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MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING  
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

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Statement before

The National Film Preservation Board Public Hearing  
at the Library of Congress  
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Dr. Billington and other members of the Board, my name is Douglas Gomery and I have been teaching media studies for nearly 20 years. I earned a Ph. D. in 1975, have authored nine books, written some 300 articles and 1000 reviews, and served three years as a member of the Board of Trustees of the American Film Institute. I am now a professor at the University of Maryland; I speak for myself, and am not making a special plea on behalf of a particular organization. I have attached a VITAE to the end of this statement.

First, I think the state of moving image preservation in the United States is in appalling shape, despite heroic efforts by the Library of Congress and many other archives throughout the USA. I have long observed that the will is there. Let me now personally applaud the efforts of archivists around the United States. Their job is a difficult one and to my mind they do it wonderfully under

severe constraints.

Their problems -- to this observer -- lie with focus and resources.

I think the scope of the preservation effort needs to be expanded. We need more than a comprehensive national film preservation program. We need a national comprehensive moving image effort.

Videotaped moving images -- from over-the-air television, cable television, and video cassettes -- are being produced in fantastic ever-growing numbers, but we seem to be collecting only a small percentage.

Yet videotape is less stable than safety film.

To address only the "film" problem is to wage "the last war." We need to preserve film and television -- and all future moving image media production.

In particular let me argue that we need to begin to systematically preserve television news. And I mean all forms of this most important means of mass communication, from the network evening news to CNN's regular reports. We should not forget to save local morning, noon, evening, and nightly newscasts issued from over-the-air TV channels and increasingly delivered over cable TV wires.

Innovative forms should also demand our attention, from presidents and other persons of the day appearing on the "new news" ("Larry King Live" and "MTV Townhall," to state but two obvious examples) to the increasing number of lengthy documentaries

cablecast on the Discovery and Learning Channels.

We are losing this important resource. The valiant TV news archive at Vanderbilt University rests on shaky financial ground as I understand it. The television networks seek solely to turn their news archives into "profit centers." CNN barely has a news archive. And local television news archives -- of taped and live presentations -- simply do not exist. Nor do cable television networks -- national or local -- have the resources or desire to create proper archives.

We need a national center for the collection of television news in all its forms. We need to begin one now.

Finally I address what I consider the crux of the archival problem -- a regular source of funds. I think few do not agree with me that we should try to save "as much as we can."

Everyone asks: where will we get that kind of money?

Surely we all agree that at the moment there is not enough money for preservation. Private companies do not regularly invest; public institutions are starving in this era of budget cuts.

I have a specific proposal.

My logic proceeds in two steps. First the function of moving image preservation in the contemporary United States is properly understood as part of basic education. Educational leaders have long acknowledged the need for collections of books and other printed materials. In the 1990s moving images need to join this core library.

Second, the task of national moving image preservation is not

a local nor a state concern. It covers the whole nation and thus the federal government ought to underwrite a program of national moving image preservation as part of the work of the Department of Education.

To pay for this I propose a user tax. That is those of us who gain entertainment and information from moving images, insight and fun from both film and television should be willing to contribute a tiny portion of what we spend on purchase and rental to maintain preservation. I suggest one percent (1%) of all gross sales and rentals and advertising expenditures of all films and television.

I think such a tax would yield -- in 1992 -- at least \$500 million dollars, and more in future out-years. That type of regular (and ever increasing) funding would go a long making sure that education which requires moving images will always have access to needed primary materials.

To the average customer this means two cents more on a video tape rental or a nickel more to go to the movies.

And the full tax will not be passed on to the customer. The moving image industry includes 75,000 stores to rent videos and 22,000 movie theaters plus thousands of over-the-air and cable television outlets and so with these alternatives some of the cost of the tax will be absorbed by the distributors and producers, thus spreading the sacrifice, thus having everyone help fund the moving image archive.

No one wants to pay more taxes. But education is vital to our success as a nation. And so let us do it right. Thank you.