

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



The
National Center
for
Jewish Film

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MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

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The National Center for Jewish Film is a unique film library created to preserve the pictorial records of the Jewish experience. The Center is:

- An Archive....to ensure the preservation of films and photographs of Jewish subject matter.
- A Repository....to collect and catalogue all such extant materials.
- A Study Center....to provide facilities for scholars, filmmakers, video producers, and students to view films and conduct research.
- An Audiovisual Library....to circulate films to educational institutions, community groups and the public.

Collections and History:

The National Center for Jewish Film (NCJF) was established to gather, preserve and disseminate film material relevant to the Jewish experience. Founded in 1976 with the acquisition of 30 Yiddish language feature films, NCJF has steadily expanded and diversified its holdings of both cinematic and photographic materials. Several national Jewish organizations together with filmmakers and private individuals have deposited their collections at NCJF. The current cumulative total is estimated at 7,000 cans of film (35mm nitrate and acetate, 16mm acetate, 8mm and Super 8mm).

As an archive, NCJF's immediate priority is rescuing endangered film material, sole existing prints, works found only on perishable nitrate stock, and deteriorating acetate stock. To preserve these films, NCJF works closely with the American Film Institute, the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Archives and Records Service, the UCLA Film Archive, the Library of Congress, the Jerusalem Cinematheque, the Museum of the Diaspora, the Ghetto Fighters' Kibbutz, the British Film Institute and institutions in Germany, the USSR, Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

Created under the auspices of the American Jewish Historical Society and Brandeis University, NCJF continues to cooperate with both institutions. In 1981, NCJF became an independent, non-profit organization, housed in the Lown School of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies on the Brandeis campus in Waltham, Massachusetts.

Preservation Efforts:

The primary purpose and mandate of the National Center for Jewish Film is the preservation of the film materials relevant to the twentieth century Jewish experience. At least fifty percent of the Center's annual budget is spent on film preservation and restoration. Over the years, an increasingly small portion of this money has come from Federal and State sources.

Rutenberg and Everett Yiddish Film Library:

The largest extant collection of films produced in the Yiddish language, this collection is one of America's most important ethnic film collection. Beginning with incomplete nitrate reels of 30 features, this collection now consists of 65 Yiddish language features made between 1920 and 1950. Twenty-eight titles have been completely preserved and restored including the classics: THE DYBBUK; GOD, MAN AND DEVIL; GREEN FIELDS; JEWISH LUCK; THE LIGHT AHEAD; THE RETURN OF NATHAN BECKER; TEVYE; UNCLE MOSES and YIDDLE WITH HIS FIDDLE. New 35mm and/or 16mm prints are available for public exhibition.

The first major retrospective of NCJF's Yiddish Film Library - "Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds" was mounted by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York from November 14, 1991 to January 12, 1992. This exhibition featured 45 programs, a gallery show of posters and stills, and a landmark book, "Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds", by film critic, J. Hoberman. The retrospective has travelled to Berlin, Boston, Detroit, Louisville and is scheduled for Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Stockholm, Toronto, Sao Paulo, Melbourne, Barcelona, Rome, Fort Worth, during the next year.

Early American Silent Films:

This collection of early American shorts and features depicting Jewish life consists of 18 rare films preserved by NCJF or other archives. The collection includes: COHEN'S ADVERTISING SCHEME (1904); D.W. Griffith's CHILD OF THE GHETTO (1910); HUNGRY HEARS (1922) and Edward Sloman's feature HIS PEOPLE (1925) and SURRENDER (1927). Prints of all titles are available for use by educators, film buffs and the public.

European Jewry:

In a joint effort with Brandeis University's Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry, NCJF continues to search for films concerning European Jewry, acquiring and preserving these documents as they become available. NCJF holds one of the largest collections of footage documenting the Displaced Persons camps in the immediate post-war era. These materials from 1945-48 require immediate preservation due to acetate vinegar syndrome deterioration. Acquisitions from Russia, Poland and Eastern Europe have recently been added to the collection. 288

Nazi Antisemitic Films:

Since 1985, the Center has had an agreement with the Bundesarchiv Film Archiv and other archives in Germany to acquire, subtitle and distribute Nazi-propaganda films, including: THE ETERNAL JEW and JUD SUSS. NCJF is working with academicians to determine how these dangerous images can be used in educational settings.

Other Collections:

NCJF's holdings include extensive film materials from the Jewish National Fund, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Organization for Rehabilitation Through Training (ORT) and the United Jewish Appeal, together with documentaries and newsreels depicting the Holocaust, Soviet Jewry, the American immigrant experience and Sephardic Jews. Recent acquisitions include Israeli features, post-World War II German features, Joseph Green's Yiddish Film Classics, the original footage for HOTEL TERMINUS and the collections of filmmakers Paul Falkenberg and Arthur Zegart.

