



HARRY RANSOM
CENTER



***Banned, Burned, Seized, and Censored* Exploration**

Name _____ Date _____

THE HARRY RANSOM CENTER is a humanities research library and museum. Current exhibitions are on display in the galleries on the first floor. The Gutenberg Bible and the First Photograph are on permanent display in the lobby. The Ransom Center is free and open to the public.



In the Gallery

Banned, Burned, Seized, and Censored

The exhibition *Banned, Burned, Seized, and Censored* reveals the machinery of censorship at work in America during the interwar years, letting writers, reformers, attorneys, and publishers speak for themselves and illuminating the complex negotiations that occurred at the intersection of literature and “obscenity.”

1. Many different organizations actively banned offensive literature in America. Name 3 of these organizations.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

2. Who was one of the most active attorneys for the anti-censorship cause during the interwar years?



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3. What is a “smut hound”?

4. In summary, what is being discussed in the letters written between E. Greenbaum and J. Sumner?
(Location: left side of the gallery, in the “Negotiating Obscenity” section)

5. What challenges do you think publishers and bookshop owners faced during this time?

6. In Boston, how did “objectionable” book titles start leaving bookstore shelves?

7. How did pro-censorship organizations use extra-legal intimidation to wage war on “objectable” literature?

8. In the photograph, “Upton Sinclair in Boston, 14 July 1927,” what is Upton Sinclair doing? What were some potential consequences? (Image location: back wall of the gallery, in the “New England Watch and Ward Society” section)

9. How did Walt Whitman find himself in the middle of the early 1880’s censorship controversy?



10. What were some of the fears that Claude McKay and his publisher faced?

11. How did writers respond to censorship? Give a specific example from the exhibition.

12. How did customs agents decide which books to seize?

13. How did the Smoot-Hawley Tariff affect the distribution of literature in the United States?

14. What was the Comstock Act and how did it affect the United States Post Office?
