The Honorable Lawrence M. Small
Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution
100 Jefferson Drive, SW
Washington, D.C. 20560

Dear Secretary Small:

We are writing to express our deep concern over the recent announcement of the creation of “Smithsonian Networks,” a joint venture between the Institution’s Smithsonian Business Ventures Unit and Showtime Networks.

According to Jeanny Kim, Vice President for Media Services at Smithsonian Business Ventures, filmmakers and researchers who wish to have “more than incidental” access to Smithsonian archives or Smithsonian curators or scientists would have to offer their project to this new business venture. This policy will discourage independent filmmakers from creating projects for other media outlets. Indeed, this policy will also discourage an independent filmmaker from making a documentary and releasing it on the Internet on a noncommercial basis.

We have several concerns about this new venture. First and foremost, the Smithsonian Institution has refused to disclose the details of this agreement. In a letter to members of the Smithsonian Institution, a spokesperson states: “This is a business contract that does not involve federal funds. Such contracts are confidential as they contain proprietary information that no company should have to share publicly.”

The Smithsonian Institution is not merely a business venture. It is a publicly chartered guardian of our national heritage, created by the U.S. Congress “for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.” In your FY2005 Annual Report, you noted that the Institution receives 75% of its revenue from federal appropriations, government grants, and government contracts. The Institution is governed by a Board of Regents appointed from all three branches of our government. The Smithsonian Institution is a public trust in the truest sense of the term.

The Institution, as a public trust, operates as custodian of our shared heritage. As Secretary Joseph Henry stated in his first annual report in 1847 in considering the role of the Institution in formally accepting the bequest of James Smithson: “The bequest is for the benefit of mankind. The Government of the United States is merely a trustee.”

Because the arrangement with Showtime Networks has raised grave concerns among the public, we believe it is imperative that the Institution disclose all the details of this contract. The Smithsonian Institution, by subscribing to the “intent and spirit” of the Freedom of Information Act, should keep in mind that the aim of the law is “a general policy of full agency disclosure.” The purpose of that law, as so eloquently stated by Justice Thurgood Marshall is to “ensure an informed citizenry, vital to the functioning of a democratic society, needed to check against corruption and to hold the governors accountable to the governed.” Disclosure of the terms of the contract that establishes Smithsonian Networks goes to the very heart of the “intent and spirit” of the Freedom of Information Act.
While disclosure of the terms of this contract is our first concern, our broader concern is the troubling principle established by the venture of a “right of first refusal.” The prospect of potentially requiring that an independent filmmaker, a video blogger on the Internet, a historian, or educator who makes “non-incidental” use of the collections or needs access to staff first present their project for commercial exploitation by this new business venture is an anticompetitive practice that is extremely troubling.

Recent years have witnessed an explosion in the creation of documentary films. Many award-winning films have drawn on our collective heritage as maintained in the archives of the Smithsonian Institution. Closing off one of the most important collections of source materials and limiting access to staff will have a chilling effect on creativity, will create disincentives for digitization of the collections for access by all Americans, and violates the mission and purpose of the Smithsonian Institution.

We ask that you take three actions today:

1. Disclose the terms of the contract with Showtime Networks and any other commercial agreements that limit access or use of the collections.

2. Annul the contract with Showtime Networks, as it was awarded without public comment and without a competitive procurement process.

3. Hold hearings to gather comment from a broad cross section of the public before undertaking any further actions that limit access to the collections for which the Smithsonian acts as guardian or limit access to the talented and highly capable staff of the Institution.

