



April 14, 2006

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

Dear Secretary Small:

We write to express our alarm and deep dismay about the contractual arrangements between the Smithsonian Institution and the Showtime Network. Admittedly, what we know about the agreement is quite limited—derived from news reports and press releases—but that in itself is sufficient to raise significant concerns. The Smithsonian Institution is a great public trust, representing a vital connection between our nation's past and the present. As such, it is too important to be parceled out in secret deals using “intentionally vague” criteria.

As the leading organization of professional historians in the United States, the American Historical Association was chartered by Congress in 1889 to defend access to historical materials and promote scholarly rigor in the public presentation of history. For more than a century we have counted the Smithsonian Institution as a close ally in that effort. Our relationship extends as far back as 1901, when the Association's first recording secretary was curator of history at the Smithsonian, and the Institution served as the Association's publisher. So it is with extraordinary regret that we find ourselves at odds on this issue.

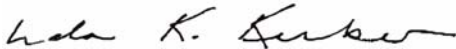
Through the years the AHA has articulated standards and best practices for the work of professional historians—whether they are working as filmmakers, curators, or academics. These have been developed and promoted in union with professional societies of archivists, curators, and other scholars. Fundamental to those standards is the need for open access to the materials of history, the ability to follow the evidence wherever it might lead, and the opportunity to disseminate freely the results of those findings. The contractual relationship with Showtime seems fundamentally at odds with those ideals and a violation of the trust of generations of Americans who have donated materials to which they believed the public would have free, open, equal and nondiscriminatory access forever. Our *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* recognizes the need for restrictions on access to archives for national security, proprietary, and privacy reasons, but clearly the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution do not fall under these categories. Aside from its secretive nature, the arrangement clearly curtails and constrains the options of historians and documentary researchers seeking to use the collections of

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the Smithsonian, obtain assistance from the staff, and publish their work when and as they choose.

We appreciate the difficult financial situation the Institution now faces, but expediency cannot outweigh the standards that should guide a premier institution for preserving the nation's historical legacy. Continued public support requires that you disclose the terms of the contract with Showtime, detail the criteria to be used in restricting access to Smithsonian collections and staff, and suspend these terms of the arrangement until these issues have been publicly discussed with all of the stakeholders.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Linda K. Kerber".

Linda K. Kerber, President  
American Historical Association  
May Brodbeck Professor in the Liberal Arts & Sciences  
The University of Iowa

LKK/bnj