

319 Benner Street
Highland Park, NJ
March 12, 1993

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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Mr. Steven Leggett
Library of Congress
Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division
Washington, D.C. 20540

MOVIE PICTURE, BROADCASTING
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

Dear Mr. Leggett,

I am writing to urge the Library of Congress to make public access a high priority of its film preservation program. I understand that preserving only the generative negative enables the program to conserve costs, but this practice defeats the purpose of keeping the films at all: films must be made available to interested and potentially interested viewers. Obviously preserving a negative is preferable to shoving all the material into an incinerator, but a film that can readily be seen had undeniable advantages over one that cannot.

Currently a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University, concentrating on twentieth century American literature, I would like to be able to integrate film into my courses, and programs like yours could be an invaluable resource. In my field there is a strong movement away from the "high art" of modern masterpieces, toward works which are more part of mass culture and reflect the experiences of diverse communities. I am particularly interested in alternative understandings of modernism and in exploring the origins of postmodernism within this period. Focusing on areas which are not currently part of the canon, especially in the interstices between literature and other disciplines like history and art, requires field work outside the usual institutions. Film can be a major resource, but it must be physically available and we must know what is there to be seen. A course I am taking now on American culture and film provides a strong background which will help me to incorporate film into future studies, but to continue to learn how film can be relevant to my work will require both detailed information on what films are available (catalogues, resource centers) and the means for viewing them.

The academic community can also provide a liaison to the public, and on our campus alone several groups operate film series open to the public which show films that are seldom screened (and unavailable at Blockbuster Video) and introduce often lesser-known films to a wider audience. My interests are not just professional: I enjoyed frequenting the Museum of Broadcasting and numerous repertory theaters when I lived in New York, and shared the excitement generated by the showing of "newly discovered" films at the Castro and the Roxie in San Francisco (where I was also a member of a B-movie film club). While I cannot argue that correspondence between the poets Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore--just to take an example from my academic work--has appeal for more than a handful of people, I can confidently say that people love seeing films and would be avidly interested in seeing ones newly made available. Film is right now an area of tremendous interest and contestation, and it would be a disgrace not to make work accessible to such a greedily curious public, especially when public tax dollars fund preservation projects.

Sincerely,


Stephanie Hartman