

“Like Nickels in a Slot”: Children of the American Working Classes at the Neighborhood Movie House

This essay presents an ethnohistorical¹ account of the social conditions of children’s moviegoing during the late 1920s and early 1930s at the Strand theater in Springfield, Massachusetts.² The focus is placed specifically on a neighborhood theater and on this historical moment, because this field of space and time provides fertile ground in which to sift for traces of American working-class culture and subjectivity as these continued to form and reform in relation to both the ideology of Hollywood films and the stratified social geography of the local urban landscape.

The reproduction of cultural practices and subjectivities is neither predetermined in the individual nor guaranteed. Rather, as Roy Rosenzweig concluded in his pioneering study of working-class leisure in Worcester, Massachusetts, cultural transformation is an ongoing relational process of socialization that is subject to both intraclass and interclass contestation and marked by an historically specific dialectic of continuity and change across generations (215–21).³ As the experience of family is crucial to this process, I am particularly interested to excavate the cultural space of the Strand as it was inhabited by youth and used by parents in ways that were in keeping with a distinctively community-based, working-class tradition of childhood and family organization. At the same time, this mode of social organization was being subject to cultural interventions launched by elite groups from outside the neighborhood through such means as the attempt to create “family nights” at the Strand.

Scholarship on American film exhibition and moviegoing sometimes figures the late 1920s and early 1930s as a period of standardization based upon the model of studio-integrated movie palaces in large, northeastern

cities and the vision of a sweeping middle-class audience.⁴ However, the generalizability of the picture palace experience to moviegoing in any given northeastern city, let alone to other cities in the Northeast or beyond, is questionable. Gregory Waller, for instance, has observed that this viewpoint can be sustained only if we accept that moviegoing during this period was largely an urban phenomenon and that “the experience of audiences in a relatively small number of opulent theaters was representative of moviegoing throughout the ‘urban centers’ of the Northeast, which, in turn, was somehow comparable to the experience of going to the movies in the rest of urban . . . America” (195).

My interest in this study is precisely with the smaller theaters that persevered—at great difficulty, to be sure, given the constraints imposed by their “subsequent-run” status—in the marginal spaces beyond the palaces.⁵ An important point, yet one easily overshadowed by the crush of centralization marking the film industry during this era, is that although studio integration established Hollywood’s dominance over local exhibition, it did so not by eradicating differences between sites but by advancing what was already shaping up, according to Robert Sklar, as “a class system for motion picture theaters. Its categories ranged from the handsome new palaces down through older, downtown, neighborhood and small-town theaters” (144–45).⁶ Or as Miriam Hansen has observed, picture palaces became highly profitable, flagship theaters, but “they represented only a small portion of American movie theaters . . . 5 percent between 1915 and 1933. Neighborhood theaters charging lower prices continued in business, and continued to attract ethnic and working class crowds” (100). What was the social and cultural experience of these crowds? More importantly for this study, what uses did neighborhood

theaters serve for youth, and how did these theaters fit the cultural logic of working-class families enmeshed in daily struggles to make ends meet and to manage the child-rearing duties of their households?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to establish the concrete context in which a given neighborhood theater served as a gathering place for child audiences. It is also necessary to reconstruct that context and the audience experience there using a full range of evidentiary discourses. Toward this end, three lines of inquiry are pursued: (1) analysis of Springfield's social geography and the location of the Strand theater's neighborhood within this geography; (2) analysis of the cultural appeals evident in exhibition practices at the Strand; and (3) analysis of discursive constructions of the Strand's audience as produced in contemporaneous documents and in retrospective accounts of moviegoing collected through personal interviews.⁷

Springfield's Social Geography

By the late 1920s, Springfield was a heavily industrialized city with an ethnically diverse labor force and a total population hovering around 150,000. Fortunately for scholars interested in the social geography of the city during this time, there exists H. P. Douglass's *Springfield Church Survey*, published in 1926, which employed a rigorous method utilizing a combination of data sources (federal census records, local polling records, city school censuses, court records, charitable relief records, and extant records indicating the location of city industries) to map the city's urban geography into eleven districts distinguished by "natural boundaries and homogeneity of population" (263).

The survey was designed to provide information that would assist Springfield's churches—explicitly those of Protestant denomination—to better grow and organize their parish memberships, as well as to facilitate the ability of local social agencies to address a full range of what were deemed to be the city's social problems. The survey was not, however, a "neutral" or unprejudiced document. Its purpose was to hierarchically organize the spaces of the city according to an index of "social quality" predicated upon a number of criteria that formed the basis of contemporaneously "popular distinctions between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' sections of the city" (Douglass 265). Thus, Douglass describes the survey's measures of

social quality as follows: "It is assumed that a district with a large population of foreign birth or foreign antecedents, many Negroes, a high degree of industrialization and congestion of housing, with many children at work, much illiteracy, juvenile delinquency and charity, represents a less desirable combination of human fortunes than one in which opposite conditions exist, and that the ranking of districts on this basis approximately places their people in the scale of human welfare" (265–66). Given the cultural assumptions informing this measure of "social quality and desirability," it is not surprising Douglass maintains the survey's results "demonstrate conclusively that Protestantism has . . . a strong affinity for more desirable sections of the city [and that] . . . the largest proportion of Protestants and the best social quality go together" (274).

The survey's bias does not undermine its usefulness as an historical document. On the contrary, the survey speaks volumes about the stress and anxiety being experienced by a dominant culture confronting the transformation of the city, and it stands as a record of this culture's attempt to scrutinize and map that transformation for the purpose of asserting social and ideological control over it. Whatever social quality rankings the survey assigned various districts, its carefully detailed account of key social, economic, and cultural features of those districts remains useful precisely because it indicates to the contemporary researcher where the dominant culture was turning its attention. Thus, the survey reveals where ethnic, racial, and working-class populations lived, where industrialization was heaviest, where charitable relief was prevalent, and where levels of juvenile delinquency were pronounced.

District H: The Hill/Winchester Square

Springfield's Strand theater was located in an area designated by the church survey as district H, known locally as "The Hill." District H was the original site of the city's manufacturing base, though by the 1920s it had been surpassed in industrialization by districts A (Brightwood), B (North End), and C (central business district). The Hill was located roughly one and a half miles east of Springfield's central business district. It was judged by the survey as seventh lowest among the city's eleven districts in terms of overall social quality.

The hub of social and business activity in The Hill was Winchester Square, which formed at the fork

between State and Wilbraham Streets, the district's two largest thoroughfares. The Hill's lone movie theater, the Strand, sat on the northern end of Eastern Avenue, near the intersection with Wilbraham Street at Winchester Square.

