



**Statement  
of the  
American Film Institute  
National Center for Film and Video Preservation**

**Library of Congress  
Public Hearings on**

***"The Current State  
American Television and Video Preservation"***

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The AFI is pleased to testify at these important hearings, and to contribute to the Library of Congress' work to bring television and video materials into a comprehensive plan to preserve America's moving image heritage. For over two decades, especially through the work of AFI's National Center for Film and Video Preservation, the development of the national television and video preservation effort has been one of the institute's primary mandates. During this time, the National Center has taken a leadership role in coordinating this effort and has been privileged to work with hundreds of committed archivists across the country.

Today, at the Library's suggestion, we would like to share a bit of the AFI's long history in television and video preservation, describe how the National Center's current activities are contributing to this cause, and offer five basic recommendations for a national plan to safeguard these materials. These recommendations were first articulated by the National Center as part of a nationwide needs assessment that it carried out in 1990. The report that emerged from this assessment still stands as one of the most comprehensive statements on the needs of television preservation, and we are pleased that the Library has indicated it will be consulting this document in preparing its study.

#### **AFI's History of Involvement in TV/Video Preservation:**

AFI's history in television preservation dates back to 1974, when it convened a conference of interested parties, with follow-up support from the Ford Foundation, to discuss the coordination of television archival activities. In 1978, AFI began coordinating the annual meetings of what was then known as the Television Archives Advisory Committee. This group and its film counterpart evolved into what is now the

Association of Moving Image Archivists, the North American professional association for which the National Center continues to serve as institutional secretariat.

In 1983, AFI's television preservation mandate intensified when it established the National Center for Film and Video Preservation in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts. Throughout the 1980s, the Center completed a number of projects that placed television on the national preservation agenda. In 1986 the Center published the "National Film and Video Storage Survey," containing information on the film, television and video holdings of over 30 public archives. Also in 1986, the Center called a two-year "National Moratorium on the Disposal of Television Programming," an initiative that conveyed to the television industry the urgent need to save our national television heritage. As an outgrowth of the moratorium, the Center prepared national guidelines for the selection of television programs for retention and preservation. The guidelines were distributed in 1988 to the nation's television networks, producers, and broadcast groups.

One of the Center's major accomplishments came in 1989 with it coordinated the negotiation of an agreement between Capital Cities/ABC, the UCLA Film and Television Archive, and the Museum of Television and Radio to bring the history of ABC's entertainment programming into the national collection. The agreement covered hundreds of ABC-aired series from the 1950s to the 1970s - an estimated 24,000 kinescopes and film prints.

This national-level work was complemented by the Center's extensive efforts on behalf of regional television archives across the country. The ground-breaking event for this field came in 1987, when the National Center organized the first national conference

of local television news archives. These institutions are a rich resource in documenting our nation's history, and we are pleased to share the table today with colleagues from two of the nation's leading local television archives, those in Miami and San Francisco.

**Current NCFVP Programs and TV/Video Preservation:**

Today, the National Center's has a range of programs which address the needs of television preservation. The AFI Collection is known for having brought over 25 thousand classic American feature films and short subjects into the national collection at the Library of Congress and other archives. But this national clearinghouse collection has also acquired thousands of television programs and classic commercials, dating from 1939 to the 1980s.

The Center's National Moving Image Database has provided significant support for the television and video archival communities. Since 1988, the NAMID Data Entry and Conversion Program has allocated over one million dollars for data acquisition projects at archives across the country, including over twenty television and video collections. In doing so, NAMID provides extensive direct support for the cataloging and automation work of these archives, and fosters the use of national-level standards. Each archive's data is in turn acquired by NAMID and made available – through a series of open access agreements negotiated with the archives – to preservationists, catalogers, researchers and the public.

Using this approach, NAMID has become the largest collective moving image database in North America. Over 30,000 of its records document the nation's television and video holdings, including broadcast television collections at the Library of Congress, UCLA, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, American Archive of

the Factual Film, and Museum of Broadcast Communications, as well as independent video art works and documentaries held by the Pacific Film Archive, Anthology Film Archive, Long Beach Museum of Art, Electronic Arts Intermix, The Kitchen, and Video Data Bank. This year, NAMID will acquire additional television data through new conversion projects involving the Peabody Awards Archive at the University of Georgia, the Bay Area Video Coalition, the Experimental Television Center, and the University of Southern California Cinema-Television Archive.

In addition to physical holdings, NAMID includes all filmographic data published by the AFI Catalog project. While the Catalog will continue to focus in the coming years on researching American theatrical films released between 1893 and 1970, we look forward to the day when AFI will be able to expand this national filmography in to the realm of historic television. A feasibility study on such a Television Catalog was completed by the National Center in 1988.

One of the institute's priorities this year is to bring NAMID, AFI Catalog and AFI Collection data online through AFI's new World Wide Web site. NAMID was available online for the first time in 1995 through a dedicated BBS line, and our goal now is to provide full Internet access to this valuable information.

