Disturbing the Peace: *Lost Boundaries, Pinky, and Censorship in Atlanta, Georgia, 1949–1952*

by Margaret T. McGehee

Abstract: This article investigates the reasons behind Atlanta film censor Christine Smith’s 1949 banning of *Lost Boundaries* (Alfred Werker) and her approval, with cuts, of *Pinky* (Elia Kazan), examining in particular the representations of segregation and integration in each film, the studio support behind the films, and the characterization of *Pinky* as a “woman’s picture.”

In 1949 a group of films explicitly addressing issues of race relations in the United States emerged from major and minor Hollywood studios. These films—*Home of the Brave* (Mark Robson, United Artists), *Lost Boundaries* (Film Classics, Inc.), *Pinky* (Twentieth Century–Fox), and *Intruder in the Dust* (Clarence Brown, MGM)—made manifest the racial climate immediately following World War II, particularly the persistence of the legal codes and spatial practices of segregation. At the same time, the emergence of such films and their subsequent popularity signaled a growing opposition to the Jim Crow system on the part of many whites across the country, including those in charge at the Hollywood studios. The films, in hindsight, foreshadowed the rhetoric of the debates surrounding desegregation and race relations that would begin to explode in the 1950s. They also ultimately served to challenge the state and local systems of film censorship in place at the time.

This article focuses on two films from the 1949 group, *Lost Boundaries* and *Pinky*. More specifically, it investigates the reasons behind Atlanta film censor Christine Smith’s banning of *Lost Boundaries* (a low budget, independently produced “semidocumentary”) and her approval, with cuts, of *Pinky* (a costly, high profile studio production). Relying upon extensive primary materials, including Smith’s reports to the supervisory Atlanta Library Board and accounts in newspapers, popular magazines, and trade publications from 1949 to 1952, I examine how representations of segregation and integration within each picture, studio support (or lack thereof) behind each film, and the characterization of *Pinky* as a “woman’s picture” and as the story of an individual (as opposed to a picture about an entire race) may have factored into Smith’s rulings.

Through an examination of one censor’s decisions I seek to provide a textured analysis of the cultural work that these films and the conversations, debates, and court cases surrounding them performed within postwar American society. Americanist Margaret T. McGehee is a doctoral candidate in American studies in Emory University’s Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts (ILA) and holds a master of arts in southern studies from the University of Mississippi. Her dissertation focuses on the careers of three women writers in Atlanta, Georgia, from 1945 to the present and the representations of Atlanta in their respective nonfictional and fictional works.

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Paul Lauter defines cultural work as “the ways in which a book or other kind of text... helps construct the frameworks, fashion the metaphors, create the very language by which people comprehend their experiences and think about the world.” In this vein an in-depth analysis of one censor’s decisions highlights the ways in which films such as Pinky and Lost Boundaries worked as political commentaries on contemporary racial situations and as potential catalysts for social change. Articulating the language of the arguments that would rage throughout the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s surrounding integration, segregation, and equal rights for black Americans, these films—released after the return of black soldiers from the war in 1945 but before the Freedom Struggle fully gained steam—illuminated through fictional renderings the issues that were already beginning to divide the country. Furthermore, these films sparked conversations about what should and should not be seen, discussed, or permitted on-screen and off.

An examination of one censor’s decisions also reveals the complicity of censors in enforcing segregation’s boundaries and in maintaining white power and privilege at the same time that Hollywood’s studios and producers began to challenge the social “norms” written into the Production Code, “dos and don’ts” related to the intertwined categories of race, gender, and sexuality. While many white southerners’ blatant efforts to protect their racial privileges are burned in our memories via television and the press—the sea of young, snarling white men and women crowded around the “Little Rock Nine” in 1957 or Alabama governor George Wallace “standing in the schoolhouse door” in 1963, for example—the everyday efforts of whites to protect the political, economic, and social status quo in the immediate post-1945 period have yet to be fully disclosed. Smith’s actions resembled those of other censors at the time, but when coupled with reviews from the period her decisions are indicative of a broader complexity: many white Americans’ growing willingness to accept the notion of equal rights for African Americans while simultaneously opposing desegregation of public facilities. The work of censors like Christine Smith resembles other white southerners’ efforts to build what historian Grace Hale has called a white “collectivity [based] on not just a convention or a policy but on segregation as a culture,” a project that had been under way in the South since Reconstruction. Policing both the racial and sexual content that could be shown to Atlanta audiences, Smith—a white, middle-class, southern woman—took up the reins of her predecessors, contributing to the perpetuation and preservation of the culture of segregation that defined southern society at that time.

**Systems of Film Censorship.** Before delving into Smith’s decisions it is important to contextualize her role as censor within the broader systems of film censorship at work in the postwar period as well as within the broader context of Atlanta’s postwar history. In 1922 major Hollywood studios had collectively formed the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) as a way of organizing and synchronizing the “policies and practices” of the movie industry. Led by Will Hays, the MPPDA, renamed the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) in 1944, sought to develop a system of “self-regulation” that would allow the Hollywood film industry to protect itself from outside influence on and control of the
content of its productions. The MPPDA created the Production Code in 1930 as a
way of regulating what material studios could and could not show on-screen. Policed
by the Production Code Administration (PCA), formed in 1934, the code’s list of
unacceptable items focused on the categories of crime, sex, vulgarity, obscenity,
profanity, costume, dances, religion, locations, national feelings, titles, and “repellant
subjects.” Because the PCAs “seal of approval” was necessary before a film could be
released, the agency, headed by Joseph Breen, was involved in almost every aspect
of a Hollywood film’s production in order to make the film fit within the parameters
of the code. In essence, the code served as a preemptive strike against external
censorship bodies; as Cindy Patton put it in her essay “White Racism/Black Signs:
Censorship and Images of Race Relations,” it provided a “logic for interpreting
what might be censored.”

The Production Code included “miscegenation” in its list of “don’ts”; that is,
films were not to show a “sex relationship between the white and black races.” The
race-focused films of 1949, however, pushed this boundary, especially when two
of them—Lost Boundaries and Pinky—concerned “black” characters (who would
today be identified as “biracial”) passing as “white.”

Miscegenation was implied in these films but never shown or discussed. And
though never stated outright, the ability of these characters to pass, due in large part
to their light skin, no doubt resulted from sexual relationships between blacks and
whites at some point in the characters’ family histories. In both films white actors play
the “black” characters that pass as white, thereby making the suggestion of potential
relationships between the white and “black” characters more acceptable to the PCA
(which did approve the films after significant communication between the films’
producers and Joseph Breen). In the end, however, these films posed problems for
southern censors like Atlanta’s Christine Smith and Memphis’s Lloyd Binford.

The systems of film censorship at work outside of Hollywood studios in the
late 1940s enabled individuals like Smith and Binford to wield power over the
representations of segregation and integration projected onto the screen. According
to Richard S. Randall in his 1968 book Censorship of the Movies, all levels of
government—national, state, and local—were involved in the business of film
censorship “in one form or another.” While the federal Bureau of Customs had
authority over imported films, state-level censorship boards were responsible for
examining foreign and domestic films prior to granting licenses for their exhibition.
Until the mid-1950s to mid-1960s eight states—New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland,
Ohio, Massachusetts, Virginia, Louisiana, and Kansas—had statutes that allowed for
the creation of censorship boards. By the mid-1960s only four states—New York,
Maryland, Virginia, and Kansas—had “systematic movie censorship programs now
in use.” By 1967 only Maryland still had an operating censorship board.