Despite its relatively low social quality ranking, The Hill was literally surrounded by four districts—F, D, I, and G—that ranked first through fourth, respectively, in the church survey's hierarchy of social quality. To the north was district F, the top-rated district in Springfield. Douglass wrote of district F that the “older New England aristocracy, with a commendable sense of responsibility, located itself in this district in close proximity to the industries from which it drew its wealth” (267). It was further noted that “within this sharply defined area [of district F] lies a population of extremely homogeneous character which enjoys the most satisfactory general living conditions in the city” (Douglass 267). The Hill was bounded to the south by district D, Forest Park, which ranked second in overall social quality, a ranking that reflected the “present prestige now attached to the desirable parts of the rapidly growing south side” (Douglass 267). To the east was district I, a “strongly American and residential” section of the city that ranked third in overall social quality (Douglass 267). Finally, The Hill was bordered on the west by district G, which was listed as fourth in overall social quality. The survey pointed out, however, that district G was “now menaced . . . along the middle by the creeping in of undesirable population. . . . It is questionable how long it will hold its quality [as] it lies between the upper and lower millstones, districts C and H” (Douglass 267).

As Springfield's upper millstone, The Hill and its “undesirable” population may have been perceived by outsiders as a threat to neighboring districts, but it nonetheless had a lower percentage (50 percent) of first- and second-generation immigrants (primarily, English Canadian, Scotch, Irish, Italian, Swedish, and German) than either of the two districts ranked immediately above it—Brightwood (66 percent, ranked sixth) and Liberty Heights (62 percent, ranked fifth) (Douglass 265). However, one important demographic variable on which the survey compared The Hill unfavorably to these two districts was race, in particular, the size of its African American population. Indeed, The Hill had the highest percentage of African American residents (5.6 percent) of any district in Springfield. Screened through the domi-

nant cultural perspective embedded in the survey, this fact undoubtedly contributed to Douglass's judgment that The Hill had lower overall social quality than Brightwood and Liberty Heights, both of which had fractionally small African American populations (.3 percent and .2 percent, respectively) (265).

Another crucial dimension that helped determine the lower social quality of The Hill compared to Brightwood and Liberty Heights was the level of charitable relief distributed to the district. Douglass's survey noted that 2.9 percent of The Hill's residents received an average of 91 cents assistance, figures well above those found in Brightwood (1.6 percent receiving an average 49 cents) and Liberty Heights (.6 percent receiving an average 27 cents). The average amount of relief in The Hill was much closer to two of the lowest ranked districts in Springfield: the central business district (ranked eleventh, 2.8 percent receiving an average 95 cents) and the North End (ranked ninth, 2.4 percent receiving an average of \$1.06) (Douglass 265). It would appear that though The Hill was rated the seventh worst district in Springfield on the specific variable of “industrialization” and was home to numerous manufacturing interests (Indian Motorcycle Company, Brooks Bank Note Company, Van Norman Machine Tool Company, Harder Coal Company, and Springfield Ice Company, to name a few), the district's population remained of generally modest financial means with a relatively large percentage of residents relying on charitable assistance each week to help make ends meet.

Though the survey judged The Hill to be of “below average social quality,” one former resident remembers the area as a stable and secure environment shaped by a diversity of cultures, a healthy mix of single and multiple family dwellings, numerous businesses and industries, and a strong sense of community insularity. Former resident Larry Gormally observes that Winchester Square provided “a source of jobs for many neighborhood families, who were able to walk, ride a bike, or take a trolley to work” (“Winchester Square” 2). While many locals found work within the neighborhood, others commuted to jobs at Westinghouse, Chapman Valve, Smith and Wesson, and Milton Bradley. Mr. Gormally also points out that “horse-drawn equipment was still in use in 1929, and many companies . . . used horses to deliver their goods and services” directly to the area's households. “Coal, milk, bread, and ice were all delivered in horse-drawn wagons [and]

during summer the vegetable man rode down our streets with a wagon loaded with fruit and vegetables" ("Winchester Square" 3).

Given its surrounding social geography, the Strand theater catered to a predominantly working-class population comprised of a variety of European ethnic groups and a sizable African American community. Though The Hill was bounded on all sides by "high quality" districts, it was perceived by outsiders as culturally distinct from these areas and indeed was viewed by the church survey as a menace to the social quality of district G in particular. It therefore seems plausible that the Strand drew audiences from the immediate environment and was not often attended by citizens residing in the four adjacent "high quality" districts. However, to reconstruct the cultural space of the Strand more precisely, particularly as it was inhabited by child audiences and used by their parents, we must examine the appeals of the theater's moviegoing environment in greater detail.

The Strand Theater as Cultural Space

The 746-seat Strand theater opened in 1916 under the proprietorship of Springfield resident Edward L. Knight. In 1926 Winchester Amusement Corporation (headed by Springfield residents Harry Cohen and Louis Cohn), a locally owned and operated neighborhood theater chain that included four other neighborhood movie houses, purchased the Strand. Despite the theater's small size, surviving fire insurance maps indicate it had a balcony. Matinee admission was 10 cents for children and 15 cents for adults, and the charge for evening shows was 25 cents for everyone. The Strand regularly changed bills three times each week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, though it occasionally offered four changes per week, with new bills on Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

The Strand was located directly across the avenue from Buckingham Junior High School. This was efficacious for the theater, of course, and as former neighborhood resident Larry Gormally writes, the school "provided a steady supply of young impressionable children who remained faithful to The Strand well into adulthood. How well I remember, when I went to Buckingham, staring out the windows of classrooms on the Eastern Avenue side, and wishing I was watching a movie" ("The Strand" 1). In addition to Buckingham, The Hill's Homer and Tapley Grammar School and Holy Family School were also nearby,

and these schools served as tributaries, increasing the stream of child moviegoers attending the theater.