The National Center continues the coordination and outreach efforts that have helped bring new archives and special collections into the television archival community. As a contribution to this effort the Center will publish shortly *The Administration of Television News Film and Videotape Collections: A Curatorial Manual*. Co-edited by Steve Davidson from the Wolfson Center and Greg Lukow of the AFI, this guidebook is

illustrated with over 200 photographs and designed to assist local and national archives responsible for safeguarding television news.

Finally, we would like to note that AFI is currently in the middle of a three-year initiative to raise over one million dollars in new funds for archival preservation projects through the AFI Preservation Challenge Grant. Television projects are eligible for funding, and we encourage their submission. In 1995, \$350,000 was awarded to 13 archives through the first year of the project, and the institute hopes to announce the availability of funds for the second cycle of grants in the very near future.

### **Recommendations for a National Program for TV/Video Preservation:**

We would like to conclude our testimony today by offering five fundamental recommendations for a national television and video preservation plan. These suggestions have, of course, a bottom line: increased resources to help archivists preserve and make accessible our nation's television and video heritage. Indeed, one of the most compelling goals of the national television study should be to provide potential funding agencies with the information they will need to establish ongoing preservation support through programs similar to those that have supported film preservation for nearly three decades.

First, determine the scope of the problem. There is an urgent need to measure the size of the staggering volume of broadcast, cable and video material to be saved. Our experiences with funding agencies have shown that a statistical assessment of existing material is essential in developing a comprehensive approach to television preservation. The material grows significantly with every passing year.

The study should provide an overall estimate of what has been produced, what has been lost, and what is currently being held or acquired. Existing selection policies of should be analyzed with an eye toward identifying major gaps. Research should project the future growth of television, video and new forms of multimedia production, as well as the impact of this growth on preservation needs and resources. A useful corollary would survey surviving playback and recording equipment for the many obsolete videotape formats still in need of conservation.

Second, define television and video "preservation." The study should provide potential funders with a clear, working definition of the principles of television and video preservation. It should determine where consensus exists on current preservation practices and promote the development of new standards where needed. It should differentiate between motion picture preservation and the unique needs of television and videotape conservation. It should rethink, for example, the concepts of "original" and preservation "master" and "restoration" in light of the history of specific television materials, such as kinescopes, and with an eye toward emerging digital technologies.

At the same time, the study should emphasize the convergence of film and television preservation and the inseparability of the two media in day-to-day archival practice. As with film, the preservation of television and video materials should be seen as a process, not the singular act of generating a new copy. The fundamental need for long-term storage under proper environmental controls must again be emphasized.

Third, strengthen public/private partnerships. If our nation is to save its television and video heritage, the need for cooperation between public archives and private-sector producers and broadcasters cannot be over-emphasized. The study should promote

the crucial concept of "the national collection," held at a diverse range of institutions who collectively share the responsibility of preserving the heritage. The study should provide realistic selection guidelines to help evaluate what we can reasonably expect to save and foster consensus regarding "who" will save "what." The television and video equivalent of the "orphan film" should be defined to help rationalize the preservation expenditures of public archives with those of commercial producers.

The study should look to existing partnership models in film preservation, for example, The Film Foundation or the Sony Pictures Preservation Committee. It should encourage the development of model donation and deposit agreements between public archives and producers, and cooperative methods for de-accessioning unwanted materials. The study may also want to explore the possibility of extending the range of copyright submission repositories to include other archives who would be responsible for materials not selected for retention by the Library of Congress.

Fourth, secure the necessary new funding. The study should bring television and video to the forefront of the national preservation agenda. It should articulate long-term funding needs and help develop necessary resources. This is the bottom line for all the nation's archives. The techniques to preserve the heritage are at hand, but the pace must be accelerated. Preservation support should be broadened beyond laboratory transfer work to include storage, cataloging, and access. The need is compounded by the absence of a tradition of support like that for film preservation. As a matter of public policy, we must overcome the impasse of conventional wisdom which for too long has maintained that "*the mountain of television programming is too enormous to contemplate*" or "*videotape is not a long-term preservation medium.*"



As public/private partnerships are solidified, new fundraising mechanisms can be developed. In particular, we are all awaiting the outcome of the pending legislation to create a new "National Film Preservation Foundation." If this Foundation is established, steps should be taken to ensure that the Foundation's mandate is broadened to include preservation support for all moving image materials.

Fifth, increase access. As more television and video materials are preserved, the responsibility of providing access becomes paramount. The study should encourage rights holders to support shared open access for a diverse community of users, even as it provides assurances that legal interests will be protected. Possibilities for inter-archival loans and exchanges can be increased. Within the expanding universe of the Internet, the study should promote the concept of the networked "virtual archive" in which the online transmission of moving images would break down traditional barriers to access while also providing new ways to assist preservationists and catalogers.

The study should also encourage new agreements between archives and broadcasters that would enable off-air taping not only of news materials, as allowed under the current copyright law, but also a broader range of programming for education and research purposes. Indeed, in looking to the future of online digital research, the study could explore the possibility of extending the very concept of "off-air taping" into the realm of online image capture.

In conclusion, the National Center would like to thank the Library of Congress for the opportunity to share these reflections. We look forward to doing whatever we can to assist the preservation community with this vital effort.