

To: Jule L. Sigall,
Associate Register for Policy & International Affairs

From: Michael J. Bowen

Comment: Orphan Works

As an advanced Ph.D. candidate and lecturer in Cinema Studies (currently affiliated with New York University, New York City), I would like to urge the Copyright Office to move decisively toward preserving and extending public access to “orphan” films. As a specialist in marginal, low budget filmmaking of the 1960s and ‘70s, it has become increasingly clear to me that efforts to expand copyright protection to works whose rights-holders can no longer be located, are deceased without designated heirs, or for which no reasonable chain of ownership can be effectively established would unquestionably have a devastating effect upon access to and scholarship surrounding a large body of culturally and aesthetically valuable films. Blanket extension of copyright “protection” to such works would, in essence, consign uncountable films – many of them already significantly at risk - to a legal and cultural oblivion, making them inaccessible to entire generations of Americans and further obscuring that filmmaking heritage of which we as a nation are so proud.

I urge you, therefore, to make every effort to ensure that automatic, long-term copyright extensions are not made available to films whose rights-holders do not make reasonable efforts to renew them of their own volition.

Sincerely,
Michael J. Bowen
New York City