

STATEMENT OF
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TO
NATIONAL FILM PRESERVATION BOARD (NFPB) PANEL
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MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
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I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

I would like to ask you to imagine yourselves historians of 20th century America working in the year 2093. You would have access to the usual historical records - books, newspapers, memorandum, computer disks, still photographs, Hollywood movies, but probably not documentary films because they would not be available. Yet, much of the material historians of our time will be most interested in exists in and on documentary film. One can put aside the politics or point of view of documentary films and just look at what is shown as a form of natural history.

Documentary films show how people talk, walk, dress, relate to each other, the nature of work, the social organization of society, family relations, the handling of deviant behavior, the operations of courts, the role of police, medical practices, the relationship between men and women, racial issues, the functioning of government agencies, scientific experimentation, the nature of entertainment and our music and the way it was performed. The list is endless.

I would like now to reverse the historical look and suggest that our knowledge and understanding of 19th century America would be enriched, and enlarged if film technology had been available to document American life in that century. We would be endlessly fascinated by a police station in Boston in 1840, a southern plantation, a hospital in Washington during the Civil War, the voyage of a clipper ship, a western frontier town, the Library

of Congress in 1890, a Congressional race in Missouri in 1866, a regiment fighting in the War of 1812, the South during Reconstruction, Charles Dickens' tour of America, a band concert in a small Ohio town in 1872 to name but a few topics from another endless list.

What interests 20th Century historians of 19th century American life are not just the best selling popular novels of the period but documents that give the texture and feel of everyday life. I would like to suggest to you that the principal film archival effort that I am familiar with is the equivalent of collecting the popular novels of the 19th century. The emphasis today is on the preservation of Hollywood movies to the almost total exclusion of documentary film material. There is to my knowledge no systematic, selective effort to preserve and collect the work of the documentary filmmakers of our time.

I am going to briefly describe my own material because it may be representative of the problem facing many documentary filmmakers. Over the last 26 years I have made 26 films covering a wide variety of topics drawn from the common experience of everyday life: schools, military service, courts, hospitals, religion, handicapped people, business and prisons. This represents about 4 million feet of negative and 4 million feet of quarter inch tape. There is also 4 million feet of workprint and 4 million feet of magnetic track. In addition I have the original negative, interpositive and duplicate negative for each film. This represents another one half million feet of film and optical track.

The cost of storing this material is about \$7,000 a year. I can't ~~continue~~ to afford to ^{CONTINUE} pay this. I am obviously going to keep all the pre-print negative material but I am now forced to consider destroying the rest which consists of most of the material. Yet the kind of documentation that exists in the out-takes of films may be of most interest to historians and the general public in succeeding centuries in their efforts to reconstruct, know and understand the way we live now.

I would urge you to support an archival effort that makes a systematic and enduring effort to preserve and collect documentary film material. I believe that in doing so you would make an important contribution to the future study and understanding of our times and establish a precedent that would be admired and followed.

I would like you also to think about the possibility that the documentary film of our time may be the entertainment film of the next century. One measure of social change will be the extent to which the documentary films of the 20th century become the equivalent of the Marx Brothers or situation comedies of the 21st century.