Sincerely yours,

Carl Malamud
Senior Fellow/CTO
Center for American Progress

Vinton G. Cerf
Internet Pioneer

Gloria Tristani
President
Benton Foundation

Anna Deavere Smith
Actress, Writer, Teacher
New York University

Ken Burns
Filmmaker

Graeme Revell
Film Composer

Rick and Megan Prelinger
Prelinger Archives and Prelinger Library

Lawrence Lessig
Professor of Law
Stanford University

Prudence S. Adler
Associate Executive Director
Association of Research Libraries

Jacoba Atlas
Senior Vice President - Programming
PBS

Gigi B. Sohn
President
Public Knowledge

Alex Gibney
Director/Screenwriter/Producer
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title/Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George C. Stoney</td>
<td>Goddard Professor of Cinema, Tisch School of the Arts at NYU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David J. Farber</td>
<td>Distinguished Career Professor, Carnegie Mellon University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Drain</td>
<td>Vice President, National Programming, WGBH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander B. Magoun, Ph.D.</td>
<td>Executive Director, David Sarnoff Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell Kapor</td>
<td>President and Chair, Open Source Applications Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim O'Reilly</td>
<td>Founder and CEO, O'Reilly &amp; Associates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan W. Lacy</td>
<td>Executive Producer, American Masters, WNET, New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Vixie</td>
<td>Internet Pioneer, Internet Pioneer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela Samuelson</td>
<td>Distinguished Professor of Law, University of California at Berkeley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelley Bookspan, Ph.D.</td>
<td>President, LifeStory Productions, Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Saretzky</td>
<td>President, Princeton Preservation Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee W. Formwalt</td>
<td>Executive Director, Organization of American Historians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Mitchell</td>
<td>President &amp; CEO, The Museum of Television and Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John F. Wilson</td>
<td>Co-Chief Programming Executive, PBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Passe</td>
<td>President, National Council for the Social Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Moore</td>
<td>Filmmaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shira Lee Katz</td>
<td>Doctoral Student, Harvard Graduate School of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie Kahn-Leavitt</td>
<td>Documentary Filmmaker, Filmmakers Collaborative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Douglas Newcomb, CAE</td>
<td>Chief Policy Officer, Special Libraries Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory Doctorow</td>
<td>Assistant General Manager - Content, Nebraska Educational Telecommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Aufderheide</td>
<td>Professor and Director, Annenberg Center for Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Weinberg</td>
<td>President, The New York Film/Video Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorie Conway</td>
<td>Producer/Writer, Boston Film and Video Productions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Peter Jaszi
Professor of Law
Washington College of Law
American University

Kirby Dick
Documentary Filmmaker
2005 Academy Award® Nominee

Siarkei Krasikau
Producer

Daniel Blake Smith
Professor of History
University of Kentucky
Phoenix Films, Inc.

Roy Rosenzweig
Professor of History
George Mason University

Anna K. Nelson
Distinguished Historian in Residence
American University

RJ Cutler
Filmmaker

Maria Agui Carter
Writer/Director
Iguana Films

Julie Corley
Filmmaker
LifeStory Productions, Inc.

Nancy F. Cott
Trumbull Professor of American History
Harvard University

Margit E. McGuire
Professor/Past President of NCSS
Seattle University

Julie Zammarchi
Independent Filmmaker

Tom Devine
Legal Director
Government Accountability Project

Jennifer M. Urban
Director, Intellectual Property Clinic
USC Gould School of Law

Michal Goldman
Filmmaker and President
Filmmakers Collaborative

Jeffrey Chester
Executive Director
Center for Digital Democracy

Sandra J. Ruch
Executive Director
International Documentary Association

Jonathan Lawson
Executive Director
Reclaim the Media

Dan Gillmor
Director
Center for Citizen Media

Thomas J. Simon
President
Fair Wind Pictures, Inc.

Robin Hessman
Filmmaker
Red Square Productions

Jonathan Rintels
Executive Director
Center for Creative Voices in Media

Tamara E. Robinson
Vice President and Director of Programming
WNED

Francesca Prada
Producer, Director, Writer

Alan Snitow and Deborah Kaufman
Snitow-Kaufman Productions
Barbara Attie  
Attie and Goldwater Productions

Juan Mandelbaum  
President

Geovision

Charlene Gilbert  
Associate Professor of Film and Media Arts  
American University

Linda Harrar  
Producer/Director/Writer

Linda Harrar Productions LLC

Diane Estelle Vicari  
President  
International Documentary Association

Melissa D. Bucklin  
Senior Producer

Nebraska Public Television

Kent Gibson  
Executive Director  
Non Fiction Exchange (NFX)

Michael Benefiel  
Advisor

Persuasive Information

Catherine Herrera  
Filmmaker

Tom Cappello  
Crazy Legs Productions

James B. Young  
J.B. Young Photography

Debra Zimmerman  
Executive Director

Women Make Movies

Gerald Jones  
Filmmaker

Jill Godmilow  
Professor, Filmmaker  
Department of Film, Television & Theatre  
University of Notre Dame

Lisa Simmons  
Film Producer

Erica Ginsberg  
Co-Founder, Docs in Progress  
President, CineCitizen Media

Joyce Appelby  
Past President, American Historical Assc.  
Professor of History, Emerita  
UCLA

St.Clair Bourne  
Producer-Director  
Chamba Mediaworks, Inc.

Ed and Mary Ann Southern  
Historian and Librarian

Malkia K. Lydia  
Independent Filmmaker  
Kuyamba, Inc.

