



# Unclean Lips: Obscenity, Jews, and American Culture (Goldstein-Goren Series in American Jewish History)

*Josh Lambert*

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*Winner of the 2014 Jordan Schnitzer Book Award presented by the Association for Jewish Studies*

Jews have played an integral role in the history of obscenity in America. For most of the 20th century, Jewish entrepreneurs and editors led the charge against obscenity laws. Jewish lawyers battled literary censorship even when their non-Jewish counterparts refused to do so, and they won court decisions in favor of texts including *Ulysses*, *A Howl*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and *Tropic of Cancer*. Jewish literary critics have provided some of the most influential courtroom testimony on behalf of freedom of expression.

The anti-Semitic stereotype of the lascivious Jew has made many historians hesitant to draw a direct link between Jewishness and obscenity. In *Unclean Lips*, Josh Lambert addresses the Jewishness of participants in obscenity controversies in the U.S. directly, exploring the transformative roles played by a host of neglected figures in the development of modern and postmodern American culture.

The diversity of American Jewry means that there is no single explanation for Jews' interventions in this field. Rejecting generalizations, this book offers case studies that pair cultural histories with close readings of both contested texts and trial transcripts to reveal the ways in which specific engagements with obscenity mattered to particular American Jews at discrete historical moments.

Reading American culture from Theodore Dreiser and Henry Miller to *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *FCC v. Fox*, *Unclean Lips* analyzes the variable historical and cultural factors that account for the central role Jews have played in the struggles over obscenity and censorship in the modern United States.

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