Censorship bodies at the city and town level, however, “have,” according to
Randall, “always been more numerous and considerably more varied in form than
state licensing boards.” These boards were established to enforce cities’ or towns’
censorship ordinances. No group has been able to make an exact count of those
boards; the Motion Picture Association of America, the Film Daily Yearbook, and the
International Motion Picture Almanac all made attempts to do so in the mid-1960s,
but their results differed. In more recent research Patton states that approximately one hundred local boards existed around 1950 but that the number is hard to pinpoint given that many boards were created but never put into operation after controversies developed around the film *The Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith Corp., 1915).10

Local censorship programs differed around the country in terms of their operations and organization. The MPAA's 1965 report identified three general types of boards: (1) those whose local censorship ordinance required all films to be reviewed prior to being shown; (2) those whose procedure was to only review those films with potentially censorable content and then call for cuts to be made if necessary; and (3) those who reviewed films once they were in local theaters and who would then call for cuts to be made or call for the film's withdrawal if necessary.11

Atlanta had an active censorship program from 1914 to 1962 that fell into the first category. In 1915 a legislative act amended Atlanta's charter to permit the mayor and the Board of Aldermen to create a body that would reject "obscene or licentious pictures or other pictures that may affect the peace, health, morals and good order" of Atlanta. However, it was not until December 1944 that the city established a movie censorship bureau. According to Carmen, all films shown publicly within Atlanta's limits had to be approved by a film censor, who worked for the Atlanta Public Library system. The censor would decide whether or not to grant a license to a given film and could also order cuts to be made in the film prior to its showing. The Atlanta Public Library Board served as the Atlanta Board of Censorship and had the power to review the censor's decisions and to hear appeals from "any person aggrieved" by those decisions. The censor was required to submit a monthly report of decisions made.12

After passing the "competitive examination" required of applicants for the censor position, Christine Smith was appointed to the job in 1945 and remained Atlanta's censor until her retirement in 1964.13 Smith was born in Ruskin, Tennessee, graduated from Centenary College, and received a master's degree from Emory University. She taught government at Brenau College in Gainesville, Georgia, and worked as the director of the Atlanta League of Women Voters prior to becoming Atlanta's film censor. In 1954 she married Atlanta alderman Ed A. Gilliam. Although Smith was the first official movie censor in Atlanta, she replaced the "unofficial" censor, Mrs. Alonzo Richardson.14 The censor's job required Smith to view ten to fifteen movies a week. Each month Smith would send her required report to the board. In this report she summarized her decisions, detailed any press she had received, and generally reported on the day-to-day operation of her office. These reports provide excellent primary material; they characterize Smith as committed to and serious about her role as a protector of the peace. Furthermore, they indicate that the library board consistently supported her decisions.

"The city too busy to hate": Images and Realities of Postwar Atlanta. Christine Smith swore to uphold the municipal ordinance that permitted the censor to prevent any films from being shown that would "disturb the peace" in Atlanta. In so doing Smith was also swearing to protect Atlanta from any incidents that would tarnish its reputation as a progressive southern city. Her tenure as censor coincided
with a significant period of growth for Atlanta. From the late 1940s into the 1970s a cadre of wealthy white business leaders, with the help of Atlanta’s African American leaders, sought to develop Atlanta into a thriving city that would be attractive to businessmen and their families. Labeled an “urban regime” by political scientist Clarence Stone, this group of businessmen worked to transform Atlanta’s downtown into a central business district. The plan of “urban renewal” implemented by this biracial coalition eventually resulted in the installation of a civic center, a stadium, university buildings, and middle- to upper-class housing in the downtown area. The cooperation between blacks and whites helped create an image of Atlanta as “progressive” in terms of race relations, a reputation described by urban historian Charles Rutheiser as follows: “The ‘official’ mythology promulgated in numerous publications, ads, videos, sponsored by both Atlanta’s predominately white corporate elite and mostly black political establishment, posited the city as the embodiment of the New New South—not only a good place to do business, but hospitable, progressive, racially harmonious, and, owing almost exclusively to the efforts of native son Martin Luther King, Jr., the cradle of the modern human rights movement.” Historian David Harmon echoed Rutheiser’s observations: “Between 1946 and 1981 the image of Atlanta that dominated the public’s perception was that of a New South city, relatively free from the region’s prejudices.”

In an effort to distinguish Atlanta from other southern cities where racial violence began to erupt in the 1950s, Atlanta’s mayor at the time, William B. Hartsfield, described Atlanta as “the city too busy to hate,” a moniker that has persisted into the present. However, as Harmon has observed, the image of Atlanta as a peaceful, business-driven urban center “existed side by side with social, political, and economic realities that contradicted this perception.” Leaders’ plans for urban renewal and their use of tactics such as zoning and annexation effectively forced out lower-income blacks and whites from neighborhoods surrounding the central business district, resulting in increased spatial segregation in a time when desegregation of public facilities was well under way.

It was in the early stages of Atlanta’s rapid postwar growth that Smith took up the reins as censor. Committed to keeping the peace, Smith also committed herself to preserving the “progressive” image of Atlanta. The release of Lost Boundaries and Pinky in 1949 posed threats, in Smith’s opinion, to the city’s racial serenity. It was therefore up to Smith to keep the peace and to keep off the screen that which had the potential “to disturb.”

Passing on the Screen: Pinky and Lost Boundaries. The act of “passing” and the consequences of doing so provided rich fodder for American authors in the 1920s and 1930s, especially Harlem Renaissance writers. James Weldon Johnson’s novel Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (originally published in 1912 and reissued in 1927), Jessie Fauset’s Plum Bun (1928), and Nella Larsen’s appropriately titled novel Passing (1929) all focused on characters’ struggles with the implications of deciding to pass as white. In the mid-1930s Universal Pictures seized upon two novels about passing by white female authors—Fannie Hurst’s Imitation of Life (1933) and Edna Ferber’s Show Boat (1926). In star-studded film adaptations—Imitation
of Life (John Stahl, 1934) and Show Boat (James Whale, 1936)—Universal made passing visible to the moviegoing public.

These films brought to the screen the conflicts faced by African Americans attempting to “pass” as white. But in these films the characters who pass are punished for doing so. Passing is depicted as a double betrayal—a betrayal of unknowing and unsuspecting white characters and a betrayal of “fellow” black characters who find pride rather than shame in their racial identity. Peola's decision to pass in Imitation of Life essentially sends her mother to her grave. In Show Boat an interracial married couple is forced off the ship and out of their jobs once the wife's mulatto identity is revealed.18

When Lost Boundaries and Pinky were produced and released over a decade later the PCA's rule against showing miscegenation in films had not changed, and the notion of passing-as-betrayal was still very potent. The consequences of passing were shown to be no less dire, but these films implied that even if passing was deemed to be “wrong,” so were the unequal social conditions that might inspire African Americans to try it. As literary scholar Gayle Wald points out in Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture, these films encouraged “their audiences to see ‘crossing the line’ not as a mere flight from black identity, but as a way of circumventing the limitations imposed upon African Americans’ social, economic, and geographical mobility.”9 In effect, in these liberal-minded films passing became a vehicle through which racist beliefs and assumptions shared by numerous whites around the country could be exposed, highlighted, and critiqued.

Lost Boundaries. After MGM dropped the film (due to production costs and the studio's plans to produce two other films dealing with racial issues, Intruder in the Dust and Stars in My Crown), Lost Boundaries was produced by Louis de Rochemont with the help of Film Classics and Reader's Digest (which published the true-life story upon which the film is based).20 Lost Boundaries tells the story of Dr. and Mrs. Scott Carter (Mel Ferrer and Beatrice Pearson), an African American couple who “pass” as white for twenty years in a small New Hampshire town where Scott Carter works as the town doctor. Until the navy declines Scott’s commission for “failure to meet physical qualifications” no one in the town, including the Carter children, knows that the Carters are black. When Dr. and Mrs. Carter finally tell their son, Howard (Richard Hylton), he angrily runs away to Harlem, returning after he realizes that he does not fit there. The film concludes at an all-white church service where the preacher’s sermon makes clear that the ostracized family should be “integrated” (and welcomed back) into the church and into the town. In the final scene, however, the visibly unhappy teenage daughter, Shelley (Susan Douglas), walks out of the church, leaving viewers to wonder if she will ever be able to accept her “new” racial identity.

Following its release in 1949, Lost Boundaries met with mixed reviews. New York Times film critic Bosley Crowther applauded the film for “[visualizing] emotional experience in terms that are so plausible and basically revealing that its impact is irresistible.” Crowther made clear to readers that since the movie dealt with only one family it was not a “picture of the whole complex problem of race and racial
discrimination.” However, he concluded his review by stating that despite these criticisms *Lost Boundaries*’ “statement of the anguish and the ironies of racial taboo is clear, eloquent and moving.”