Joanna Rudnick and Gordon Quinn  
Development Director and President  
Kartemquin Films

Frances Reid  
Director

Iris Films

Rebecca Tabasky  
Outreach Organizer  
Carnivalesque Films

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich  
University Professor  
Phillips Professor of Early American History  
Harvard University

Brian Newman  
Executive Director  
National Video Resources
Johnny Symons
Independent Documentary Filmmaker
Kristine Samuelson
Professor
Director, Documentary Film & Video Program
Department of Communication
Stanford University
Nina Gilden Seavey
Director
The Documentary Center
George Washington University
Pamela Yates
President
Skylight Pictures, Inc.
Karen Thomas
Executive Producer
Film Odyssey, Inc.
Joseph Turow
Robert Lewis Shayon Professor
Associate Dean for Graduate Studies
Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania
Betsy A. McLane, Ph.D.
Director Emerita
International Documentary Association
Alison Guss
True Aim Productions
Paula Manley
Chair, Board of Directors
Assoc. of Independent Video and Filmmakers
Max Alvarez
Film Historian, Lecturer, Curator
JoAnna Baldwin Mallory
Film Producer
Director, Office of New Ventures
Partners HealthCare
Joseph Finneran
Creative Director
Group Dynamics
Carl Byker
Series Producer, “The Great War”
Producer, “The Duel” and “Woodrow Wilson”
Robert H. Johnson
Executive Director
New Mexico Foundation for Open Govt.
Joan Mandell
Director
Olive Branch Productions
Marcia Jarmel and Ken Schneider
PatchWorks Films
Megan Mylan
Documentary Filmmaker
Phylis Geller
President
Norman Star Media
Paul Atkins
Director of Photography
Moana Productions, Inc.
Celia Wexler
Vice President for Advocacy
Common Cause
Michael Ehrenzweig
Independent Film Producer
Deborah Hoffmann
Documentary Film Maker
Rick Tejada-Flores
Producer
Roger Weisberg
Producer/Director
Public Policy Productions
Joseph P. Shannon  
Producer  
Real Arts Media

Jessica Bricker  
Producer

Robert Stone  
Documentary Filmmaker  
Robert Stone Productions

Janis Plotkin  
Interim Executive Director  
Film Arts Foundation

Nadia Tomisova  
MA Candidate Film and Video  
American University

Kenn Rabin  
President  
Fulcrum Media Service  
Series Archivist, “Eyes on the Prize”

Jesse Boggs  
Independent Producer  
Former Producer and Host  
Radio Smithsonian

Geoffrey A. Huth  
Chair  
Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference

Robert Gordon  
Filmmaker

Anny Lowery Meza  
Film Editor

Jay Rosenblatt  
Filmmaker

Steve Mencher  
Mensch Media

Barbara Abrash  
Producer and Curator

Susan C. Ivers  
Independent Media Specialist

Joan Widdifield  
Producer/Director  
Documentary Films

Maryam Arif  
Researcher  
CNN/ImageSource

Elizabeth Thompson  
Producer/Director  
Thompson Films

Lucie Faulknor  
Producer  
Serendipity Films, LLC

Joseph A. DeFrancesco  
Documentary Filmmaker

Gene Aanenson  
President  
North Dakota Council for the Social Studies

Shirley K. Sneve  
Director of Radio and Television  
Native American Public Telecommunications

David Van Taylor  
Vice President  
Lumiere Productions, Inc.

Linda DiFeliciantonio  
President  
Naked Eye Productions, Ltd.

Richard S. Butler  
President  
High Road Media, Inc.

Mike Hazard  
The Center for International Education

Janet Cole  
Producer
Robert M. Goodman  
Producer  
Stone Reader

Steven H. York  
Senior Producer  
York Zimmerman Inc.

William Greaves  
Filmmaker  
William Greaves Productions

Muffie Meyer  
President  
Middlemarch Films, Inc.

P. Alexander Gibney  
President  
Jigsaw Educational Productions, Inc.

Dianne Cleare  
Production Manager

Brian Fulford  
Senior Licensing Agent  
CNN/Imagesource

Wenonah Elms  
Senior Research Associate  
LECG

Julie S. Omelchuck  
Founding Member  
Oregon Alliance to Reform Media

Robert Hillmann  
Cinergy Media LLC

Justine Shapiro  
Promises Films  
The Saul Zaentz Media Center

David e. Delk  
Co-Chair  
Alliance for Democracy - Portland Chapter

Ricki Green  
Producer and Journalist  
Ever Green Communications

Connie Wilkerson  
Division of Film Studies  
University of Utah

Sara Altherr  
Former PBS Publicist for Documentaries

David Grubin  
Producer, Director, Writer, Cinematographer

Kevin Henry  
Filmmaker

Sharon Sachs  
Editor

Kathryn Barnier  
Documentary Filmmaker

David M. Schneider, MD  
Faculty Physician  
Family Practice Residency Program  
Sutter Medical Center

