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speaking on behalf of  
The American Film Institute  
and  
The National Center for Film and Video Preservation at AFI

Hearings

National Film Preservation Board of the Library of Congress

February 12, 1993

Los Angeles, California

FIELDWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR A NATIONAL MOVING IMAGE PRESERVATION PLAN:  
A TEN-POINT APPROACH

The reauthorized National Film Preservation Act of 1992 represents the first time that a moving preservation planning study had been requested directly by Congress. For this reason alone it is an extremely important piece of legislation that deserves both the strong support and extensive involvement of the entire moving image archival field.

In order to assist with this national planning initiative, the National Center for Film and Video Preservation at The American Film Institute would like to provide the National Film Preservation Board of the Library of Congress with its perspective on this vital matter. As you may know, the National Center was established in 1984 by the National Endowment for the Arts and The American Film Institute to serve as a central office for coordinating American moving image preservation activities on a national scale. With funding support from the NEA, the Center continues to administer the only federally funded film preservation grants program, researches and publishes the national filmography through its AFI Catalog project, and acquires film and

television programs to add to the over 25,000 titles in the AFI Collection at the Library of Congress and other archives. To assist with these hearings, the National Center would like to recount the results of a nationwide preservation needs assessment that it carried out in 1990. This needs assessment survey was conducted as part of a national planning document prepared by the Center at that time.

The results of the Center's 1990 survey yielded a clear consensus regarding a number of principles that the nation's archives felt should be involved in any national plan for moving image preservation. These general principles are summarized in the following "ten-point approach." A national moving image preservation plan should:

1. Build on the long history of work and relationships within the moving image archival community.
2. Bring together all constituencies in the field and provide a structure for their direct participation in the preparation and implementation of the national plan. In conducting its needs assessment survey, the National Center identified the following key constituencies within the moving image archival community:
  - a. The FIAF-member nitrate archives.
  - b. Historic television collections.
  - c. Local television news archives.

- d. Other non-fiction and subject oriented collections:
  - anthropological and natural history collections;
  - collections documenting ethnic, multi-cultural experiences;
  - U.S. government archival holdings;
  - educational, industry, labor, political, and urban-life collections;
- e. Independent, avant garde and performing arts collections.
- f. University-based collections with distinct research and educational mandates.
- g. Production and broadcast archives:
  - the major film studio libraries;
  - network television archives;
  - local and independent television stations and broadcast groups;
- f. Commercial stock footage archives

3. Continue to emphasize the concept of a "national collection" now held at a diverse range of public and private archives across the country who collectively share the responsibility of preserving the national film heritage.

4. Acknowledge the convergence of film and television/video preservation, and the functional inseparability of the two media within the archival field and day-to-day archival practice.

5. Address the well-established priorities of nitrate and theatrical film preservation while at the same time giving special attention to the less-developed area of television and video

conservation. Indeed, archivists have continually expressed the belief that one of the major goals of a national preservation plan should be to provide funding agencies with the information they will need to establish ongoing support for television and video preservation through programs similar to those already in place for film preservation.

A parenthetical note is in order here. The National Center recognizes that these hearings and the legislation currently embodied in the National Film Preservation Act of 1992 are intended primarily to address the needs of motion picture film preservation. As was noted in the announcement for these hearings, "film" for the purposes of the the Library's study, is defined as "works originally fixed on film stock and excludes work fixed on videotape or other electronic formats. Therefore, the study will not concern itself with issues related to the preservation of video or television materials."

Despite this definition, it is important to remember the much if not most of the nation's historic television production has been and continues to be originally fixed on film. It is the hope of the National Center that the current study will acknowledge this fact, and will pave the way for future action by the National Film Preservation Board and the Congress to address the extraordinary needs of television preservationists. Not to do so would exclude some of the great "films" in the history of

American moving images, from the original versions of works produced during the golden years of television, such as MARTY or REQUEIM FOR A HEAVYWEIGHT, to television events such as ROOTS or HOLOCAUST or LONESOME DOVE, to seminal modern works such as TWIN PEAKS or NORTHERN EXPOSURE or the recent documentaries of Frederick Wiseman.

6. Determine the overall scope of the problem by measuring the size of the nation's moving image production and holdings (especially important for television and cable production).

7. Address the crucial problem of the selection of materials to be saved. This can be done through national-level selection criteria promoting shared preservation responsibilities by both public archives and producers.

8. Define the appropriate preservation standards and practices, especially those relevant to emerging new research on storage temperature and humidity conditions, to the deterioration of acetate film materials (commonly referred to as "the vinegar syndrome"), and to the conservation of materials on magnetic videotape and other new optical and digital media.

9. Solidify cooperation between the public archives and industry producers and rights holders in order to facilitate both preservation and access to the broadest possible range of

materials. This is a crucial component of any national preservation plan in the United States. The archives have worked long and hard for many years to build bridges of trust and collaboration within the production community. Through the membership of the National Film Preservation Board, the archival field has an extraordinary opportunity to expand and strengthen these vital relationships.

10. Finally, and most importantly: articulate the long-term funding needs of the moving image archival community, and establish the programs, pass the legislation, and raise the hundreds of millions of new dollars necessary to meet these needs. This, of course, is the bottom line for all of the nation's archives. The techniques to preserve our moving image heritage are at hand, but the rate of research, acquisition and preservation must be accelerated. With every passing day archivists must choose how to invest scarce preservation resources...to choose what to save and what must be left, for the time being, to deteriorate or fade away. Without adequate funds, the preservation effort will simply take too long, and time is our greatest enemy. The National Endowment for the Arts and other government agencies are making vital contributions to the effort. But additional support is crucial if we hope to keep pace with the preservation problem.

In addition to these basic ten-point approach, two supplemental points have been clearly articulated by the preservation field and should also be mentioned:

a) A national moving image preservation plan should address the concrete and specific needs of the field, not the often limited assumptions of funding agencies.

b) A national plan should be kept as focused and simple as possible; it should not be overburdened with a new and unnecessary bureaucracy, but should keep its sights on the bottom line: the need to develop an action agenda with significant new preservation dollars attached to it.

Let me close by stating that the National Center for Film and Video Preservation at The American Film Institute will continue to offer whatever assistance it can provide to help the Library of Congress and the preservation field to achieve the goals of the National Film Preservation Act. For the past decade, the National Center has been actively involved in developing and coordinating the national preservation effort. In the process, we have acquired a great deal of experience in planning and implementing national-level preservation initiatives. The Center continues to serve as Secretariat for the Association of Moving Image Archives, for the North American FIAF archives, and for The Film Foundation. It is therefore in the unique position of having worked closely



with all archival constituencies, film as well as video, public as well as private. More than any other organization, we are aware of the work and needs of the field as a whole.

In addition, the National Center continues to acquire physical holdings information from a broad range of film and video archives across the country for inclusion in the National Moving Image Database (NAMID). The gathering and coordinating of this information is, of course, a crucial prerequisite to any comprehensive national program for film preservation. Currently, more than 25 institutions have contributed collections information to NAMID, which now holds over 160,000 records in the USMARC format.

Included in NAMID is information on a number of titles already selected by the Librarian of Congress for inclusion in the National Film Registry. As one possible point of collaboration, the National Center could assist the Library in gathering holdings data on all current and future titles included in the Registry. This information could provide a special focus and foundation within the national preservation database. The Library and the National Center could coordinate information-sharing on these titles so as to ensure the best-surviving materials are always available for preservation.

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The National Center would like to thank the Library of Congress for its continued leadership on behalf of preservation, and for the opportunity to provide these recommendations today.