The African American newspaper the *Chicago Defender* offered more pointed criticism. Admitting initial dislike of the casting of white actors as the “passing” family “when there is and always has been such a high degree of unemployment among . . . Negro actors,” the reviewer found *Lost Boundaries* to have been “beautifully produced.” At the same time the critic argued that the film did not fully address what happened once the town discovered the truth about the family’s racial identity. Furthermore, the fact that the African American friends of the doctor insisted that he “pass” seemed odd, given that the “reaction of most Negroes to ‘passing’ is one of disapproval despite their knowledge of any economic gains made by it.”

**Pinky.** Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck and directed by Elia Kazan, *Pinky* was white screenwriters Philip Dunne and Dudley Nichols’s adaptation of the 1946 novel *Quality*, written by Cid Ricketts Sumner, a white native of Mississippi best remembered for her Tammy Tyree stories. *Pinky* focuses on a light-skinned black woman from Mississippi named Patricia “Pinky” Johnson (Jeanne Crain) who “passes” as white while studying to be a nurse in the North. Fearing that her northern colleagues will discover her “true” racial identity, Pinky returns to her southern home, where her grandmother Dicey (Ethel Waters) asks for her professional help in caring for Miss Em (Ethel Barrymore), Dicey’s white former employer. Near the end of the film Miss Em dies and leaves her estate to Pinky. Faced with a disputed claim by Miss Em’s white relatives, Pinky must go to court to defend her right to the property. Surprisingly, the judge grants her the estate, leaving Pinky to decide if she wants to remain in the South as a “Negro” or marry her white fiancé (William Lundigan), a doctor who wants to be with her despite their racial differences but who nevertheless suggests that “Pat,” not “Pinky,” continue to pass as white once they are married and living outside of the South. Finally declaring to him “I am a Negro,” Pinky remains in the South and converts Miss Em’s home into a clinic and nursery school for the black community. In doing so she forgoes the intertwined prospects of marriage and “passing.”

After its premiere at the Rivoli in New York City on September 29, 1949, *Pinky* met with a mixture of approval and disdain from white and black critics across the country. Some writers praised the film either for daring to address race relations and confront whites’ discrimination toward African Americans or for its quality entertainment. Several of these reviewers nevertheless critiqued *Pinky* as being a superficial attempt to resolve the issues that it purported to criticize and as resolving these issues in too “easy” a fashion. Almost all of the critics highlighted the actors’ performances, particularly those of Crain and Waters. Most praised Waters for her portrayal of Pinky’s grandmother, but these critics stood divided about the white Jeanne Crain’s depiction of the African American lead character.

Reviews of *Pinky* were far more numerous than those for *Lost Boundaries*, and of the two *Pinky* enjoyed greater box-office success, particularly in southern cities like New Orleans. Andy W. Smith, vice president and general sales manager
for Twentieth Century–Fox, announced in December “record-shattering grosses” at the State Theatre in New Orleans and proclaimed that “‘Pinky’s’ performance in the South, as well as around the country, has been unprecedented.” Smith further claimed that exhibitors had shown “unparalleled support” by having 8:30 a.m. openings and by advertising the film as a “major event.” During its final four days at the Roxy Theater in Atlanta Pinky grossed over $13,000, which Pittsburgh’s African American newspaper, the Courier, reported as the most any Twentieth Century–Fox film had ever grossed in Atlanta at a first-run theater. Variety noted that Pinky, “with a name cast and the backing of the company’s sales organization and its 650 theatres,” had topped the list of the three “Negro tolerance pix” with $4.25 million out of the $8.5 million in domestic rentals. Home of the Brave came in at second place with a predicted estimate of $2.25 million, and Lost Boundaries was third with an expected total of $1.8 million in domestic rentals.24

Deciding the Films’ Fates in Atlanta. Smith banned Lost Boundaries from showing in Atlanta in July 1949.25 Three months later she approved Pinky with the understanding that certain cuts would need to be made in the film before it could play in the city. Pinky eventually received a special “southern debut” at the Roxy with blacks and whites seated in segregated sections.26

In her August 1949 report Smith explained her ban on screenings of Lost Boundaries because such screenings were bound to (in the words of the ordinance she swore to uphold) “adversely affect the peace, health, morals and good order of the city.”27 In the same August report Smith took offense at certain quotations attributed to her by the press:

> I have been quoted in the New York Times and Quick magazine. Where they got a direct quote from me is beyond my comprehension since I have made no statement whatsoever on the matter. I have been quoted as saying that it was “unfit for public showing.” Not only have I given no statement, but, if I had made a statement, it certainly would not have been this one. Whenever I have been forced to give [a] statement in the past I have been careful to use the wording of the ordinance itself. We may have a court action on this picture. I think that most of the publicity has been promotion for the picture, a sort of free advertising which the papers have been dumb enough to fall for.28

Smith also reported in August on the increasing conflict between her office and the Atlanta Public Library Board. Minutes from the board’s meeting on September 13 reveal that several supporters of Lost Boundaries, including William George of the Atlanta Civil Liberties Committee and Arthur de Bra of the MPAA, spoke to the board on the film’s behalf. Board member Milton Farris read a letter from Ralph L. McCoy, the local manager of Film Classics, Inc., “recommending that the Board approve the showing of his company’s film in Atlanta.” But despite the efforts of these men the board upheld Smith’s decision to ban the film.29

In October 1949 Smith approved Pinky for showing in Atlanta pending certain cuts to be made in the film.30 Smith found an important social value in Pinky even as she simultaneously categorized the film as “entertainment”; Variety and the Motion Picture Herald quoted Smith as saying that despite her regret that Hollywood had

30 Cinema Journal 46, No. 1, Fall 2006
engaged in the making of race films, she felt *Pinky* was worthwhile. “I know this picture is going to be painful to a great many southerners,” stated Smith. “It will make them squirm, but at the same time it will make them realize how unlovely their attitudes are. However, I hope the public will understand and view this picture as entertainment which mirrors both the darker side and the progressive side, which all good entertainment should have.”

Six months after the banning of *Lost Boundaries* Smith approved three other race films: *Home of the Brave, Pinky,* and *Intruder in the Dust.* “Not one of them,” *Lost Boundaries* producer Louis de Rochemont pointed out, “disturbed the peace, morals and good order of Atlantans too much.” But such concerns over keeping the peace reemerged two years later with the release of the Warner Bros. film *Storm Warning* (Stuart Heisler, 1951). In this film Marcia Mitchell (Ginger Rogers) witnesses a lynching by the Ku Klux Klan while visiting her newly married and pregnant sister, Lucy Rice (Doris Day). When Lucy introduces Marcia to her husband, Hank (Steve Cochran), Marcia recognizes Hank as one of the members of the lynch mob, but she refuses to tell the county prosecutor, Burt Rainey (Ronald Reagan), what she knows. Marcia tries to convince Lucy to leave with her, but she refuses. After Hank attempts to rape Marcia but is stopped by his wife, Lucy decides she will leave with Marcia, and Marcia decides to testify against Hank and the Klan. Before she can do this, however, Hank beats her and brings her before the Klan for punishment. Lucy arrives at the gathering with Burt Rainey and violence breaks out, ending with Hank shooting and killing Lucy.

In August 1950 Smith arranged for a showing of this picture for the library board before making a decision on the film. Smith wrote that the film was a “strong expose” of the Ku Klux Klan and that she was therefore concerned about “possible Klan activities” during its showing, giving as her reason an incident in Macon, Georgia, when someone or some group had burned a cross at a drive-in during a showing of *Pinky.* Smith claimed the Klan was responsible, whereas the newspapers reported that the Klan could not be definitively linked to the incident. On May 17, 1950, a “large, fiery cross”—twelve feet high, six feet wide—“was burned” near the theater during a third-run showing of *Pinky.* The manager of the drive-in claimed that he thought the incident had been caused by “pranksters,” as he had not received any complaints about the showing of the film. In fact, claimed the *Atlanta Constitution,* the film had appeared several weeks before at a theater in downtown Macon “with most Maconites reporting favorable reactions.”

