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Charlton Heston

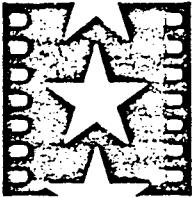
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The American Film Institute

Charlton Heston
Chairman, Board of Trustees

CHARLTON HESTON'S STATEMENT BEFORE THE JOINT SENATE AND HOUSE HEARINGS ON THE ARTS LEGISLATION, November 14, 1975

I appear here today as Chairman of the American Film Institute, but that's not the way I make my living. I serve the AFI, along with the thirty five other men and women who make up our Board of Trustees, as a private citizen. We serve in response to the mandate of the United States Government. The AFI is the only national organization ~~formed by~~ ~~the National Endowment, and the only organization~~ created by the Endowment, to serve its legislated purposes.

A decade ago, when the Congress first passed legislation providing Federal funds for the support of the arts, the importance of film in our time and our country was clearly recognized. The example provided by the other film-making nations of the world seemed both wise and practical. As in England, Sweden, and France, the NEA was instructed to create a national film institute that would respond to the needs of film as an art form ... the American art form.

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I think this was a wise decision. Given the complex and varied nature of film, and its burgeoning significance in more and more aspects of our lives, only a national organization like the AFI could even begin to answer the varying needs and differing perceptions of the various communities of film-makers and film scholars, amateur and professional, buried in the underground or flourishing in the groves of Academe, that make up the body of American film.

I think it's not only wise, but crucial that the AFI has always been non-governmental, a private institution. It's all very well to argue the importance of film on the national agenda, but if the AFI serves the nation, it also serves the film community, and they must support it. I'm proud to say they have. In the eight years of the AFI's existence, we have raised some eleven million dollars from private sources . . . approximately half of our total budget. It's my view that we can, and most certainly should, raise even more. Up until now our contributions have come largely from film professionals: those organizations and individuals who make and study film. Now, more and more, we are getting contributions from private citizens all over the country who simply like it; men and women who find film important in their lives and think the AFI is a useful outfit. I think they're right.

In the eight years of the AFI's existence, we've done a good deal, I think, though we should do more, and could do better. I know there are those who say we bit off more than we could chew. I disagree. It's true that we have

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HEARINGS ON THE ARTS LEGISLATION, November 14, 1975

a large agenda, and each of the many constituencies of film in this country perceives its needs as both pressing and unique. But the AFI is also unique, I think, in its capacity to respond to these differing needs.

We have a board of remarkably high quality, one I'd match against any comparable group in the country. They are, each of them, film professionals of the finest calibre, drawn from every discipline in film and television. Professors of film from the nation's great universities, network and studio heads, underground film-makers and public performers, directors and technicians; they cover the whole, startling spectrum of film in our time.

I won't attempt to deal with the AFI's programs in detail. Many of you know of our goals and the paths we're taking to fulfill them; other witnesses at these proceedings will brief you on some of our newer programs. I would like to speak briefly of our prime activities on each coast. In California, the Center for Advanced Film Study we established there eight years ago has advanced measures each year towards our aim: a conservatory of film. In addition to a dedicated faculty, based in a most impressive building we rent for one dollar a year, we have one other unique asset: on-going access to the largest pool of professional film-makers in the world to serve as consultants. For the seminars these artists provide, we don't pay a dollar a year. We pay nothing.

Through the Center we also administer a program providing internships for film students on actual shooting companies, funded by the Academy of Motion

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Picture Arts and Sciences, and a Workshop Program with the Screen Actors Guild allowing film students to work with professional film actors. As far as I know, this is utterly unique. No other group, certainly no other film institute in the world offers this capacity to its students.

In Washington, in addition to our public programs at Kennedy Center, housed in a theatre, incidentally, built not with public monies but with one single private donation to the AFI, are also centered our publications program, and our archival project.

The AFI's Archival Program is perhaps in the long run the most valuable thing we do. Very simply, in eight years it has saved more than eight thousand American films. Prints of these films, in their original form, now rest in the archives of the Library of Congress. They include the work of every American film-maker of note, as well as some whose stature as yet has not been adequately measured. In sum, this collection represents literally one of the most important cultural assets in the United States.

I have touched briefly on the achievements of the AFI, as well as its goals. I have not told you of our needs. Frankly, I don't plan to, ^{in any detail.} ~~I hope I don't~~ You gentlemen are aware of some of them. We have problems ~~in~~ ^{needs}. Happily, we have friends in the Congress. It's hard to imagine a Senator or a Congressman, or indeed a citizen whose lives are not touched in some way by film. I would hope to such an audience I do not need to argue the importance of the American Film Institute. We were created by the government. I think you see enough our function, and our future. I leave it to you to determine how best to provide us the means to fulfill both.

Funding, and in administrative structures. The can be solved, perhaps in several ways,