

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION ARTS

Vilas Communication Hall
821 University Avenue
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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Mr. Steve Leggett
Motion Picture and Recorded
Sound Division
Library of Congress
Washington DC 20540

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MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

Dear Mr. Leggett:

I write to register my views on current inquiries into motion picture preservation.

I have been studying and teaching about the history of cinema for nearly twenty-five years, and I have watched film scholarship become a credible, thriving academic discipline. Central to our increasing understanding of the art and history of cinema is access to as wide and diverse a range of materials as possible.

Because we cannot know what future generations of scholars will want to study, we should strive to maintain a wide range of documentation about the cinema. Indeed, with the growth of our knowledge has come more subtle and penetrating questions about cinematic art, about films' relation to culture and history, and about the development of American moviemaking. These questions often oblige researchers to seek out print and film material neglected by previous generations. As our understanding broadens, so too must the range of materials we have available.

This also means that scholars should have reasonable access to the films. Both established researchers and students should be able to see films on film--not on video, which inevitably distorts and sometimes defaces the original. As a matter of course, 35mm viewing copies should be made available for those scholars working on questions of provenance, visual style, and related matters. Similarly, qualified scholars who require frame enlargements for documentation should, under supervised conditions, be allowed to make photographs from viewing prints, just as literary scholars are permitted to photocopy a page of text. The development of film studies over the last two decades has depended largely on close scrutiny of film prints, and if the academic study of film is to progress, access to them should continue and even widen.

In conclusion, let me simply praise the activities of the National Film Preservation Board and heartily endorse that body as the best-placed group to coordinate the development of resources around an art and a medium to which the United States has

made enduring contributions. Future generations will be grateful if our efforts have enhanced their understanding of how movies became the preeminent art in twentieth-century culture.

Sincerely,



David Bordwell

Jacques Ledoux Professor
of Film Studies