**Why *Lost Boundaries?*: Differences in Representations of Integration.** Several factors appear to have influenced Smith’s decision to approve *Pinky* and ban *Lost Boundaries,* not the least of which involved differences in representations of white-black relations, integration, and segregation in each film. *Lost Boundaries* is set in small-town Keenham, New Hampshire, and centers on an African American family whose members “pass” as white for almost twenty years. Although the townspeople are initially skeptical of Scott Carter because he has come to replace the recently deceased beloved town doctor, Dr. Carter, his wife, Marcia, and his children, Howard and Shelley, prove themselves to be worthy additions to the
town: Scott saves the life of a boy who had fallen into a frozen pond and aids burn victims from a nearby forest fire; Marcia becomes chairman of the local Red Cross; Howard, a student at the University of New Hampshire, is a talented pianist; and Shelley, though not the “prettiest” girl in the town, according to the narrator, is well liked and popular in Keenham. Throughout the film the all-white town is shown to be the perfect place for the Carters.

Though the all-white residents have little contact with African Americans, racism is alive and well in Keenham. When Howard brings his African American friend, Art Cooper (William Greaves), home from college, his disgruntled sister, Shelley, says aloud that of all the boys her brother could bring home he had to go and “bring home a coon.” (Her father instantly reprimands her and forbids her from using such an epithet.) And when Art accompanies Shelley, Howard, and Howard’s girlfriend, Joan (Peggy Kimber), to a church dance, one of the townswomen maliciously gossips about Marcia Carter that “no one with any background brings darkies into their home.” Needless to say, when the truth finally comes out about the Carters’ real racial “background,” Keenham’s denizens are shocked.

They get past their shock fairly quickly, however, as the townsfolk eventually accept the Carters as black and re-“integrate” them into town life. As usual one Sunday the Carters attend church, where the benevolent Reverend Taylor (Rev. Robert A. Dunn) preaches to the congregation about tolerance. At the conclusion of his sermon the minister calls for the singing of hymn 519. (When the town bestows upon Scott the previous town doctor’s former mailbox, phone, and license plate they are all numbered 519.) The hymn—entitled “Once to Every Man and Nation, Comes a Moment to Decide”—begins:

\[
\text{Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide}
\text{In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side}
\text{Some great cause, some great decision, offering each the bloom or blight}
\text{And the choice goes by forever, `twixt that darkness and that light.}
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This hymn implies that the time has come for the congregation, perhaps representative of white Americans everywhere, to finally decide, “Which side are you on?”

Christine Smith could easily have perceived Lost Boundaries (and its concluding preachiness) as a prointegrationist piece of propaganda with the potential to elicit protests or violence on the part of white southerners firmly entrenched in the system of Jim Crow. The subsequent integration of this black family allows for the doctor to continue to “lay hands” on the townspeople, white women included, and also allows the daughter and son to continue their romantic relationships with their white sweethearts. In fact, after the Carters’ racial identity is revealed, Shelley’s boyfriend, Andy (Carleton Carpenter), asks her if she will still go to the dance with him.

In reporting the suit filed by RD-DR and Film Classics, the Atlanta Daily World briefly compared Lost Boundaries to Pinky, stating that the former did not “heed the mammy philosophy,” as Pinky did, of “Don’t pretend you is what you ain’t.” This single statement might explain Smith’s decisions with regard to these two films. Pinky, who has passed in the North as white and who is engaged to a white doctor, eventually decides to remain in the South as a “Negro” and forgo a life as a white
woman. Although she gains access to her inherited property, she nevertheless breaks things off with her northern white fiancé and re-creates a segregated and asexual environment on the estate granted to her, running a nursery school and clinic for black children only. Her rights may have been upheld legally, but the sexual, social, and geographical divisions between whites and blacks are reinforced, not lost. In her essay on the film Elspeth Kydd writes: “Although the film’s court drama challenges the racial system, the resolution of the narrative in part reaffirms it. Pinky must identify herself as black in order to gain the inheritance, in effect denying both her white heritage and the complexity of her identity. The court case asserts Pinky’s inheritance rights, yet ultimately the absolute nature of racial boundaries remains intact.”

In an article entitled “Censor Decides ‘Brave’ Pic Doesn’t ‘Imperil’ Jim Crow” the Pittsburgh Courier suggested that Smith had banned Lost Boundaries because it “contained inferences that were [against] long practiced customs which are part of the law of the South.” Home of the Brave, on the other hand, did not have any “outright pleas for the banning of segregation.” The article cited Smith’s bottom line: to “keep anything off the screen which advocates action which would break laws.” Pinky might have demonstrated to whites, again according to Smith, “how unlovely their attitudes are,” but it ultimately proved no challenge to segregation. By not challenging the “system,” Pinky did not pose much of a threat to the “peace” of white Atlanta.

As mentioned earlier, Pinky was not released until cuts required by Smith were made in the film. Indeed, as Variety and the New York Times reported, some fifty feet of film—34 seconds of 102 minutes—were cut from the final version shown in Atlanta. The moments cut included an “attempted rape scene, the slapping of a Negro girl by a white policeman and the final scene showing the principals (Pinky and her fiancé) kissing.” Two of these three cuts involved overt physical interaction between white and black characters—in other words, moments of potential sexual and racial violence and miscegenation. Although fictionalized, on-screen sexual relations between white and black characters, in addition to outright violence toward black characters, would not be tolerated by censors acting on behalf of mostly white viewers.

Variety’s prediction about the South’s reception of and reaction to Pinky echoes such sentiments: “There may be some situations where courageous theatre owners will play it, but undoubtedly a majority will choose to skip the picture of southern decadence and ‘poor white’ sadism.” In particular, Variety’s reviewer perceived the same scenes cut by Smith—the attempted rape scene showing Pinky with “two drink-sodden representatives of the ‘superior’ (white) race” and a scene of brutality “by two equally scurvy-looking and sadistic law enforcement officers”—as causing potential problems for southern showings. However, the removal of these scenes relates to broader issues of social control. Such an action on Smith’s part served to uphold the sharp social and sexual divisions that the system and culture of segregation sought to enforce. Pinky mostly supported the status quo, despite its slight progressive push for greater tolerance and fairer treatment of African Americans; Lost Boundaries indirectly promoted integration and acceptance as well as a merger of white and black social spaces. In all probability such a distinction did not escape Smith’s keen and discriminating eye.
Figures 1–3: Before allowing Elia Kazan’s *Pinky* (Twentieth Century–Fox, 1949) to be shown in Atlanta, Christine Smith ordered these three scenes cut: a white police officer slapping a black woman, Tom (William Lundigan) and Pinky (Jeanne Crain) embracing, and the attempted rape of Pinky by two white men.

Likewise, certain visual elements of each film could have led Smith to interpret the two pictures differently. There is little indication in her reports that elements of film style played into her decisions or that she based her decisions on more than just the narrative and the most basic visual content. However, it is interesting to consider the visual style of the two films to better understand how they represented the characters who pass and how those representations may have affected Smith’s interpretations of the films.

Susan Courtney’s compelling examination of the film reveals that Pinky not only chooses her “place” but is, in fact, placed within it throughout the film by various techniques. She discusses at length the means by which the filmmakers lead viewers to accept Pinky, played by the white Jeanne Crain, as black—that is, the ways in which Pinky is “culturally and cinematically inscribed” as black. Her blackness is made apparent, in part, by the ways in which characters label her as black; only near the film’s conclusion does she define herself to Tom as “a Negro.” But even more pointedly, Courtney asserts, “Pinky’s blackness is cinematically asserted from without her.” Pinky appears in spaces that indicate her racial identity to viewers: in her childhood room in Dicey’s home, outside (as opposed to inside) the gate of Miss Em’s columned mansion, or in the black section of town. Lighting effects and
the use of dark shadows, Courtney posits, also serve to highlight Pinky’s dual racial identity throughout the film.40

Courtney’s examination of Pinky provides a jumping-off point for a visual analysis of *Lost Boundaries*, an analysis that may further help to explain Smith’s reaction to the film. While *Pinky* works to indicate and make apparent the main character’s black identity, *Lost Boundaries* moves in the opposite direction, completely whitewashing the Carters’ blackness in narrative and cinematic terms. Unlike Pinky, the Carters are removed from the spaces where segregationist codes would have dictated they belonged. Early in the film the Carters leave the South after Dr. Carter’s residency at a “Negro” hospital falls through; it is implied that he is too light-skinned for the all-black hospital but is told by the head doctor there that the hospital prefers to give preference to “southern Negroes.” His place, the film suggests, is not among his fellow African Americans, and the choice of whiteness is made to seem necessary if Scott is to support his family.

