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America's Operating System—It's the Law!

FedFlix—No Late Charges in the Public Domain!

*In late 1987, Public.Resource.Org entered into a formal joint venture with the National Technical Information Service (NTIS). They agreed to loan us video tapes each month, which we digitized and promptly returned. The only cost to the government was some postage. We then posted high-resolution masters on the Internet Archive and copies for casual viewing on YouTube. At the end of this 1-year joint venture, 588 fine federal films **have been posted**.*

The FedFlix concept should be brought inside the government. The U.S. has thousands of films that would form the basis for a public domain stock footage library, an invaluable resource for filmmakers, scholars, and others creating new content in this era of YouTube and remixes.

Government as Film Producer

Government produces thousands of films, a unique and invaluable treasure trove of vocational education, safety materials, and other topics not covered by private industry. The Navy is the world's leading expert on boating safety, the U.S. Fire Academy trains our nation's volunteer fire fighters, and the Mine Health and Safety Administration produces hundreds of occupational safety videos.

In addition to vocational and safety materials, the government has an incredible archive of other public domain materials. The Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress have hundreds of thousands of historic photographs, audio recordings of military bands, and video archives of government hearings, war films, and other historic material.

Moving these materials into the modern era has been a slow and erratic process. While there are bright spots, such as the Library of Congress American Memory project, other agencies such as NTIS sell 20-minute videotapes for \$80, the Department of Defense has no mechanism for moving their unclassified materials out to the general public, and the Federal Judicial Center produces hundreds of hours of invaluable training materials about the law that is only available on a satellite system. A wealth of public safety and vocational training materials goes unused.

Stock Footage for a Remix Era

While mainstream media struggles with the onslaught of the Internet, one bright spot has been the explosion of documentary filmmakers, independent news producers, vloggers, mashup and remix artists, and others who incorporate audio and video into their works. While video production has blossomed, clearing copyright on film clips or photos is, by far, the hardest part of making a film or other multimedia production. The government can change that.

With public domain materials, one does not have to ask for permission. The public domain is an essential common resource that allows both the noncommercial and the commercial world to thrive. Scholars writing books often need to use photographs, and have long complained that clearing rights on these materials has been next to impossible. Travel writers at the Associated Press have complained how hard it is to clear rights, even to public resources such as photographs from the Smithsonian.

The U.S. has had no consistent program for posting audio, video, and photographic materials onto the net. We demonstrated with our FedFlix program how easy it is to quickly change that situation and create a common resource by posting films and photos. The federal government should up the ante and adopt a goal of posting 5,000 films and 50,000 photographs next year, an effort that could be coordinated by an agency such as the Government Printing Office.