As in Springfield's other neighborhoods, in The Hill Saturday was the primary moviegoing day for children, who usually attended the 1:00 P.M. show in neighborhood-based peer groups. Former resident Harold James pointed out during our interview that "everybody went with their own age groups, . . . mostly on Saturday afternoon. We'd go see the serials that ran on Saturdays and the westerns which came on Saturdays, and double features." He added, "The rest of the week, you went to school. At age fourteen [in 1926], I was doing a lot of work [selling magazines and shining shoes] after school, so I didn't do too much movies, except on Saturdays." During our two interviews, Larry Gormally likewise recalled the group dynamic that characterized attendance at Saturday afternoon shows: "We all came from relatively poor families, immigrant families, hard working people, and we would all go as a group. When I was a kid, let's say maybe I started going when I was seven or eight, and I went as a group through junior high school, there might be eight or ten of us would go" (personal interview, 1 November 1991). He also remembered that from all directions "and all the streets, the kids would be kind of like streaming over, and everybody walked, everybody, 'cause nobody had cars" (personal interview, 15 July 1994).⁸

With the worsening during the Depression of already tight economic conditions, child moviegoers were forced to scramble for money, and the hunt for stray milk and soda pop bottles to be returned for deposit became a regular part of the Saturday movie ritual. As Larry Gormally explained to me:

In the thirties, we had a Depression going on, and even the nonimmigrant families, the older families—there was a tremendous amount of unemployment so money was not readily available. I'm talking from say 1930 to 1936–37, that era. So . . . all the kids in our neighborhood, we used to scrounge for deposit bottles. . . . It cost a dime to go to the Strand, so we used to try and scrounge three nickel bottles, ten cents for admission and a nickel for candy. . . . In my family, there were four boys, and if the four of us went, that was sixty cents, and that was a lot of money. (Personal interview, 15 July 1994)

Once money was raised to get children inside the theater, they routinely sat with the group with which they came, and Gormally remembers that "the group I was with, we'd always try to sit on the first floor, right hand

side, and we'd get in there and of course everybody would be talking and the place was really noisy" (personal interview, 15 July 1994).

While the Strand's balcony seats were the same price as ground level seating, younger children usually opted for the first floor and were relegated to the balcony only when the first floor was full. For some of the neighborhood's older children, the balcony served as the preferred site for courting behavior, especially on Friday nights, or was chosen for its efficacy as a location from which to carry out practical jokes. Larry Gormally, for instance, recalls some neighborhood teenagers would go to the Strand Wednesday night—dish night—and “wait up in the balcony, and they'd wait for a real tense moment in the movie, and they would look over, and they would drop a dish” (personal interview, 1 November 1991).

Such antics, however, were usually beyond younger movie audiences, who went primarily on Saturdays and found the floor seats amenable to peer socializing. Ground level seating also afforded an unobstructed vantage point from which to view the serials and low-budget double features, usually a comedy and a western, that were regularly presented. Both Harold James and Larry Gormally recall western heroes Tom Mix, Ken Maynard, and Buck Jones being particularly popular, though Mr. James observed that “some of them westerns were pretty bad, but you still had a favorite westerner you liked, like Tom Mix, or somebody like that, and you'd go see 'em, even though they weren't great movies.” Gormally remembers Tom Brown comedies also being “extremely popular,” and he noted the powerful appeal this upwardly mobile child character had for children of poor, immigrant, working-class parents:

Tom Brown was like your, he went to prep school for example, and he'd be like a little, like a wealthier young [person]. Instead of going to high school, he went to prep school or a military academy. . . . He was a nice-lookin' kid, always had a nice haircut. And a lot of us wanted to be in a military academy, we thought military academies were great. . . . And we were always envious. I remember that Tom Brown, Christ, we were always so envious the way he dressed, and his father had a car, you know? We thought for a long time that that was the way it was. We didn't know any better. . . . When you got into high school, you'd begin to see the difference, and you knew it wasn't true. (Personal interview, 15 July 1994)

Larry Gormally's account of the envy working-class children could feel toward Tom Brown, who stood as a

figure of social assimilation, resonates with Miriam Hansen's analysis of the class relations bound up in the cinema's shift to classical spectatorship as the “commodity form of reception.” In preclassical cinema, Hansen argues, “the naive spectator of early films is depicted [in works such as *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show*] as a child or childlike, or as excessive and hysterical” (57). This depiction of “rube” spectators unable to distinguish moving image from reality corresponded to a stereotyped view of immigrant, working-class audiences as greenhorn participants in a rapidly expanding commercial public sphere. Within this social and historical context “the adequate spectator must be mature and balanced, which means respecting the boundaries between illusion and reality along with the segregation of screen and theater spaces that regulate them” (Hansen 57). The mature spectator knows “it's just a movie.”

Importantly, and in contrast to the screen stereotype, the tendency of actual audiences in working-class, immigrant nickelodeons was as much toward distraction as absorption, as much toward the immediate reality of the theater space as toward the fictive “reality” of film space. This tendency effectively met the conditions for mature spectatorship but in a decidedly class-specific form, a form not valorized by dominant cultural groups because it did not resemble, for instance, the separation of stage and theater space as regulated through practices of audience behavior (rigidity, silence, controlled applause) appropriate to the polite theater. Still, in its own way, the separation of screen and theater space in nickelodeons mitigated class envy toward on-screen characters by allowing the mobilization of the nickelodeon as an alternative public sphere where local ethnic and working-class cultural practices could exert authority in determining the pleasure of the moviegoing experience. And that pleasure was frequently focused on the extratextual aspects of moviegoing as a collective social experience. Thus, while dominant cultural groups may have found Uncle Josh's peering behind the film screen to check the “reality” of the image to be an exemplary instance of rubelike or childish behavior, spectators closer to Uncle Josh's social milieu may have instead seen a familiar reflection of the loosely defined space that characterized the nickelodeon theater—a public sphere that existed autonomously from screen space and was as yet still open to the possibility of odd or aleatory behaviors on the part of audience members.

According to Hansen, after the development of classical narrative, the working-class and ethnic traditions that once helped segregate theater space from film space were marginalized by a commodity form of spectatorship in which class relations blurred as working-class, immigrant audiences were sutured into the illusory middle-class world of cinematic fiction. As Hansen argues, "the fantasy of projecting oneself, unseen, into a fictional world 'up there' which claims a greater degree of reality involves a social hierarchy that asks the spectator to identify with the perspective of the 'poor' looking in on the 'rich'" (58). To clarify, Hansen cites Ben Brewster's analysis of Griffith's *Gold Is Not All* (1910), a film that represented an early instance of classical spectatorship and dealt explicitly with the subject of class relations. Commenting on the spectatorial position implied in a scene in which a poor couple looks over a wall at a rich couple, unaware they are being watched, Brewster observes that "the rich are ignorant of the poor; the poor see the rich and envy them. . . . Inside and outside on the screen duplicate inside and outside in the movie house" (as quoted in Hansen 58). This seems an especially apt characterization of class relations as they took shape in *The Hill*, which was literally surrounded by the four most elite districts in Springfield in terms of "social quality."