From the very first scenic shots in *Lost Boundaries* whiteness is ubiquitous. These opening glimpses of the town render the whiteness of Keenham as omnipresent and inescapable. A white church appears to stand in the center of a main thoroughfare. The lawns and homes in Keenham are blanketed by snow. The church, snow, and homes all appear to glow in a luminous whiteness. The darker objects that do appear in scenes of the town—the dark winter coats of two children walking down the street in the film’s beginning or the Carters’ black dog that appears in front of their house later in the film—stand in stark relief against the white backdrop. Darkness, it seems, appears only rarely in this lily white town.

Several elements, in fact, serve to diminish any visible “trace” of blackness in the Carters’ countenances. Every attempt seems to have been made to make the family members appear “not black,” including the positioning of the Carters against backdrops of whiteness (e.g., when Marcia in a light-colored dress hangs white curtains in the newly married couple’s first apartment) or next to unmistakably African American characters (e.g., Howard plays the piano beside dark-skinned Art Cooper). The film consistently illuminates the Carters’ whiteness.

The scenes of Howard’s flight to Harlem after he has learned of his family’s secret even more starkly set his whiteness in relief and further show that certain “black” social spaces do not fit with the Carters’ class status. Howard runs away to Harlem essentially to witness firsthand what he thinks of as “black life.” It makes sense that Howard, who we must assume has never met an African American before Art Cooper, would travel to the place most tied to “blackness” in the popular American imaginary at that time. But while Howard could pass as white in New Hampshire, it is clear that he cannot pass as black in Harlem. As Howard wanders the streets with suitcase in hand, he stands out against the backdrop of African American passersby and children in the streets.

While staying at a boarding house Howard is terrorized in his dreams by the implications of his racial identity. In his nightmare he sees the stark white faces of his family members and his white girlfriend replaced by the faces of black strangers. The dream seems to reflect Howard’s confusion about his family’s racial physiognomy (in his mind they don’t “look black”) and about what his future love life holds: an
attractive white woman like Joan or an attractive African American “woman of his dreams.” It is interesting that at the moment when Joan is replaced by an African American woman Howard awakes in sweaty horror. The fear of miscegenation, perhaps mimicking many whites’ own fear at the time, appears to be too much for him to handle.

When Howard gets involved in a fight and is arrested, he explains to the kind African American police officer, Lt. Thompson (Canada Lee), that he is neither white nor black but “both.” The police officer removes whiteness as an option, stating simply to Howard, “You’re a Negro.” However, the officer continues to explain that he is different from the “gangs” he encountered in the Harlem “slum.” Howard, we already know, is an educated, polished young man from a well-to-do family. He does not fit in Harlem in part because of his visible whiteness but also because of his less visible educational and social capital. Howard and Art Cooper are very different from the violent men Howard encounters in the fight. In fact, when Art Cooper comes to retrieve him from the police station, it becomes clearer to Howard that he is more like his refined, polite, and well-dressed African American college friend, who we learn is the son of a prominent judge in New York, than perhaps he initially thought.41 Art and Lt. Thompson implicitly reveal to Howard that all African Americans are not the same, that many African Americans have found success in
a racist country through hard work, that all African Americans do not call Harlem home, and that blackness is not an essentialist identity.

While the Carters are shown in lightness and whiteness, in *Pinky* shadows and lighting are used to “darken” the principal character played by Jeanne Crain. As Courtney points out, in the scene where Tom first finds Pinky at her grandmother’s house Pinky slowly becomes covered in a dark shadow as she informs him of her racial identity. In an earlier scene in which Pinky runs into Dicey’s arms her face is half buried. Courtney writes that “here the light face is not entirely hidden by the dark maternal body, signaling a complex divided belief about Pinky's racial identity.” When Pinky awakes from a nightmare her face is shown as divided between shadow and light.

When Pinky claims her blackness and stops “pretending she is what she ain’t,” she opts to live in a segregated society where her place is firmly fixed. The Carters, however, keep on as they always have, though now they exist as the only black family in Keenham. The message of *Lost Boundaries* therefore could be seen perhaps as going beyond a mere push for tolerance of African Americans. Instead it is a push for the merger of white and black social spaces, a message that censors like Smith would have understood to be potentially disturbing for white viewers.

**Studio Support and Advertising.** Although the representations of integration and segregation offered by the two films help explain Smith’s rationale, the studio support behind each most likely factored into her decisions as well. As Thomas Cripps writes in *Making Movies Black*, *Pinky* enjoyed the “full force of a major studio” behind it. With *Pinky*, Cripps quips, “liberalism entered the big time.”

Reviews confirm the influence of the studio packaging of *Pinky*, *Time*, for example, asserted that “partly because it puts entertainment above soapboxing, Darryl Zanuck’s sleek movie (*Pinky*) is head and shoulders above its predecessors both as entertainment and propaganda.” Paul Jones, movie editor for the *Atlanta Constitution*, speculated that “what has been wrong with most of the ‘race’ films so far has been that most producers were hesitant about sinking too much production cost into them without feeling them out. As a result, such films as ‘Intruder in the Dust’ and ‘Home of the Brave,’ among others, have fallen short on production value and on story material.” In *Pinky*, however, Jones found a cast “top-heavy with names,” “almost flawless” production, and a story that “builds sympathy and understanding for the minority.” Jones believed that “20th Century Fox has shot their big guns on ‘Pinky,’” and he recommended the film, *despite* its focus on a “social topic.”

The film indeed had big names behind it. Producer Darryl F. Zanuck and director Elia Kazan had collaborated previously on *Gentleman’s Agreement*, which won an Academy Award for best picture of 1947. Ethel Barrymore, Ethel Waters, and Jeanne Crain were well-known actresses and were all nominated for Academy Awards for *Pinky*—Crain for best actress and Barrymore and Waters for best supporting actress. The film benefited from an A-studio budget. Aubrey Solomon, in his corporate and financial history of Twentieth Century–Fox, listed *Pinky’s* production cost as $1,585,000. *Lost Boundaries* was budgeted at $600,000, more than 200% less than *Pinky.*
The studio also contributed to *Pinky’s* success through the “financial muscle” that it provided in terms of distribution and advertising. Indeed, Fox appears to have invested heavily in platforming the film, resulting in extensive coverage—far more extensive than *Lost Boundaries*—in popular and trade publications. Fox marketed the film to both white and black audiences, indicating that Hollywood was finally taking black audiences more seriously. Advertisements for the film appeared in both white and black newspapers, and special efforts were made to accommodate black viewers—balconies reserved at the Roxy in Atlanta, for example, and the African American *Chicago Defender*-sponsored premiere in the Midwest. An ad in *Variety* directed at exhibitors proclaimed that showing *Pinky* represented a departure for the South: “‘Pinky’ opening in Atlanta GA, is the biggest thing to hit the South since *Gone With the Wind.*”

On November 17, 1949, opening day in Atlanta, the city’s African American newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*, noted that “for the first time in the history of the Roxy, the entire balcony will be reserved for colored!” The *Atlanta Daily World*, *Constitution*, and *Journal* all reported that moviegoers “packed” the Roxy—“standing room only’ crowds” and “record crowd[s].” The line for admittance was never less than a block long, claimed the *Constitution*, with a maximum of a thousand persons in attendance at one point. The *Journal* claimed that “while approximately 7,000 Negroes (the day’s total) enjoyed the picture fully, one of the largest crowds of white patrons ever to assemble at the Roxy theater in a single day paid strict attention to a film using racial conflict as the theme.”

Papers mentioned that no disturbances occurred, indicating that some sort of problem had been expected (but by whom is unclear). The *New York Times* reported that policemen noticed “‘nothing louder than a sneeze’ except for one instance, when the balcony of Negroes and ground floor of whites applauded a ‘victory’ for the Negro heroine.” The lack of any violent or negative disruption proved to a *Daily World* reviewer that “people with a logical viewpoint are to be found everywhere, and that prejudice and hate among us is a rapidly fading evil.” Interestingly enough, the *Chicago Defender* also commented on the “calm” that prevailed during the first week of *Pinky’s* Atlanta showing.

