

The American Film Institute

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

MAR 15 1993

March 12, 1993

OTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

Mr. Steve Leggett
M/B/RS Division
Library of Congress
336 James Madison Memorial Building
First and Independence Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20540

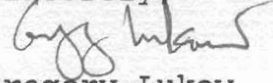
Dear Steve:

Attached is a supplementary statement from the National Center for use in the study on film preservation that is being conducted by the National Film Preservation Board of the Library of Congress. The statement expands on one of the points raised in the Center's recent testimony at the February 12, 1993, hearings of the NFPB in Los Angeles. It presents a number of compelling reasons for including television and video materials in the long-term national plan that will eventually emerge from the Library's study.

The National Center recognizes that Congress did not specifically mandate that television and video media be included in the study. However, even in limiting the current report to film preservation, we should not forget that so much of our nation's television heritage has been produced on motion picture film. At the very least, it is our hope that the attached statement will help facilitate a future report addressing the preservation of these historic materials.

We are submitting this document in part because we feel it is important to have this case stated for the record. The overwhelming majority of moving image archives in the United States are involved in conserving television materials -- on both film and videotape. Over the years, the National Center has implemented a number of projects and national-level initiatives on behalf of these television archives. The attached statement is offered in support of their work.

Sincerely,



Gregory Lukow
Deputy Director

281



National Center
for Film and Video
Preservation

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

MAR 15 1993

The American Film Institute

MOVING PICTURE, BROADCASTING,
AND RECORDED SOUND DEPARTMENT

THE CASE FOR TELEVISION/VIDEO PRESERVATION

Within the archival community in the United States, there is a clear and strong consensus that one of the first and most fundamental issues that a long-term national plan for moving image preservation should address is the traditional and often inappropriate distinction between "film" preservation and "television/video" preservation. Wherever possible, archivists believe this misleading distinction should be re-evaluated and an emphasis placed, instead, on the overlapping concerns and the inter-dependent needs of film and television preservation.

At the same time, archivists are also keenly aware of the very real disparities in the histories of preservation funding for the two media. Traditionally, theatrical film materials have received higher and more consistent levels of financial support than the comparatively less-developed area of television and videotape preservation. This is true of support from both federal agencies and private foundations, and is often true of administrative support within preservation institutions themselves.

Accordingly, archivists have stressed the necessity of utilizing national preservation planning initiatives as an opportunity to make the special case for the needs of television and video preservation. This case needs to be made with the general public and with funding agencies, both of whom have displayed a tendency to regard television programming as an ephemeral, low-brow, and quickly disposable cultural commodity. To rectify this, a national plan should provide both the information and the rationale necessary to foreground the distinct value and identity of television, video and other special collection materials, and, by extension, to develop more balanced approaches to the national preservation effort.

Thus, a workable national moving image preservation plan must necessarily synthesize two important elements: on the one hand, a recognition of the special nature of television's history, aesthetics, and social role as distinct from the motion picture entertainment industry as a whole, and, on the other hand, an

effective integration of television and motion picture preservation concerns within a long-term master plan.

The Convergence of Film and Television Preservation

Disparities in funding support for the film and television/video media have been due in large part to the fact that the needs and accomplishments of nitrate and theatrical film preservation have long been more sharply defined in the eyes of both funders and the general public. Indeed, some of the largest television archives have themselves been fully occupied in dealing with deteriorating film materials acquired under existing collecting policies, or through early donations of large nitrate collections received from the major studios.

In addition, when contrasted with the monumental and often undifferentiated volume of television programming produced day-in an day-out on a round-the-clock basis, the comparatively higher profile and higher name recognition of Hollywood feature films, combined with the dramatic and well-publicized problem of the deterioration of these films on nitrate stock, have served to focus special attention on the older medium of film.

Now, however, changing realities and priorities in the preservation field call for a re-thinking of these traditional understandings. In many ways, the inter-dependence of film and television preservation was already an historical fait accompli dictated by material and practical circumstances dating back to the early 1950s. These circumstances are becoming even more compelling today, given the rapid evolution toward:

- 1) the functional integration of film and television/video media within day-to-day archival work,
- 2) the structural integration of production entities within the film and television industry, and
- 3) the professional integration of film and television collecting institutions within the public archival community.

What has emerged is a convergence in the activities and interests involved in the preservation of film, television and video materials at all levels.