In short, the inscription of the "outside" middle-class world into the "inside" space of the classical narrative granted that world authoritativeness as a representation of "reality" to working-class moviegoers living in view of, if at a remove from, middle-class comfort and convenience. Yet the authority of this social "realism" did not necessarily hold up over time. As working-class audiences adjusted to the commodity form of mature spectatorship, they were increasingly capable of distinguishing middle-class illusions from working-class realities. To recall Larry Gormally, "When you got into high school, you'd begin to see the difference, and you knew it wasn't true" (personal interview, 15 July 1994).

It is also important to remember that the subsumption of theater space to film space, particularly in the neighborhood movie house, was not always as total as models of classical spectatorship would have it, and this was true even as late as the early 1930s.⁹ Certainly, child audiences at the Strand found pleasure (and ideology) identifying with and envying a fictional, middle-class "peer" like Tom Brown. But there remained tremendous pleasure in the moviegoing experience itself, pleasure

rooted in extrafilmic rituals relating to peer sociability and intersubjectivity. And the shape of these rituals and the meanings constructed through them were predominantly defined by the particular configuration of ethnic, racial, and predominantly working-class culture that characterized *The Hill*.

Of course, the kinds of activities youthful audiences could mobilize within the space of the theater were constrained by community norms as well as by institutional constraints imposed by management, which could render theater space more or less open to local appropriations. While "gallery gods" might routinely drop a china plate or two from the balcony on "dish nights," thereby adding a residual element of distraction to the moviegoing experience, such actions were done within constraints imposed by the theater's in-house "policeman." As Larry Gormally recalls, the Strand "had a special cop on duty, and I remember him well because he was about six foot three or four. And even though he was not a regular policeman, we use to call him, his name was 'Joe the Cop,' and he was so big and tall that if he said something you obeyed him. He was authority, there was no argument about that" (personal interview, 15 July 1994). Clearly, the capacity of classical narrative to absorb its youthful spectators into the diegesis was not in and of itself enough to insure the "rule of silence" in the theater, and residual modes of "distracted" spectatorship that militated against the "derealization of theater space" had to be actively suppressed (Hansen 83).

By the same token, management could open up the theater to extrafilmic activities and expressions of neighborhood culture, even though these activities remained organized from above. Harold James, for example, recalls that the Strand's regular "amateur nights" provided him and his mates a welcome opportunity to test their jazz prowess before the local community. James explained that on amateur night "that place would be packed. . . . I think it was Saturday night when they had the amateur show. In fact, we were in an amateur show there one time, I was in a show myself. . . . I play a ukulele and been playin' since I was eight years old. We had a group called the Ramblin' Rascals, and we played at the Strand and won first place one night, playing Duke Ellington's song 'It Don't Mean a Thing, If It Ain't Got That Swing.' We kept that up for quite awhile."

If amateur nights contributed to the pleasures of moviegoing at the Strand, it must be stressed that their

popularity hinged on the sense of insularity and parochialism (seeing other people from the neighborhood on or from the stage) that defined peer relations in the neighborhood generally. This insularity also explains why neighborhood youth rarely attended theaters downtown or in other parts of the city. As Larry Gormally put it,

You kind of felt that, why would you leave? For example, if I could only go to a movie on Saturday when I was a child, why would I go all the way down to the Paramount? . . . We wouldn't know anybody, so we'd stick with our own group. See, we were all more neighborhood oriented, we went to school in that neighborhood, we played all our sports in the neighborhood, we went to church, we knew everybody. The other thing, if you went into strange neighborhoods, let's say if I went from Winchester Square down to the South End [of the downtown district], that was an Italian neighborhood. Those kids would see me, and I might be fair game . . . unless I had a gang. You were on somebody else's turf. (Personal interview, 1 November 1991)

The neighborhood resident's allegiance to the Strand did not necessarily end with childhood. Though Larry Gormally remembers going downtown to the Paramount (Springfield's largest movie theater) during his late teens and early twenties, especially when he wanted "to impress some girl" (personal interview, 1 November 1991), he also pointed out that neighborhood "population was stable. Kids graduated from Buckingham [Junior High], then went to one of the local public high schools, and when they got married, a lot of them still stayed in the same neighborhood, and they became the adult customers at the Strand" (personal interview, 15 July 1994).

The adult patron's loyalty to the Strand was further solidified through merchandise giveaways. As Harold James recalls of his mother's and sister's regular seven-block trek to the Strand: "See, you could go out at nights then, and my mother and sister safely used to walk to the Strand for nights they gave away glassware or china." Larry Gormally remembers that during the Depression the theater also sought to appeal to adult male patrons by raffling live turkeys before the holidays, an appeal grounded in the prize's use value:

All the mothers would go, I think dish night at the Strand was Wednesday. They'd all go Wednesday night. I never recall going with my mother, I recall going with my father a few times. One of the memorable times with my father, ah, I think it was on a Monday night the week of Thanksgiving, and my father was gonna, they was giving away a live turkey. My father said, "I'm gonna win that turkey." Well, I went with my

father, and I can still see it, he won the turkey. They had it in pens outside in the back, and . . . Christ, I think it was fourteen pounds. And I remember walking home, ha, with that turkey. It was funny. We kept chickens, my father and mother were brought up on farms in Ireland . . . so they always had chickens, and walking home with that damn turkey! . . . My father waited a couple of days, then he killed the turkey, and we all had to help my mother pluck the turkey. (Personal interview, 1 November 1991)

The functional value of the Strand for adults extended beyond merchandise giveaways and turkey raffles, however. For parents, the Strand provided an essential site for low-cost childcare, and the organization of everyday activities was often coordinated around sending children off for one of the theater's programs. As Larry Gormally explained to me: "The movies were also babysitters, great babysitters. See, we'd go as a group, and our parents were never afraid to let us go. . . . It was a way of getting the children out of the house. It was a way for the, maybe the parents might want to do some shopping. My parents did not have a car. They could do their grocery shopping, for example, while they [the kids] were gone. And again, we were all safe" (personal interview, 15 July 1994).¹⁰

Though working-class parents and their children believed using the neighborhood theater as a childcare center was a safe and effective means for negotiating the demands modern life put upon the family, Springfield's Better Films Council (BFC) nevertheless took exception to the practice.