Aggressive platforming of *Pinky* played a substantial role in its success. However, printed advertisements played down the racial component of *Pinky’s* narrative, lending an air of mystery to the film. An article illustrating a “prime example of pressbook advertising” in the *Motion Picture Herald* showed six of the ads used for *Pinky*. Three of these ads, absent of any headlines or captions, highlight only the face of Jeanne Crain, with one only showing her from the nose up. It is unclear from such images what the film is about or who the person intensely staring at the reader is. No indication of racial identity or “passing” is made through such advertising. Using captions such as “She Told Me—Too Late!” and “She Came Home a Stranger!” the ads equally obfuscate the character’s racial identity and thus her dilemma.

The extent of the advertising for and promotion of *Lost Boundaries* did not match that of *Pinky*, and the film encountered difficulties before and after Smith’s ban. *Variety* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported in August 1949 that ads and lobby displays used to promote the film at New York’s Astor—ads used to “counter anti-
A Woman's Picture. In addition to the prointegrationist messages of *Lost Boundaries* another aspect of its narrative may have also played a role in Smith's decision. *Lost Boundaries* focuses on a postwar, middle-class, educated African American
family aspiring for bourgeois respectability and inclusion in a place with a small to nonexistent black population. *Pinky*, on the other hand, more narrowly focuses on an individual woman’s dilemma. *Pinky* screenwriter Phillip Dunne, in fact, wrote a special piece for the *New York Times* promoting *Pinky* as a picture about an individual and not about a race. And according to the film historian Ginger Clark in her article on *Pinky*’s production, Dunne, after replacing Dudley Nichols as screenwriter, made a concerted effort to refocus the story on an individual, scrapping an oratory in which Pinky takes a stand on race relations. Clark concludes that “the film fell victim to the demands of the melodrama in that this would be Pinky’s personal, emotional story, and not necessarily a story with universal implications.” In such a case racial issues, as Clark has suggested, take a backseat as “subtext.”

In its October 17 issue *Life* magazine classified *Pinky* as a “woman’s film,” juxtaposing a still of Jeanne Crain next to stills of the lead actresses in MGM’s *Madame Bovary* (Vincente Minnelli, 1949) and Paramount’s *The Heiress* (William Wyler, 1949). The main characters in these women’s films, the photo spread suggests, all wrangle with similar issues. The article asks, “Ladies, What Would You Do . . . if You Were Madame Bovary and Married to a Boor, if You Were Pinky, a Negro, and Able to Pass as White, if You Were the Heiress and in Love with a Cad.” To some, the tragedy of the mulatto and the romantic troubles of female nobility were comparable: the positioning of *Pinky* between these two films was designed to defuse any potential criticism. The remainder of the article consists of stills from *Pinky* with the caption, “Pinky Must Make Her Choice between Her Race and Her Love.” The article clearly functioned in part as an advertisement playing upon the sympathies of female readers.

Not all advertisements for *Pinky* ignored racial issues. One featured Crain in an alluring pose, dressed in a sleeveless dress, hair down and turned sideways, with a dark shadow behind her; the caption reads, “She Passed for White” and then below, “This is the personal story of a girl who fell desperately, hopelessly in love!” Using gradually increasing font size, another ad asks, “Does he know . . . does he know . . . DOES HE KNOW” and continues “and Pinky knew that her whole life of deception has brought her to this.” A line passes through this advertisement, dividing the letters of Pinky into black and white, alluding to her dual identity. Interestingly enough, the advertisements in the *Atlanta Journal* leading up to the film’s debut all included the image of William Lundigan’s character holding Pinky, as if to highlight that at the core the narrative was a love story (even though any intimate contact between Lundigan and Crain was not to be seen on the screen in Atlanta, thanks to Smith). The frequent use in these ads of phrases such as “the poignant story” or “the personal story” reinforces the notion that *Pinky* was meant to be a story about an individual’s emotional struggle rather than that of a racial group’s plight.

In this vein perhaps Smith could tell herself that the film showed how “unlovely” whites’ attitudes toward blacks could be but that in the end the story represented no threat to the peace of Atlanta, as it centered around one woman’s struggle with love, family, and social responsibility. Clark supports this argument in her production history of *Pinky*, claiming that Zanuck avoided any entanglements on the race issue by structuring *Pinky* as a melodrama. While it is worth wondering whether or...
not Smith approved *Pinky* three months after *Lost Boundaries* in order to avoid the aftermath of another ban, there is scant evidence to support such an assertion.\(^6^5\)

One must also wonder what impact Binford’s actions in Memphis had on Smith’s decisions. For the studios Binford was a most troublesome local censor, in part because he was unpredictable. In August 1947, for example, Binford and his board banned the film *Curley* (Bernard Carr). Part of producer Hal Roach’s Our Gang series, the United Artists picture showed a black character in a classroom with white children as well as black and white children playing together. Roach, United Artists, and the MPAA took Binford and the board to court but failed to overturn the ban.\(^6^6\) To the surprise of many, in early August 1949 Binford gave his approval to *Home of the Brave* for showing in Memphis while at the same time banning *Lost Boundaries*.\(^6^7\) According to *Variety*, Smith announced her ban on *Lost Boundaries* on August 19, and she listed *Home of the Brave* as approved with cuts in her September 1949 report.\(^6^8\) The announcement of Binford’s ban of *Lost Boundaries* appeared in the *New York Times* on August 21 (with a dateline of August 20), quoting the censor: “We don’t take that kind of picture here.”\(^6^9\) Whether Smith acted in reaction to Binford or vice versa—in other words, whether timing was an important factor in Smith’s decisions—is unclear from the papers’ reports of the bans and from Smith’s reports to the library board. What is clear is that as of late August 1949 the Atlanta Library Board still had an opportunity to overrule Smith’s decision on *Lost Boundaries*, an opportunity that the board members opted not to take.

The logic behind Smith’s decisions appears to have stemmed from a combination of factors—her devotion to an ordinance (and her interpretation of that ordinance), representations of black-white social relations in each film (and her interpretation of those representations), the studio support behind each film, the marketing of *Pinky* as a “woman’s picture,” and Smith’s own position as a white woman in the segregated society of 1949. While such factors are debatable, the results of Smith’s actions—in terms of *Pinky*’s box-office success in Atlanta and the impact of her actions and other censors’ actions on the institutions of film censorship—are not. As discussed in the following section, court cases would follow, resulting in the eventual dismantling of film censorship boards around the country.

**From Screening Room to Courtroom.** Smith’s actions and those of other censors regarding these films had a significant impact on the institutions of film censorship and on the film industry itself. Censors as a collective embodiment of racial hegemony performed much of the work of determining how social relations should be understood. The results of such work helped make clear the means by which society should be organized and, in effect, perpetuated the logic underwriting legal segregation that many white southerners had worked to put into place since Reconstruction. The films implied that the happiest ending would be the one where the status quo remained unchallenged and unchanged.

In October 1949 several representatives of Film Classics visited Atlanta to ask what would happen if they showed *Lost Boundaries* in Atlanta without charging admission. Smith replied that “under the present ordinance, the Censor could do nothing to prevent such a showing.” “But,” she added, “I could not guarantee...
that the Police Department, acting under the general police powers, might not stop the showing."

An interesting parallel story emerged after Smith included a copy of a letter from city attorney J. M. B. Bloodworth to Mayor William B. Hartsfield offering his opinion on the permit Smith granted to Pinky. Bloodworth stated in the beginning of his letter that after Smith approved Pinky with cuts “it developed that the distributor who has the picture ‘Lost Boundaries’ which Miss Smith and the Board both banned, has complained and possibly threatened suit if ‘Pinky’ is permitted to be shown and ‘Lost Boundaries’ prohibited.” The attorney reviewed the sections of the censorship ordinance that applied to the matter, concluding that if the board was considering revoking Pinky’s permit in order to avoid a suit from the distributor of Lost Boundaries, then “we would be inviting a suit by the distributor of ‘Pinky’ who appears to have a legal permit to exhibit it.” Revoking the permit for Pinky would only create an “intolerable situation.”

Although they may have avoided an intolerable situation with regard to Pinky, Smith and the board members did not escape the suit from Lost Boundaries’ production team. On November 19 they were served papers for the lawsuit brought against them by RD-DR and Film Classics. In her November report Smith forecast what was to come. “From the information in the trade papers,” Smith claimed, “the case will be handled as a major test of the entire censorship question. . . . The[e] is no doubt that great effort and legal talent will be expended with the United States Supreme Court as the final deciding factor. The effort will be not only to abolish all local censorship but to s[e]cure Supreme Court ruling that the Constitutional Amendment on freedom of speech applies to movies.”