Convergence at the Level of Archiving the Physical Media

On the one hand, the dichotomy between film and television/video seems relatively easy to comprehend, given the respective

histories of the two media. One is a ticket buyer-based medium with an industrial structure that emerged at the turn of the century, ultimately to be dominated by a half a dozen production studios whose product is projected in theaters and has appeared almost entirely on film. The other is an advertiser-based medium with an industrial structure that emerged in the 1930s and 40s, dominated for most of its history by three national networks, with roots in radio, whose programming is broadcast into the home and has come to rely extensively on the use of videotape in its distribution.

Yet, on the other hand, even in drawing these seemingly obvious differences between the "film" and "television/video" media, it is inadequate to equate videotape exclusively with television and film with motion pictures. This is true for two basic reasons:

First, the separation of "film" and "television" is misleading because of the simple fact that thousands of hours of historic television material exist only on film, while thousands more are still being shot on film.

Second, conflating "television and video" is also misleading because television -- whether broadcast, cable or closed-circuit -- is ultimately a distribution medium that can present materials originally produced on a variety of physical formats. Videotape is but one of these formats, and has its own broad array of uses in other distribution venues, including theatrical release.

Thus, the primary relevant distinction for preservationists is between the physical characteristics of film and video. The distinctive photo-chemical processes of film and the electro-magnetic processes of video continue to raise appropriate preservation questions regarding differences in the permanance and long-term stability of the two media.

By contrast, and for a number of very practical reasons, the respective efforts of motion picture and television archives are largely inter-dependent and feature significant areas of overlap. Recently, this has become even more the case because of newly discovered problems with the degradation of acetate film, commonly referred to as the "vinegar syndrome." Indeed, as archivists now begin to re-assess the balance in their preservation priorities between deteriorating nitrate and deteriorating acetate film, they may often find that it is their television collections on acetate film -- including early 16mm kinescopes and newsfilm -- that represent some of the greatest areas of concern.

Convergence within the Production Industry

All surviving television from the 1940s and most of the 1950s is on film stock, usually in the form of 16mm kinescopes or other film prints. In the years when much of television was done live and not recorded, and before the networks were able to achieve simultaneous nationwide broadcasts by hooking up their affiliate stations via coaxial cable or microwave relay paths, these kinescopes, which were often shot directly off of television monitors, and other duplicated film prints provided the only means available to distribute national programming among these unconnected stations.

Later, in the 1950s, most prime-time series programming began to be shot on film. Indeed, there has always been significant cross-over within the film and television industries, where the studios and production companies that create the majority of theatrical feature film releases are the same companies that have produced most prime-time dramatic television programming. Today, producers still turn to 35mm film as the best available medium for mastering original moving image properties for long-term distribution in a variety of markets, whether theatrical, videocassette, laserdisc, cable, or network television. Much of the film preservation transfer work by the major production studios is undertaken in order to maximize the commercial possibilities of these various distribution and syndication markets.

Convergence within the Archival Profession

The integration of film and television/video preservation has also been reflected within the professional development of the archival field as a whole. Since the 1970s, and especially in the past decade, large and significant new donations of television, video and other special collections material have been made to an ever expanding body of archives across the country. Even the new U.S. copyright law was revised, beginning in 1978, to enable the increased acquisition of television and video material within the newly-established American Television and Radio Archive at the Library of Congress.

Today, the majority of both public and private archives are committed to collecting motion pictures as well as television, and are responsible for handling material on film as well as tape.

In addition, archivists now find they must also service a broader range of user requests for access to all moving image materials. By the late 1970s, scholars had come to recognize the value of using television -- from prime-time dramas to game shows to commercials -- in their social and historical research, even as in the 1960s they had discovered the importance of studying American motion picture filmmakers and genres.

This overall convergence within the archival field was manifested over a decade ago when working archivists in the United States and Canada recognized the practical need to merge the Film Archives Advisory Committee (FAAC) and the Television Archives Advisory Committee (TAAC) into a single body: the Film and Television Archives Advisory Committee (F/TAAC). In 1990, this decision was again manifested in the fieldwide decision to further change the name of the organization from F/TAAC to AMIA -- the Association of Moving Image Archivists -- a name that acknowledges the professional importance of archiving "moving images" in general as a founding first principle.

For these reasons, any proposal to create a long-term national preservation plan must eventually address and include this full spectrum of historic moving images, including television and video production.