The Strand's Child Audience: "Like Nickels in a Slot"

First formally convened in March 1930, the BFC¹¹ of Greater Springfield was created in response to the Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs' call to establish local groups devoted to fighting tasteless movies and lurid movie advertising.¹² In its original membership, the BFC included representatives from thirteen women's clubs operating both within the city proper and within its affluent suburbs of Longmeadow, East Longmeadow, Wilbraham, and Hampden. Within two years, BFC membership increased to sixty women's club representatives. The BFC was presided over on a temporary-chair basis by Mrs. Fred B. Cross until 1932. At that time the chair and vice-chair positions were made permanent and filled by Mrs. S. H. Crane and Miss Ruth

Miller, respectively, who came to the BFC from women's clubs in Forest Park (district D) and Longmeadow, two of the wealthiest areas in Greater Springfield.¹³

In February 1930 members of the Springfield Federation of Women's Clubs heard a speech from former Maine governor Carl E. Milliken, who spoke on behalf of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. Milliken addressed a variety of topics, including the matter of parents leaving children in neighborhood theaters. As reported in newspaper coverage ("Clubwomen Told") of the event:

A serious problem in many cities, the speaker mentioned, is the attitude of some parents who dump their children in the motion picture theater while they go off for the evening, many times not returning until after the closing time of the theater while the manager has the care of the children on his hands. "These parents seem to think that children can be dropped into the community like nickels in a slot and will be taken care of somehow," remarked Mr. Milliken [emphasis added]. Family night programs for the neighborhood theaters that change their programs twice a week was urged as a good solution for family entertainment and solidarity.¹⁴

Acting upon Milliken's suggestion to create family nights at neighborhood theaters, the BFC in April 1930 established a committee of "motion picture advisors" who were to seek out the cooperation of the city's neighborhood theater operators in providing family programs: "It was felt that if the exhibitors could be encouraged to select films suitable for both adults and older boys and girls on Friday and Saturday evenings, this would be a constructive service." In addition to advocating family nights, the advisors were also charged with the task of working with "managers of the small theaters outside of the downtown theater section . . . to secure the advance bookings of these theaters, and if there is any film that is known to be objectionable, to urge the manager to substitute a more desirable one" ("Motion Picture Council Future Action"). The surnames of club members appointed as motion picture advisors were among the "best" names in Springfield, and the member specifically assigned to the Strand was Mrs. Leicester Warren from the Springfield Women's Club.

The BFC's attempt to implement family nights singled out evening shows, but by May 1932 members' concern had expanded to include the "problem" of parents leaving children at weekend afternoon shows. The BFC called for "a halt on the use of the moving picture as a day

nursery," and mothers and fathers were "scored heavily" because "in spite of every effort to provide information about films, the movies were turned into commercial nurseries."¹⁵

Discussing conflicts over child audiences during the first three decades of the twentieth century, Robert Sklar observes that "the struggle over movies, in short, was an aspect of the struggle between the classes. Taking place . . . in a society where to speak of class conflict was a breach of good taste, it was almost invariably masked." He adds, "Since the enemies of movies could deal only indirectly or covertly with the issue of class conflict, they made their case on the ground of protecting the young" (Sklar 123). The actions of the affluent members of the BFC to reorganize the practices of neighborhood theaters may be understood, in this light, as an attempt to intervene in the cultural politics of class by reforming the child-rearing practices of working-class families.¹⁶

By focusing its reform efforts on the goal of improving both the quality of films and the quality of the surrounding social context in which films were viewed in working-class neighborhoods, the BFC's approach was in keeping with emerging social science research of the time, specifically the Payne Fund project, that was beginning to identify contextual variables of "social organization" or "social disorganization" as key to understanding the degree (strong or weak) and direction (positive or negative) of a movie's effect on youth. The influence of motion pictures was seen as particularly strong and detrimental in socially disorganized neighborhoods, which were characterized by weak structures of family, school, and church (Jowett 220–25). Taken to the extreme, a socially disorganized neighborhood could become an "interstitial area," which Paul Cressey (158–60) describes as a "type of community condition" defined by ineffectual social control, deteriorating residential neighborhoods, mixed zoning, shifting populations, poverty, and other destabilizing conditions that combine to form a social setting conducive to regular gang activity and juvenile delinquency. Despite the pessimistic portrait painted by the church survey of The Hill's "below average social quality," there is little other evidence to suggest The Hill was even reasonably close to being an interstitial area of the city. Still, when viewed from the culturally dominant perspective that informed both the survey and the BFC, the neighborhood was clearly marked by social disorganization, a condition that

over time would certainly have been perceived as worsening under the social and economic stress of the Depression.

Herbert Gans's ethnographic research on working-class ethnic communities in Boston provides analytic categories regarding modes of family organization that are useful for interpreting the BFC's actions against neighborhood theaters. Based on field observations, Gans argues that a significant difference between working-class and upper-middle-class modes of child rearing in American society is formed through a distinction between "adult-centered" and "adult-directed" types of family organization.

For Gans, adult-centered families are "prevalent in working class groups" and are "run by adults for adults, where the role of the children is to behave as much as possible like miniature adults" (54). In this type of family, children are "expected to behave like adults at home [but] are able to act their age when they are with their peers. Thus, once children have moved into their own peer group, they have considerable freedom to act as they wish, as long as they do not get into trouble" (Gans 56). Gans adds that "for some years parents will fight the ascendancy of street rules over home rules . . . [but] when a boy reaches the age of ten to twelve, parents feel that he is now responsible for his own actions" (58). Parents refrain from engaging in extensive supervision over and participation in the child's peer group society, and "parent-child relationships are segregated almost as much as male-female ones." Significant gender differences within families also contribute to the shape of this pattern of child rearing, and Gans observes that "when girls reach the age of seven or eight, they start assisting the mother, and become miniature mothers. Boys are given more freedom to roam, and, in that sense, are treated just like their fathers" (56).

The separation of parent and child activities outside the home enables working-class children (particularly males) to learn the "rules of the street" that will allow them to obtain "a secure existence as persons who are both accepted and somewhat envied members of their family circle and peer group" (Gans 60). In this respect, working-class parents do not push their children toward a goal of upward class mobility but instead encourage them to locate the level of their aspiration and status horizontally within the parochial worlds of community and peer group. Indeed, as Gans observes, "The worry

about downward mobility is stronger than any desire for upward mobility" (60).

Though impossible to know for sure, it is reasonable to assume the "adult-centered" mode of child-rearing and family organization was fairly prominent among the largely working-class population of The Hill, and it no doubt carried over to patterns of attendance at the Strand. For instance, both Harold James and Larry Gormally recall that their parents attended the movies together only during the years of courtship and early marriage and that moviegoing at the Strand was largely formed within the context of strictly defined same-sex, age-based peer groups. Further, both men stressed that they never attended the theater with their mothers and only on rare occasions attended with their fathers, and then only at very early ages. Mothers, however, did often go to the Strand with their adolescent daughters, especially on dish nights.¹⁷

The adult-directed mode of child rearing and family organization stands in contrast to the adult-centered mode. Gans describes the adult-directed family as an "upper middle class pattern—in which parents . . . guide the children toward a way of life the parents consider desirable" (54). As Gans puts it, "Child-rearing is based on a model of an upper middle class adulthood characterized by individual achievement and social service for which parents want the child to aim. . . . Such parents devote much time and effort to assuring that the child receives the education which will help him to become a proper adult" (55–56).