NCJF uses private laboratory facilities to preserve and restore all formats of film in the collection. The John E. Allen Laboratory in Parksville, N.J. and Angels, PA has expertly preserved hundreds of hours of our holdings during the past 17 years. Our most pressing and urgent need is for funds to pay for the preservation work which needs to be accomplished or else these invaluable materials will be lost forever.

Facilities:

There are no nitrate storage facilities in the Boston or New England area. NCJF's nitrate is currently being stored by John E. Allen Laboratory and the Library of Congress vaults. Our preserved negatives and pre-print materials are stored in the Brandeis University Library - Rare Books Room - which is optimum storage for paper materials but not for film. Nevertheless, it is the only feasible option available in the region. Our reference prints are stored on campus and at various private storage facilities in the Boston area; none have proper humidity and temperature controls.

Information and Access:

From its inception, NCJF has made its films available to the public, circulating restored, quality prints to audiences around the globe. More than 200 titles are available for rental in quality 16mm and 35mm prints. The titles include Hollywood and European features, documentaries and contemporary productions, as well as films restored by NCJF.

Recently, NCJF has begun transferring selected restored films to videotape to increase access. Over 65 titles, including ten Yiddish features, have been trans-

ferred to videotape and may be purchased for home and classroom use. Catalogs are available upon request at no charge. NCJF staff provides assistance in selecting material to meet institutions' programming needs.

NCJF maintains a study center where researchers, students and scholars can screen materials. Due to limited office space - time-coded tapes are sent off premises. Hundreds of research tapes are provided each year to individuals across the U.S., and around the world, for a minimal charge to defray handling and postage.

Funding:

Federal and State:

In 1976, NCJF received an emergency interim grant of \$11,000 followed by \$30,000 from the American Film Institute to begin preserving the nitrate collection. AFI staff served as invaluable mentors, training NCJF personnel in the entire spectrum of film preservation. During the past 17 years, the American Film Institute Preservation Program (National Endowment for the Arts fund) has provided uninterrupted grants. These funds have been invaluable - especially in the early years when the funds were much more significant. Last year's grant of \$11,000, represented less than 10% of our preservation expenditures and less than 3% of our total annual expenditures.

In 1984, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded NCJF a Challenge Grant of \$125,000. This Challenge Grant was met successfully providing NCJF with important financial stability.

At one time, the Massachusetts Cultural Council provided significant support through its enlightened Merit Aid Program. One year, NCJF received almost \$50,000, but this source has dwindled to \$2,200, still the largest grant in our category. This money was not designated for preservation, but to fund general operating expenses.

Foundations and Corporation and Individuals:

NCJF has received considerable support from friends in the film industry, including Sony Pictures Entertainment, Loews Theatres, Orion Pictures, Universal

Studios, the Louis B. Mayer Foundation, Films Incorporated, IFEX and Swank Motion Pictures. Recently, significant grants have been received from the Coca-Cola Company, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Koret Foundation of San Francisco, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, the S.H. and Helen R. Scheuer Family Foundation and the Goethe Institute. A special campaign "Put Your Imprint on History" attracted these funders as well as numerous individuals who received prominent credit on restored prints.

Earned Income:

Income generated from film rentals, videotape sales and licensing of footage rights provides NCJF with the most important dollars to fulfill its mission to preserve the motion picture records of the Jewish experience. Film audiences who benefit from the materials are directly involved in helping subsidize the preservation. Screenings to generate revenue are held in collaboration with local non-profit sponsors who provide significant educational programs for their constituents.

During the past two years, videotape sales have generated an increasingly larger portion of revenue. It is anticipated that this resource will be short term because the market will quickly be saturated with these specialized film materials.

Long-term financial stability must be obtained. Proper storage facilities, office space and on-site study center facilities need to be built. Cataloging and annotation of the collection needs to be undertaken. An endowment to ensure the long-term viability of the Center must be raised. The most immediate need is for increased funds to preserve and restore our endangered film materials.

Conclusion:

NCJF's problems and needs mirror those of the larger film collections. One of the oldest, specialized film archives in the country, NCJF proudly assumes responsibility for salvaging and preserving a lost chapter of American film history. The preserved moving images bring back to life a small glimpse of a people, a culture, a society virtually decimated by the Nazis. A project which set out to salvage a few reels of nitrate Yiddish films has mushroomed into the most important collection of Jewish film in the Diaspora.

The Yiddish features, together with early American silent films, home footage, independent cinema, institutional films, provides a rich ethnographic tapestry of a minority culture for all Americans to study and enjoy.