In one last effort to avoid a suit the board voted in December on a motion made by board member Aubrey Milam to rescind the ban on Lost Boundaries. The vote resulted in a tie of three to three, meaning that the motion did not pass. On November 18, 1949, Samuel Rosenman, of Rosenman, Goldmark, Colin and Kaye of New York on behalf of the RD-DR Corporation and Film Classics, filed suit against Smith and the board in an Atlanta federal court. With the cooperation of the MPAA, Rosenman claimed that “pre-censorship” of films was a “deprivation of freedom of expression without due process of law, as required under the 14th amendment.” He further argued that the 1915 case that upheld the rights of state censors did not apply to this case, as the Fourteenth Amendment had not yet evolved to protect rights of freedom of expression. In other words, the case was based on the assertion that “prior restraint”—or banning of films prior to their public showing—deprived Rosenman’s clients of freedom of expression without due process of law. One would think that the MPAA, the PCA, and censors like Smith would have been on the same page. The Production Code essentially abided by the dictates of Jim Crow in preventing the showing of whites and blacks intermingling. However, films like Lost Boundaries and Pinky marked the beginning of a fracturing in the symbiotic relationship between Hollywood, with its preemptive system of “self-regulation,” and the external censorship bodies that policed Hollywood’s products.

On February 6, 1950, Judge M. Neil Andrews presided over the hearing on
Lost Boundaries in Atlanta. Andrews ruled that “the motion picture was not a part of the press and therefore was subject to censorship.” An appeal on the part of Film Classics et al. was heard in New Orleans in July, with the same ruling. Film Classics et al. filed a final appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court, but the Court refused to hear it. The ban of Lost Boundaries in Atlanta remained in place.

In Texas a similar battle over censorship took shape regarding Pinky. The film was banned by the censorship board in Marshall, a small town in East Texas less than thirty miles from the Louisiana border. In February 1950, W. L. Gelling, manager of the Paramount Theatre in Marshall, screened Pinky anyway. He was arrested and fined $200. When Gelling appealed to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, Judge Tom L. Beauchamp ruled that the ban was legal and proclaimed that the court would not do away with censorship until “forced to do so” and would not “concede” that the motion picture industry was entitled to freedom of speech. In Hollywood v. Hard Core film historian Jon Lewis argues that the ban on Pinky in Texas (and on Native Son in Ohio) “fueled a growing anti-states’ rights sentiment at the Supreme Court” that would later be a key issue in a series of civil rights cases.

Whereas the ban on Pinky in Texas promised to bring yet another more prominent challenge at the level of the U.S. Supreme Court, another case— Burstyn v. Wilson, or the Miracle case, so named for the Roberto Rossellini film on which it was based—reached the justices before Pinky. The Miracle case would be remembered for successfully challenging film censors’ and censorship boards’ powers, for questioning the value of censorship of entertainment itself, and for helping to eliminate “prior restraint” on which censors had based their power. Motion pictures, thanks to the Miracle case, were legally moved out of the realm of mere “entertainment” in 1952 to be granted the rights to free speech and due process of law. (Two years later, segregation would meet its legal end in the Brown v. Board of Education case.)

The lawsuit and court cases that ensued from the ban on Lost Boundaries in Atlanta—and from other bans on other films across the country—demonstrated that censorship indeed qualified as a political act and that its constitutionality was up for debate. In April 1962, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that “Atlanta’s censorship ordinance violated the state constitution’s guarantee of free speech by requiring films be examined prior to public showing.” As a result of this ruling Smith, who had changed her name to Christine Gilliam after marrying in 1954, changed her title to “motion picture reviewer.” Two years later Christine Smith Gilliam retired, recommending on her way out that “her office be abolished because it was futile to attempt to ‘protect the public against the impact of obscene movies in the light of recent court decisions.’” This time her recommendation went unchallenged, and the office was indeed abolished.

Notes
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1. William Lafferty, “A Reappraisal of the Semi-Documentary in Hollywood, 1945–1948,” Velvet Light Trap 20 (Summer 1983): 22–26. Pulling from multiple film histories, Lafferty defines the semidocumentary broadly as a post–World War II American “film involving a topical subject filmed in a ‘documentary’ or ‘realistic’ manner” (23). Economic factors in Hollywood studios after World War II, according to Lafferty, contributed to the rise in numbers of semidocumentaries produced between 1945 and 1948. Lost Boundaries can be considered a typical semidocumentary of that period because it was shot on location; its content came from “topical subject matter,” namely, a true story that had appeared in Reader's Digest; and it followed a series of other semidocumentaries produced by Louis de Rochemont, whose name had become synonymous with this subgenre, for lack of a better term (23–24).


6. As film studies scholar Elspeth Kydd writes about Pinky, “despite the film’s focus on miscegenation, it is a narrative focus, not a visual one, since we are, after all, watching Jeanne Crain enact a romance with William Lundigan.” Crain, a white actress, played the lead mulatto character, Pinky, and Lundigan, a white actor, played her white fiancé (Elspeth Kydd, “The Ineffaceable Curse of Cain’: Racial Marking and Embodiment in Pinky,” Camera Obscura 15, no. 1 [2000]: 99).


According to Richard Randall, the inability to precisely pinpoint this number stems from the fact that more ordinances existed than boards to police them and that many city and town ordinances were, in effect, inactive (Censorship of the Movies, 77).

Patton, “White Racism/Black Signs,” 66. Ira Carmen also writes that “it was once believed that as many as ninety cities and towns were involved in one way or another with the censorship of motion pictures” (Movies, Censorship, and the Law, 184).

Randall, Censorship of the Movies, 78–79.

Ibid., 212–14.

According to Pat Murdock, a former journalist in Atlanta, Smith had been one of three finalists for the job as censor and beat out two men for the position (“The Lone ‘Lady Censor,’” 69).

Carmen, Movies, Censorship, and the Law, 213; “Mrs. Christine Gilliam Dies: Movie ‘Censor’ 19 Years,” Obituaries, Atlanta Constitution, August 11, 1971; Murdock, “The Lone ‘Lady Censor,’” 69. Although Carmen states that Smith was the “first, and only, censor Atlanta has ever had,” Murdock states that John William Peacock first served as censor from 1914 to 1925, followed by Mrs. Alonzo Richardson.

Clarence Stone defines an urban regime as the “informal arrangements that surround and complement the formal workings of governmental authority,” which allow for cooperation “beyond what could be formally commanded” (Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946–1988 [Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989], 3–5).


Harmon, Beneath the Image, vi–viii; Bavor, Race, xv. See also Keating, Atlanta, chaps. 3–7, for a discussion of Atlanta’s postwar development and the ways in which the city ignored the needs of its lower-income populations, and Rutheiser, Imagineering Atlanta, 3–5, for an examination of how Atlanta’s image as a progressive southern city masked the reality of poverty and dislocation for many of Atlanta’s African Americans.


For the story behind de Rochemont’s break with major studios see Thomas M. Pryor, “Hoeing His Own Row: A Case History of Louis de Rochemont and His New Film ‘Lost Boundaries,’” New York Times, June 26, 1949. This article claims that de Rochemont made Lost Boundaries on his own after a disagreement with Metro over “how to treat the story.” For the original story by Walter L. White see “Lost Boundaries,” Reader’s
21. Bosley Crowther, review of Lost Boundaries, directed by Alfred I. Werker, New York Times, July 1, 1949. As Barbara Klinger has shown in her analysis of his responses to films after World War II, Crowther's reviews, as well as those of urban periodicals in general, reflected a “timeworn antagonism to Hollywood glitz” and a favoring of the “downbeat films,” so named by Crowther. This term referred to the “new realistic films” that began to emerge from Hollywood studios after World War II, films that were critical of society and that, according to Klinger, “appeared to eschew the glamour and optimism of more conventional dramas, attaining a different look that seemed to signify reality, particularly in comparison with what reviewers regarded as Hollywood’s typical illusionistic fare.”


