



# Indiana Historical Society

1 May 1996

James H. Billington  
The Librarian of Congress  
Library of Congress  
Washington DC 20540

I am writing this letter in response to the announcement in the 3 January 1996 *Federal Register* concerning the Library of Congress's study of the state of preservation of American television and video, pursuant to Public Law 94-553. I write this letter as chair of the Visual Materials Section of the Society of American Archivists, representing several hundred curators and archivists whose responsibilities include the acquisition, preservation, and accessibility of moving image materials.

Although our membership includes staff from the Library of Congress, the majority of Visual Materials Section members work in smaller organizations such as state and local historical societies, and corporate, organizational, business, and academic archives. In institutions of this type, television and video constitute only a part of their holdings. Many of these institutions lack technical expertise and funds for proper storage environments, and necessary playback, duplication, and reformatting equipment. Without these resources, moving-image material such as unique broadcast footage and amateur video is at serious risk and will likely be lost for future generations of archival users.

The announcement requested information about how the Library of Congress could best assist the field in two specific areas: (1) the establishment of a comprehensive preservation program and (2) the coordination of efforts between archivists, copyright owners, creators, educators, and historians and scholars.

I want to thank the Library of Congress for conducting this important survey of the current state of American television and video preservation that will lead to a national preservation plan. As a major collector of television and video materials, the Library of Congress should be an important player in the development of the plan. It should not, however, be the sole leader.

I recommend that your plan call for the establishment of a comprehensive national preservation program to be led by a broad-based advisory body. This body would consist of representatives from the Library of Congress and other institutions that collect

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television and video materials. Individual members of this body from various areas within the archival/museum profession should include curators, archivists, conservators, and catalogers. Professional organizations with like-minded missions, such as the American Film Institute's National Center for Film and Video Preservation, and the Association of Moving Image Archivists, would also be part of this leadership team. Copyright holders, educators, historians, creators of videos and television programming, even manufacturers of videotapes, should be representatives.

When formulating the national plan, I urge the Library of Congress to consider the vast amount of local and regional television and video holdings held by smaller institutions whose collections only partly include television and video material. Some members of the advisory body I recommend above must come from this part of the archival community. Their perspectives are often different from the larger institutions, but their insights are invaluable nonetheless. Any recommendations must include actions that even those with limited resources can implement.

Undertaking a leadership role within a larger cooperative program will enhance the efforts of the Library of Congress, and all collecting institutions. A truly national perspective will greatly assist those who preserve our country's moving-image heritage.

Sincerely,



Stephen J. Fletcher  
Curator of Visual Collections  
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