

COLLECTION OVERVIEWS

MOTION PICTURES

I. SCOPE

This overview of the Library's collections deals with motion pictures, while television and video are covered separately. There is some overlap because many early television broadcasts were recorded on motion picture film.

II. SIZE

The collections of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division include approximately 700,000 motion picture reels and 500,000 videotapes, with about 30,000 individual elements added each year.

III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS

The Library of Congress has the largest collection of American created motion picture, television, and video and digitally produced moving image materials in the world. Due to the deposit requirements of U.S. copyright law, MBRS is particularly strong in American moving image items commercially produced for news, entertainment and public information purposes. MBRS has the world's largest collection of films produced and distributed in America in the silent era (1893-1929), and is particularly strong in American films produced prior to 1915. Because the Library did not demand copies of motion pictures registered for copyright between 1912 and 1946, in the past forty years MBRS has aggressively pursued acquisitions of nitrate film to cover this gap. Today, MBRS houses (and preserves) more than 140 million feet of nitrate film, one of the largest collections in the world.

IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

The Copyright Collection: The Copyright Collection comprises the largest of MBRS holdings, and is the most used materials. The Division's earliest and most important collection is the Paper Print Collection, which began in 1894. Because at that time there was no provision in the copyright law for registering motion pictures, films were deposited as photographs printed on strips of photographic contact paper. The Paper Print Collection encompasses the full range of filmmaking activity during the early years of the industry, from 1894 to 1912. This collection is the crown jewel of the Library's moving image holdings, for there is no comparable collection anywhere in the world. No serious history of the cinematic arts can be written without referencing the films found in the Paper Print Collection.

In 1912, new copyright legislation permitted the registration of motion pictures as a distinct form, but the Library chose not to house the flammable nitrate film in use at the time and so did not demand the submission of celluloid film. However, this policy changed after World War II, and today MBRS receives a 35mm print of every major motion picture released theatrically in the US.

American Film Institute Collections: The AFI Collection fills some of the gaps in the Library's other acquisitions, primarily for the years 1912-1946 when the Library did not demand the submission of film prints for copyright. Some 20,000 titles have come to the Library as gifts from AFI. Highlights include: studio collections (original camera negatives from Columbia Pictures, RKO, and Universal); early DeForest sound film experiments in the AFI/Zouary Collection; Georges Melies films in the AFI/Academy Collection; and many films produced for African-American audiences by African-American filmmakers.

Non-Copyright, Non-AFI Collections

A wide variety of other motion picture films and videotapes have been received by the Library over the years, independent of copyright deposit and the American Film Institute.

- **George Kleine Collection.** One of the oldest collections of early films in MBRS was purchased from the estate of George Kleine, a film industry pioneer who specialized in importing European productions. The films span all genres, including drama, comedy, educational and actuality films.
- **Theodore Roosevelt Association Collection.** A collection of early film focused on a single theme: the life and times of Theodore Roosevelt.
- **Captured Foreign Collections.** At the end of World War II, a substantial number of films were confiscated in Germany, Italy and Japan, and eventually deposited with the National Archives and Record Administration and the Library of Congress. In general, theatrical entertainment films in the Captured Foreign Collection are more likely to be found at the Library and actuality films more likely to be available at the National Archives.
- **United Artists Collection.** In 1969, the United Artists Corporation presented the Library with its earliest surviving preprint material for approximately 3000 motion pictures from the pre-1949 film library of Warner Bros. studio, which UA then owned. Included are original camera negatives for such seminal films as *Little Caesar*, *Jezebel*, and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, as well as a host of Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies. The collection also contains nearly 200 sound features released by Monogram Pictures Corporation and a number of Popeye cartoons released by Fleischer Studios. Ironically, there are no United Artists Corporation films in the United Artists Collection.
- **Margaret Mead Collection.** This is a sizeable collection of 16mm films shot by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson as part of their anthropological fieldwork. Most of the footage is unedited, positive camera originals. Two groups of Mead films have been inventoried and made available: films made during the 1938 expedition among the Iatmul people of New Guinea, and footage shot in Bali (1938-39).

- **Rick Prelinger Archive.** Acquired by the Library in 2002, the Rick Prelinger Archive is a remarkable, 150,000+ reel collection of independent, industrial, government, commercial, student, and amateur productions. One discrete component—the Mogulls Camera and Film Exchange Collection—contains a good number of Kodascopes (an early home format) and films from dozens of other well-known and obscure distributors of the time. Though there are a considerable number of fiction features and theatrical shorts, there's also a great deal of travel, educational, science and documentary material.
- **John E. Allen, Inc. Collection.** This collection of ten million feet of nitrate film is one of the most important of its kind and containing many unique and best-surviving copies of American films. It contains WWI- and WWII-era actualities, sound era dramatic features, quite a number of unique silent films from New York area studios (for example, Kalem, Solax, and Thanhouser), and the “all-black newsreels” from the 1940s. Together, these collection holdings are of inestimable research value for historians, scholars and educators across the country.

V. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

- **Moving Image Collections** (<http://mic.loc.gov/>). A portal that documents moving image collections around the world through a catalog of titles and directory of repositories.
- **American Film Institute Catalog** (<http://afi.chadwyck.com/home>). An authoritative resource for information about American films produced between 1893 and 1972.
- **Cinefiles** (<http://www.mip.berkeley.edu/cinefiles/>). A database of reviews, press kits, festival and showcase program notes, newspaper articles, and other documents from the collection of the Pacific Film Archive Library.

VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS

Because of the copyright law, MBRS is very strong in American motion pictures. Although the Division’s collection of foreign film would be considered extensive by most measures, it is small when compared to the American holdings.

