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March 4, 1993

Library of Congress  
M/B/RS Division  
Washington, DC 20540  
Attn: Steve Leggett

To the Members of the National Film Preservation Board:

I attended the public hearing on preservation held in Los Angeles on February 12, 1993 and have read the trade paper reports on the hearing held February 26, 1993 in Washington, D.C. I would like to submit the following comments for consideration on the crucial subject of funding for preservation. Although I am the Associate Editor of the American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States, I submit the following comments purely as a private citizen, and they should in no way be construed to be the opinions of the organization for which I work.

I strongly urge that Professor Douglas Gomery's proposal concerning a tax on ticket admissions and cable use not be rejected without careful study and consideration. I know of no comparable plan that would generate the massive amount of money necessary to provide adequately for preservation and proper storage. Money collected from the proposed tax could also be used to finance research in the technical aspects of preservation.

In the year 1990, according to the 1992 Film Daily Year Book, there were over 1 billion domestic motion picture theater ticket admissions. A 5-cent surtax on admissions, while practically painless to the consumer, would generate \$50 million per year.

I believe that Professor's Gomery's idea is based on the situation in Sweden, where surtaxes on motion picture theater tickets and video sales support the Swedish Film Institute. With this money, the Institute has been able to preserve all their nitrate.

The objection that the studios themselves should be funding preservation seems to me to be unrealistic and, in fact, based on a faulty principle. I believe that it is the function of the Library of Congress and the various archives, not the studios, to preserve our national film heritage. If one argues that this is the responsibility of the studios, one would be forced to then contend that book publishers, not the taxpayer, should fund the book preservation efforts of the Library of Congress and smaller libraries across the country, and provide for storage costs also. As this is not the case, why treat the storage and preservation of films any different than that of books?

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One reason, I believe, that past government funding for preservation has been inadequate is that competing needs took precedent. However, with a direct preservation tax on theater tickets, money could be raised that would not be taken away from any other program and would not raise the deficit, since the money would be earmarked from the beginning for preservation.

I am not so naive as to believe that a preservation tax could be easily passed; however, a lobbying effort could be attempted. The tax could be presented as fitting in with the new Administration's emphasis on investment and rebuilding of the country's infrastructure; in particular, the inadequate film vaults of the various archives.

I hope that the Preservation Board will either seriously consider this proposal or come up with another workable way to raise the necessary funds for preservation. The Board has a unique opportunity to implement a viable preservation policy. I suggest that the Board consult with members of the archival community and the studios specifically regarding the preservation tax. Theater owners and patrons themselves should also be queried. Representatives of the Swedish Film Institute or organizations from other countries that have such a policy should be consulted.

In closing, I would like to thank the members of the Preservation Board for their efforts, past and future.

Sincerely,

  
Alan Gevinson