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Louisiana Film Proclamation Speech

La. Film and Movie Industry



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by Gary Michael Smith



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Thank you for coming this evening to celebrate our "Film and Video Industry Awareness Month." I wrote the proclamation to show my appreciation to the many individuals, organizations, and companies who have made Louisiana—and particularly, New Orleans—the film mecca it has become.

To be sure, we have seen an influx of out-of-town businesses and individuals, from Panavision to acting coaches, teaching us how to be a movie town. And granted, as with any new endeavor, there's a learning curve—a curve that is best maneuvered with the guidance of experienced professionals.

But like anyone who is mentored, we, as a state, need to be able to support ourselves. While "Hollywood South" does have a ring to it, eventually, we'll *have* to develop "The Big Film Easy" or "The Crescent Studio City."

When it's time to reduce our generous tax incentive package to help take care of our own—our own streets, our own schools, our own city infrastructure—then our little paradise may not be as enchanting as before to outside filmmakers. It's simply a matter of economics, and no one can be faulted for that.

Consequently, it's vitally important that we see past the short-term, personal benefits of this great new industry that we're proud to have built and have nurtured. To be honest, we simply can't support an entire industry on a few hundred extras earning minimum wage for the excitement of being in a film.

The needs of our city—and state—go beyond the background actors and the casting companies and the acting coaches and the local restaurants and hotels that periodically benefit. If, one day, the Hollywood film industry decides to move on to another Vancouver or Toronto—or New Orleans—for a more cost-effective environment, all we'll have left is a lot of precious memories.

And memories don't make economic growth a reality. *Planning* is the key word. We have to take responsibility to plan for our future—not depend on an outside industry to support us with a sporadic influx of revenue, craftspeople, and talent.

Wouldn't it be nice if the megastars in films shot here actually *lived* here? Or, what if we were able to use our own resident population of highly talented screen and stage actors? I see that as a possibility for us.

What I envision for our future are sound stages being funded by our own money and built by our own nonunion carpenters, electricians, and masonry craftspeople. I see local writers using what they've learned to develop their own scripts and screenplays for filming and taping local sitcoms, dramas, national commercials, and made-for-TV, made-for-cable, and feature-length films.

We have the enthusiasm—ask any casting company. We have the people—nearly four and a half million. We have the food—ask any producer who's complained about gaining 20 pounds while working here. And we have the space, and the weather. All we need now is the *drive* for self-sufficiency.

In any event, I'm proud to be just a little part of the Louisiana Film Industry, and I hope that one day—soon—we can call it our own.

Thank you, and enjoy the movie!

Editors Note: This speech was given by keynote speaker Gary Michael Smith, author of the Film and Video Industry Awareness Month proclamation at the celebration on March 26, 2005 in Chalmette, LA.

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