Katy Chevigny  
Arts Engine

Cornelius Moore  
California Newsreel

Judy Chaikin  
One Step Productions

James Campbell  
Producer

Mateen Kemet  
Director / Writer  
Runaway filmworX

Sharon Wood  
JAK Films

Karen Marek  
Associate Director of Gift Planning  
KQED, Inc.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Institution/University</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gene Thomas</td>
<td>Owner and President</td>
<td>Lifespan Video Portraits, Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rena C. Kosersky</td>
<td>Music Supervisor for Documentaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael C. Donaldson</td>
<td>Advocate and Former President</td>
<td>International Documentary Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle Peticolas</td>
<td>Independent Documentary Producer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolina Loyola-Garcia</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Media Arts Department</td>
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<td>Richard Benjamin</td>
<td>Senior Fellow</td>
<td>Demos</td>
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<td>Mimi Pickering</td>
<td>Appalshop</td>
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<td>Lisa Gottlieb</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Columbia College Chicago</td>
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<td>Amy Taubin</td>
<td>Contributing Editor</td>
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<td>Megan Simpson</td>
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<td>Lucille Carra</td>
<td>Documentary Filmmaker</td>
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<td>Kara van Malssen</td>
<td>Audiovisual Archivist</td>
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<td>James R. Adams</td>
<td>History Teacher</td>
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<td>James R. Adams</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt McDevitt</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
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<td>Jim Hubbard</td>
<td>Filmmaker</td>
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<td>Howard Besser</td>
<td>Professor and Director</td>
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<td>Moving Image Archive and Preservation</td>
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<td>NYU's Tisch School of the Arts</td>
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<td>Dr. Robert Benedetti</td>
<td>Producer, Writer, Educator</td>
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<td>Stephanie Black</td>
<td>Producer/Director</td>
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<td>Joan M. Mathys</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>Cinemar</td>
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<td>William H. Gilcher</td>
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<td>Jeffrey Friedman</td>
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<td>Telling Pictures</td>
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<td>Nate George</td>
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<td>Sasha Waters Freyer</td>
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<td>Faye Douglas Johnson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Arthur</td>
<td>Professor of English and Film Studies</td>
<td>Montclair State University</td>
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<td>Jim McSilver</td>
<td>Producer/Editor</td>
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Chris Housh  
Director/Producer  
Repressed Society Productions

Jennifer Jenkins  
Director  
Center for the Study of the Public Domain  
Duke University Law School

Lawrence Daressa  
California Newsreel

Ryan Pfleger  
Independent Documentary Filmmaker

Cable Hardin  
Assistant Director  
Media Arts and Animation  
The Art Institute of Washington

Linda Srivastava  
Assoc. of Independent Video & Filmmakers

Linda Blackaby  
Director of Programming  
San Francisco International Film Festival

Kembrew McLeod  
Associate Professor  
Department of Communication Studies  
University of Iowa

June Cross  
Assistant Professor  
Graduate School of Journalism  
Columbia University

Abigail Porter  
Exhibit Developer

Lewis Erskine  
Film Editor

Jeff Martin  
Archivist/Documentary Filmmaker

Abra Bigham  
Writer and Filmmaker

Heather Carawan  
Filmmaker

Terry Lamb  
Director  
Videosyncracy Productions

Amanda Benchley  
Producer

Ron Merk  
Filmmaker

J. Mark Wynns  
Media Consultant

John P. King  
Independent Producer  
Vice President Development  
Story House Productions

Christopher Klemek, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of History  
George Washington History

Scott Sanders  
Chicago Media Action

Veronica Selver  
Documentary Editor, Producer, Director

Jessie Warner  
Attorney

Jenny Toomey  
Executive Director  
Future of Music Coalition

Mark H. Dorfman  
Environmental Scientist

Ray Schmitt  
Real Earth Productions  
John H. Terry  
Dean of Fine Arts  
Rhode Island School of Design
Chana Gzit  
Producer  
Steward/Gazit Productions

James Rapp  
Producer/Director  
Creative Paradigm Productions

Michael Gorman  
President  
American Library Association

Alfred Hillman and Michal Brand Carr  
President and Vice President  
Hillmann & Carr, Inc.

Gerardine Wurzburg  
President  
State of the Art, Inc.

Judy Richardson  
Senior Producer  
Northern Light Productions

Anthony Radanovich  
Rural Media Arts and Education Project

Tom Weidlinger  
Moira Productions

Kathryn Dietz and Sue Williams  
Producer and Producer/Director  
Ambrica Productions

Kate Geis  
Producer

Helen De Michiel and Jack Walsh  
Co-Directors  
National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture

Glen Hoptman  
Executive Producer  
Lightbeam Studio Institute

Alfred Hillmann and Michal B. Carr  
President & Vice President  
Hillmann & Carr, Inc.