26. The New York Times reported that the Roxy did not ordinarily show first-run films but that it was chosen for the first showing—the “southern debut”—of Pinky because “it has extensive balcony space where Negro spectators may sit” (“Atlanta to Show ‘Pinky’,” Cinema Journal 46, No. 1, Fall 2006 47
32. “Atlanta Judge Studies Briefs,” Variety, February 8, 1950; Pryor, “Censorship Issues.” Set during World War II, Home of the Brave tells the story of African American soldier Peter Moss (James Edwards), who suffers from paralysis and amnesia following a mission on a Pacific island. The doctor cannot find anything wrong with Moss and decides to help him remember what happened on the mission through what he calls “narco-synthesis” (a drug-induced hypnotic therapy, for lack of a better explanation). Moss recalls that they became lost, and his white friend and fellow soldier Finch (Lloyd Bridges) had almost called him a racial epithet in blaming him for their situation; immediately following the exchange, Finch is shot by enemy fire. The doctor helps Moss realize that his paralysis was brought about by his feelings of guilt, which stem from his sense of relief that it was Finch, not he, who had been killed. Intruder in the Dust, based on William Faulkner’s novel of the same name, concerns the attempt of a young boy, Chick Mallison (Claude Jarman, Jr.), an eccentric old woman, Miss Habersham (Elizabeth Patterson), and the boy’s uncle, John Gavin Stevens (David Brian), to prove the innocence and prevent the lynching of an African American man, Lucas Beauchamp (Juano Hernandez), who has been falsely accused of the murder of a white citizen.
34. “Cross-Burning Follows Filming of ‘Pinky’ at Macon,” Atlanta Daily World, May 20, 1950; “Pinky’ Draws Fiery Cross at Macon,” Atlanta Constitution, May 19, 1950. See also “Bibb Deputies Investigate Cross-Burning at Drive-In,” Macon Telegraph, May 19, 1950; Macon Telegraph, January 27–February 8, 1950. Macon Sheriff E. Julian Peacock stated that there was no evidence to link the burning cross to the Ku Klux Klan. According to Peacock, the cross burning at Pinky was the second to have occurred within a few days. The Telegraph mentioned that a man living in the vicinity of the theater warned Peacock on May 18 that a mob planned to burn a cross in his yard that evening. However, the mob never arrived. The paper quoted Peacock as saying that “somebody is going to get hurt if this interference in other people’s business isn’t stopped.” See ads for Pinky at drive-in in the Macon Telegraph, May 16–17, 1950. It is interesting to note that Macon’s Bibb Theatre ran Lost Boundaries from January 23 to 28 in 1950 (Macon Telegraph, January 18, 1950).
35. “Repeal of Ban on ‘Lost Boundaries’ Asked in Film Suit,” Atlanta Daily World, November 19, 1949. The quote “Don’t pretend you is what you ain’t” refers to a line in Pinky stated by Dicey, Pinky’s grandmother.
37. “Censor Decides ‘Brave’ Pic Doesn’t ‘Imperil’ Jim Crow,” Pittsburgh Courier, October 15, 1949. It is worth noting that the two copies of microfilm obtained of the Pittsburgh
Courier were of poor quality, and therefore I was unable to read certain words (such as “against” [?]) or to detect appropriate punctuation. As an aside, considering the barrage of race-focused films that came from Hollywood in the late 1940s, their popularity among African American audiences across the United States, and southern censors’ focus on racial issues in making decisions about whether to allow these films to be shown, it is not surprising that newspapers outside of the South would have addressed Smith’s decisions. As Anna Everett shows in her work on black film criticism, the Pittsburgh Courier, the Chicago Defender, and other African American newspapers outside of the South from 1909 to 1949 “became African America’s voice with which to ‘talk back’ to mainstream American society, but more importantly, to communicate with itself at this crucial moment of self-reinvention.” Everett asserts that “to the displaced masses of African Americans, the black press was in effect the social, political, and cultural lifeline in a hostile white world.” These reader-focused papers played “an ever increasing role,” claims Everett, “as the cultural arbiter of an emerging film culture in black metropolises,” with their entertainment sections focusing on films and movie houses (Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909–1949 [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001], 6). Furthermore, the presence of active film censorship bodies in Chicago and in Pennsylvania and New York may explain why these areas’ respective newspapers, black and white alike, would have taken an interest in censorship outside of their own jurisdiction.

38. “Approved,” New York Times, November 6, 1949; “Clipping Two Scenes,” Variety, November 2, 1949. According to Variety, two scenes were cut, although the article only mentions one scene that showed Crain and Lundigan “in a clinch,” or embracing, after Pinky reveals her “true” racial identity to her white fiancé.

39. Variety Film Reviews, October 5, 1949.
41. For a compelling analysis of the connections between passing and class mobility in Lost Boundaries see Wald, Crossing the Line. 106–12.
42. Courtney, Hollywood Fantasies, 186.
43. Ibid., 176.
44. Ibid., 183.
45. Cripps, Making Movies Black, 232. Another article on Pinky is worth noting: Christopher John Jones, “Image and Ideology in Kazan’s Pinky,” Film Literature Quarterly 9, no. 2 (1981): 110–20. Jones examines major reviews of Pinky in 1949 in Time, Newsweek, the New York Times, the New Yorker, and the New Republic and attempts to understand critics’ problems with the film. He reaches the conclusion that the critics based their assessment on the “fundamental premise” that “a film containing subject matter dealing with contemporary trends or problems be judged according to the realism of its observations of those problems” (113). Jones goes on to address the problems posed by Jeanne Crain, a white actress, playing the role of a black woman and arrives at a conclusion as to why the placement of a white actress in the role worked, finding the reasons within the realm of audience psychology and the power of the subconscious.
47. Jones, “‘Pinky’ Recommended Despite ‘Social’ Theme.” Another complimentary review comes from the Times in London, which praises Hollywood for finally turning inward to critique America: “In the old, careless days of isolation Hollywood used to fling its gaudy advertisements of the American way of life on the screen and leave other nations to wonder and to envy.” Current world affairs seemed “to have turned American eyes inward on the faults in their own system” (November 26, 1949).
52. Advertisement for Pinky, Variety, November 23, 1949. Also helpful in Pinky’s promotion were Ethel Waters’s appearances in theaters in Chicago and New York. The Chicago Defender promoted her appearance at a showing of Pinky at the Woods Theatre. In her autobiography Waters wrote that for a week in New York she “raced every night to seven or eight different neighborhood theaters” (“Preview for ‘Pinky’ on November 11,” Chicago Defender, November 12, 1949; Ethel Waters for Charles Samuels, His Eye Is on the Sparrow [New York: Doubleday, 1951], 273).
53. Advertisement for Pinky, Atlanta Daily World, November 17, 1949; Pittsburgh Courier, November 26, 1949; Norvell, “‘Pinky’ Applauded by Whites, Negroes.” The balcony accounted for a total of 861 seats out of the theater’s 2,363, according to the Pittsburgh Courier—a thousand seats, according to the Atlanta Journal.
56. An article in the Pittsburgh Courier, in fact, directly commented on the advertising campaign used in Atlanta to attract viewers, a campaign that used the same ads employed to “herald” the openings of Pinky in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other cities as well as a “saturation radio campaign” that “followed the path of previous air barrages” used for the film across the United States (“‘Pinky’ Marches into Atlanta,” Pittsburgh Courier, November 26, 1949).
57. Motion Picture Herald, November 19, 1949.
58. “B’way Ads on Negro Pic Deemed Tinged with Bias,” Variety, August 10, 1949; “Protest Posters in Front of Astor,” Pittsburgh Courier, August 20, 1949. It is unclear what text these ads and displays used or included. The articles do not mention the specific words found offensive by protesting patrons and organizations. It is also important to remember that in addition to advertising problems Louis de Rochemont, well known for his Academy Award–winning March of Time newsreels, was left to produce the film independently after MGM canceled the Lost Boundaries project.
61. “‘Lost Boundaries’ Will Not Be on Television,” Motion Picture Herald, August 27, 1949.

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65. Smith, “Report of the Censor,” October 1949. Although RD-DR did not file suit against Smith and the board until November 1949, four months after her ban of *Lost Boundaries*, Smith was nevertheless aware in October that a lawsuit was imminent.


73. Minutes of the Atlanta Public Library Board, December 14, 1949, Atlanta Fulton County Public Library.