Parental supervision and guidance are essential to the success of this long-term goal, and the parent-child segregation marking adult-centered families is interpreted as poor parenting that jeopardizes the future development of youth into respectable, goal-oriented individuals. As Gans points out, adult-directed social workers and schoolteachers often interpret routine parent-child segregation in working-class families as a sign these parents have "lost interest in their children or [are] ignoring them," an interpretation that misreads the cultural logic of the adult-centered family (57).

By encouraging neighborhood theaters to offer family nights and by insisting that parents stop using movie houses as day nurseries, the social elite of the BFC were engaging a form of cultural politics aimed at broaching the separation between parent and child that formed the functional core of working-class, adult-centered

families. Though ostensibly intended to “protect” children, this attempt to reform moviegoing was primarily directed at the parents of these children. If parents had long accepted the practice of leaving children at the neighborhood theater as a safe and logical response to the realities of working-class life as it was lived day to day in a perpetual “present tense,” they were now urged to view this practice through the lens of their child’s idealized future. From this “future tense” perspective, unsupervised moviegoing became the functional equivalent of gambling. “Dropping children into the community like nickels in a slot” was not only morally unacceptable but harmful to the children’s sense of ambition and to their prospects for developing the discipline required to attain the twin goals of individual achievement and service to society. What was needed was less community involvement and more parental involvement, a formula that might produce more “Tom Browns”—kids who by design and direction were put in position to have “real futures” as “proper adults” in the middle classes.

It is interesting to note that the BFC did not believe this goal was similarly jeopardized by the practice—common at Springfield’s more expensive first-run movie palaces—of providing adult patrons with staffed nursery rooms in which to leave their children during a film presentation. Only the neighborhood theaters were approached with plans for reform. Though never explicitly articulated by the BFC, the class bias in this double standard was presumably hidden behind a distinction between “professional and supervised” childcare as provided by nurses at movie palaces like the Paramount and “unprofessional and unsupervised” childcare as provided by “Joe the Cop” at neighborhood theaters like the Strand. The risks associated with parent-child separation were not absolute but a matter of context and expense.

Indeed, in a different context, the separation of parent and child could even be viewed by reformers as highly desirable. In his study of the Saturday matinee movement in the 1920s, Richard deCordova found that “matinees were one means of attempting to reassert traditional distinctions between child and adult by identifying, producing and preserving a children’s culture within the cinema itself. The desire to segregate children from adults in the cinema was a strong one” (102). Predicated on a fear of the negative effects adult movie content had on youth, the matinee movement’s solution was to separate

youth into a distinct, circumscribed audience that would be provided its own “suitable” films. Here, parent-child separation was acceptable because the activities of youth were being deliberately and centrally administered from above rather than left to the vagaries of individual families, communities, and theater operators. This control insured children would be defined as “children” rather than as “mini-adults.” The creation of segregated viewing contexts for youth was thus ideologically underwritten by an adult-directed view of childhood.

In Springfield the BFC became tangibly involved with the matinee movement in 1934 when it arranged a junior matinee program for children on Saturday mornings.¹⁸ While the matinees were more successful in being implemented than family nights, the screenings were held exclusively at the Arcade theater, a second-run downtown theater rather than a third-run neighborhood theater. It remains unclear whether junior matinees at the Arcade attracted many youth from The Hill or from any other working-class neighborhoods of the city. However, given the cultural insularity of The Hill, as well as the limited transportation resources available to working-class families, there may have been little practical reason to send children downtown when the Strand could do the job just as well if not better.

As was the case with the promotion of family nights, the junior matinee program soon faded away, replaced by what would ultimately be a more sustained and long-term effort (also launched in 1934) by the BFC to promote and develop motion picture appreciation groups. These groups served to enhance the film literacy of viewers and thereby increase box office demand for “better” films. By 1937 seventeen groups were conducted on a regular basis in Springfield: six were run as extracurricular activities associated with English Departments in city high schools, nine were run for youth in the Springfield WPA, one was run exclusively for girls by the YWCA, and one was run for young adults by the College Club of Springfield. Movie appreciation groups were directed by adult discussion leaders who facilitated “the study of background technic, costume design, plot development, and other phases of motion picture production.” An added benefit for youth in the WPA group, in particular, was that “out of the discussions and the contributions of knowledge made by the director and members of the groups, the program develops into character and diction training, and opens new worlds to many

a boy and girl who had to leave school and struggle for some sort of job." For the BFC, the ultimate purpose of every movie appreciation group was to provide youth "an opportunity to broaden their leisure time activities and studies, to develop character, and stimulate ambition" ("Springfield Motion Picture").

Nonetheless, despite the BFC's efforts, the imperative to shield and supervise children to insure their future as proper middle-class adults appears to have held little quarter within the world of the working-class family.¹⁹ When all was said and done, neither working-class families nor the exhibitors who catered to them saw much use for family nights or junior matinees, which were never implemented in any of Springfield's neighborhood theaters. Instead, parents in neighborhoods like The Hill continued to use the local movie house as they had before, as a safe and beneficial form of day and evening care for their children. Dispatched to the theater, children went about learning the informal rules governing peer relationships within which their status and achievement—their own form of cultural capital—would be measured.

Less "nickels in a slot" of the future than "miniature adults" in the present, working-class children were granted freedom to explore the outside world without persistent parental supervision, but they were also expected to learn the rules of the community.²⁰ At the Strand, these rules could be violated, but only at the risk of an encounter with "Joe the Cop," who as the face of community authority could inform the offender's parents that their child had gotten into trouble. As Gans points out, however, if the child of an adult-centered family finds trouble through behavior brought to the family's attention by "the police or priest, the behavior must be attached to the influence of bad companions." But, he adds, the parents "neither feel the same responsibility for the child that is found in the middle-class family, nor develop the same guilt feelings" should the child get into trouble (Gans 58).²¹

Conclusion

The Strand at Winchester Square was predominantly attended by first- and second-generation immigrants and African Americans inhabiting working-class neighborhoods of The Hill. With "below average social quality," The Hill was judged a potential "menace" to higher quality districts surrounding it, and residents from these outlying districts were unlikely to have attended the

Strand on a regular basis. The unique geographic location of The Hill may also have reinforced the sense of insularity that characterized everyday life there, as residents may have felt out of place stepping too far beyond the boundaries of their neighborhood into the wealthier districts nearby.

