



AFI Awarded \$350,000 Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Funding To Support Unprecedented Research On Short Films And Diversity In Early Hollywood

The American Film Institute (AFI) announced today that the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) awarded AFI a \$350,000 grant to embark upon a landmark initiative to study thousands of short films released in the silent and early sound eras. Titled *Behind the Veil* after a lost 1914 film directed by pioneering filmmaker Lois Weber, the project will be spearheaded by the AFI research team at the [AFI Catalog](#), the world's most authoritative, freely accessible database of every American feature film and co-production released in the first century of the art form. The project is intended to document the cultural impact of women and people of color in the creation, distribution, and reception of early cinema.

According to the NEH, the project is being funded in part by a special initiative called [A More Perfect Union](#), which will "help Americans commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026 by exploring, reflecting on, or telling stories of our quest for a more just, inclusive and sustainable society throughout our history."

"Film scholarship has long favored feature-length titles, and this partiality has significantly limited historians' efforts to study how people from diverse communities made films and how they saw themselves onscreen. *Behind the Veil* is essential to working toward establishing a more inclusive and accurate canon of American film history," said Sarah Blankfort Clothier, Manager of the AFI Catalog. "Documenting short film creators will provide opportunities for discovering the work of storytellers who have been excluded to date and open new doors of possibility for a more accurate account of America's cultural legacy."



Film still from A FOOL AND HIS MONEY (1912) – the earliest known surviving short film featuring an all-Black cast

The research initiative aims to chronicle the groundbreaking work of female and BIPOC pioneers who were working mainly on short films in the early days of American filmmaking, including Alice Guy Blaché, the world's first female director who made hundreds of shorts; William D. Foster, America's first Black filmmaker who worked solely in the short film form; and actors such as Sessue Hayakawa, Tsuru Aoki, Myrtle Gonzalez, Red Wing and countless others who got their start in short films. By documenting early short films and those involved in their creation, the AFI Catalog will work to expand the scope of scholarship to bring marginalized perspectives into view and unearth the complex, multi-layered diversity within American film history.

Behind the Veil will continue the innovative work from the AFI Catalog on diversity and parity in Hollywood. In 2019, AFI received a \$350,000 grant from the NEH for the [Women They Talk About initiative](#), a groundbreaking project that documented the widely unrecorded contributions of female filmmakers in the silent film era and uncovered the true story of women's pioneering role in the creation of American cinema.



(Source: AFI News Release)

Category

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