This insularity carried over to the Strand, where the loyalty of local audiences was cultivated early in life and frequently extended through adolescence into adulthood. For its part, the Strand grafted onto the cultural patterns and needs of working-class families, establishing a presence as both a low-cost childcare center and a kind of liminal space amenable to social experimentation by children granted a degree of autonomy by virtue of their status as "mini-adults." The theater also offered amateur nights that appealed to older modes of social behavior and offered local adolescents the chance to test their status within the context of neighborhood peer groups. Though child audiences at the theater were brought into the ideological orbit of fictional middle-class peers, the gravitational pull of such characters was mitigated by the real-life peer relationships that were formed, in part, through the locally defined conditions of reception at the Strand. Likewise, veiled ideological attempts to reform moviegoing habits—and, by extension, the child-rearing practices—of working-class families met limited success. Parents had little time and even less good reason to adopt culturally illogical prescriptions drawn up by social elites who, from their vantage in the "better" neighborhoods, perhaps looked upon The Hill and perceived in its community-based modes of class experience a threat to the future of their own more privatized way of life—a way of life they hoped to write large as the "common sense" standard of childhood and family organization for the broader society.

In the end, the insularity of The Hill formed a cultural atmosphere through which ideological interventions from the outside were filtered. This enabled working-class traditions to take root in neighborhood children. How firmly these roots held beyond the historical period examined here, however, remains an open question with answers that could undoubtedly vary household by household, even child by child. For while the BFC had no immediate results to show for its efforts, it may have problematized the practices of working-class families just enough to plant a seed of self-doubt—as well as doubt about the trustworthiness of

the community itself—in the minds of some parents. Germinating in the soil of massive economic dislocation during the Depression, these doubts could have eventually emerged as part of a larger desire to transcend the troubles of the present by embracing the promise of the future—a perspective easily articulated to the “adult-directed” mode of family organization advocated by the BFC.

Even more importantly, as children grew older and confronted the declining insularity of their neighborhoods in the face of industry’s flight from the center city, housing reforms intended to decentralize urban population density, and increased social and geographic mobility, the tendency to equate modes and practices of working-class culture with the (in)experience of youth was likely strong. Indeed, in the wake of community disruption, the best way for some neighborhood teens to make sense of their working-class status may have been as something to outgrow, an aspect of social “immaturity” that had to be left behind (perhaps to return only later in nostalgic texts of memory) just as the Strand had to be left behind—figuratively as much as literally—if the path toward mature adulthood in the wider culture was to be successfully trod. As Steven Ross has found, “Young working-class men viewed [movie] palaces as weekend treats for which they would dress up and to which they would take their dates” (191). In this sense, though many children who grew up in The Hill continued to live and raise families there as working-class adults, their cultural experience of class may have grown increasingly contradictory and dislocated as it was incrementally disarticulated from the receding margin of space—the neighborhood as a distinctly insular, self-sufficient, and perpetually reproducing unit of social and cultural geography—and rearticulated to the expanding horizon of time. As former Hill resident Larry Gormally pointed out to me, though many neighborhood residents stuck with the Strand through adulthood, they increasingly attended the luxurious “grade A” movie palaces downtown as well: “You know what you did, you kind of graduated to that as you got older” (personal interview, 1 November 1991).

NOTES

My thanks to Larry Gormally and Harold James for their generosity in speaking with me for this project.

1. My use of “ethnohistorical” is indebted to Annette Kuhn. The term suggests an historiographic approach that draws substantially (in a reflexive way) on oral histories as memory texts that can speak to the significance of movies and moviegoing in the ongoing social and discursive production and reproduction of subjectivity and everyday life (and in the specific case of Kuhn’s work, the significance of enduring fandom).

2. The Strand was one of sixteen movie theaters to operate in Springfield between 1926 and 1932. Nine of these were subsequent-run neighborhood houses. An analysis of the class contours of the city’s theaters and audiences is found in Klenotic.

3. Though a discussion of social reproduction and the reproduction of class relations in capitalism is beyond my scope, this essay’s approach to children’s moviegoing and class-based dispositions of family organization is informed, in part, by the theoretical and empirical work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his elaboration of the habitus: “Social class is not defined solely by a position in the relations of production, but by the class habitus which is ‘normally’ (i.e. with a high statistical probability) associated with that position” (372). As discussed by Nicholas Garnham and Raymond Williams in their excellent review essay, the cultural dispositions of the habitus operate according to a coherent “logic of practice” that is “shaped primarily in early childhood” and is “a family, group and especially class phenomenon, a logic derived from a common set of material conditions of existence to regulate the practice of a set of individuals in common response to those conditions” (120). Bourdieu believes the logic of practice, once fully internalized, is quite conservative and resistant to change, making the period of early childhood especially important in the struggle to reproduce cultural dispositions and thus a key locus for reform and social contestation.

4. A notable exception to the standardization thesis is found in an essay by Thomas Doherty that examines the many different types of audience activity that continued to occur throughout the Depression era. Also, regarding the thesis that middle-class patrons dominated the movie audience by the 1920s, it is important to bear in mind, following Frank Stricker, that affluence in the 1920s was not nearly as widespread as we often imagine it to be: “Perhaps 40 percent of the population was poor in the 1920s. So many unskilled workers had to use social agencies and free services that contemporaries found it hard to delineate a poverty line separating independent families from dependent ones. For the majority of those below the median family income of \$1700 in 1929, security rather than affluence . . . lay at the core of the American dream” (32). It seems implausible that upwards of 40 percent of the population would abandon moviegoing, and as has been demonstrated in studies by Roy Rosenzweig and Lizabeth Cohen, among others, many fruitful questions of social film history can be posed to investigate the repositioning of still sizable working classes, and the very notion of class itself, over the cultural terrain of moviegoing during this period.

5. See Douglas Gomery’s work (137–80) for a fine discussion of the full range of marginal theater operations during the 1920s and 1930s.

6. Richard Maltby (“Sticks”) provides a thorough treatment of typologies by which Hollywood classified exhibition sites and audiences during the late 1920s and early 1930s, despite the industry’s prevailing rhetoric about an “undifferentiated and unified audience” (26).

7. Data from three interview sessions—one with Mr. Harold James and two with Mr. Larry Gormally—were used in this study. Interviews were conducted in a face-to-face, unstructured format and were audiotaped with permission of the participants. Mr. James (age fourteen in 1926, African American) was interviewed at the Chestnut Hill Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Center in Springfield, Massachusetts. Mr. Gormally (age six in 1926, Irish American) was interviewed on two separate occasions on the premises of the Connecticut Valley Historical Society in Springfield, Massachusetts. Each interview session was transcribed, and all quoted material from Mr. James and Mr. Gormally is taken (as close to verbatim as possible without losing clarity) from these transcripts. Regrettably, I have yet to locate any female interviewees who lived in the neighborhood during the late 1920s and early 1930s and attended the Strand theater.

8. Mr. Gormally's recollection that "nobody had cars" speaks to the working-class character of The Hill and comports with Stricker's empirical investigation of supposed gains in working-class affluence during the 1920s: "The car was enormously important in American culture and in the American economy in the 1920s, but most working class families did not own automobiles" (31). Stricker estimates the average working-class family had "a 30 percent chance of owning a car" (32).

9. Doherty's findings also lend support to this argument.

10. The use of the local movie theater as a safe and effective form of childcare is also documented in Paul Cressey's research on East Harlem for the Payne Fund project. Writing in 1932, Cressey observed of the local movie house: "Frequently it serves distraught mothers as a place to 'check' their small children while they are busy about other cares. They can leave them at the cinema, confident that they will remain there, held by the spell of the picture" (171).

11. For a broader discussion of the Better Films Council of the National Board of Review and of the national development of the "Better Film Movement," with its specifically local approach to the problem of "divergent community standards and tastes," see Garth Jowett (128–29, 151–54). In keeping with the Board of Review, the Better Film Movement sought to improve the moral content of films by developing cooperative relationships with exhibitors (who might be persuaded to see the profit and community interests served by special programs of "better" films) and by eschewing censorship in favor of improving public taste sufficient to stimulate box office demand for "better" films.

12. According to Maltby ("Production Code"), lurid advertising became the focus of attack for an "increasingly insecure Protestant provincial middle class" in part because this class of elites tended to see more advertisements than actual movies, and these ads "suggested that [the movies'] permissive representations of sex and violence were designed to cater to the baser instincts of 'morons,' a term widely used to refer indirectly to the immigrant working class" (45). Also, in addition to concerns about lurid advertising, it is possible the Federation's call in 1930 to create local movie councils was driven in part by talking pictures and "vulgar" speech. For more on talkies and censorship, see Donald Crafton (463–79).

13. See "Organize Council"; "New Head for Movie Council"; "Local Motion Picture Council"; "Springfield Motion Picture."

14. Milliken's comment about parents dropping children into the community "like nickels in a slot" makes for an interesting case of historical interpretation. At the literal level, the phrase may refer to peephole machines found in penny arcades and other places where

individuals might drop nickels in exchange for a glimpse of moving images of perhaps questionable content. More broadly, however, the reference to "nickels" may be a veiled allusion intended to resonate rhetorically with BFC members' memories of "disreputable" old-style nickel theaters. Such an interpretation makes sense, because the nickelodeon received more social criticism and notoriety as a negative influence on children than peep machines, and Milliken here is questioning the legitimacy of the neighborhood theater as a context for community-based child rearing. Blurring the line between the neighborhood theater and the questionable practices of the nickelodeon accomplishes this goal. For more on the discursive construction of child audiences and elite attempts to reform movie theater practices during the nickelodeon era, see Pearson and Uricchio.

15. See "Parents Misuse" and "Women's Clubs Pledge." It is interesting to observe in newspapers at this time the cultural articulation of the BFC's concern for children and the ongoing coverage of the Lindbergh baby case. Indeed, the Lindbergh case gave the BFC's efforts special prominence at the annual State Federation of Women's Clubs meeting in 1932. As described in "Women's Clubs Pledge," the meeting opened by extending the Federation's "sympathy to Col. and Mrs. Charles Lindbergh for the most conspicuously tragic happening in this lawbreaking era."

16. Emphasizing the class-based cultural politics at work here is not to deny that other motivations factored into the BFC's efforts to uplift the moviegoing practices of local youths. As Alison M. Parker has argued in relation to another important, contemporaneous reform group (the Women's Christian Temperance Movement), the appropriation by women's groups of the "traditional maternal mantle as the protector of children" displayed a "tangle of gender, ethnic, and class concerns and, importantly, legitimiz[ed] women's participation in the political public sphere" (78).

17. The present study concentrates on the logics and politics of class as these played out over the cultural terrain of moviegoing and neighborhood film exhibition. However, more work is needed to investigate the ways patterns of moviegoing informed by class position were also shaped in relation to gender (as well as to race and ethnicity). We need to know more, for instance, about the formal and/or informal rules that families of different class backgrounds had regarding which types of theaters and films were or were not appropriate for their male and female children. Also, research exploring the types of films presented on dish nights would help us better understand the local exhibitors' perception of film preferences by female audiences and ascertain whether film selections varied according to the class orientation of the neighborhood. Further, we need to know whether dish night was the only time of the week some female patrons (of all ages) had for an evening out at the movies, and, if so, how this constraint affected not only the social experience of their moviegoing but also how it factored into the gender politics of both working-class and middle-class modes of family organization. Future research in this vein would go a long way to advance our understanding of the complexities involved in the ongoing production and reproduction of social subjectivity and its relation to differential patterns of film consumption and modes of moviegoing.

18. "Motion Picture Council to Celebrate"; "Anniversary of Pictures Council." For a discussion of the potential economic benefit to the exhibitor of junior matinees and junior motion picture clubs during the Depression era, see Gomery (139).

19. The nonresponsiveness to the BFC's entreaties was itself in keeping with working-class traditions of community insularity. As Robert Macieski found in his case study of progressivist attempts to reform urban space, working-class residents generally ignored middle-class complaints about "their vulgar and boisterous behavior" in gathering places such as city parks, choosing instead to express their own "interpretation of the moral economy of city space" and to resist "efforts to pre-empt their authority within their neighborhoods" (Macieski 719).

20. This point was sometimes made explicit in discourses originating from the neighborhood. For instance, *Community Topics: A Weekly Periodical of Neighborhood Helpfulness*, which was circulated in The Hill from 1919 to 1923 and frequently ran advertisements for the Strand theater, made a habit of listing on its front page a variety of "Community Commandments," the first of which was "Thou Shalt Honor Thy Community and Keep Its Laws."

21. It is worth noting in this regard that, according to *The Springfield Church Survey*, The Hill had the fourth highest rate of juvenile delinquency among the eleven districts of the city (Douglass 265).

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