

PRESERVING DIGITAL PUBLIC TELEVISION
Notes from History Scholars Focus Group

NDIIPP APPRAISAL FOCUS GROUP #1 @ WGBH

Report summarizes issues discussed under general subject areas and is not verbatim transcript.

DATE: MAY 18 2005 4PM-5:30PM, WGBH - 100 Windom Large Conference Room.

PARTICIPANTS:

Dr. Peter Fraunholtz, History Dept. Northeastern University
Dr. Gerald Herman, History Dept. Northeastern University
Dr. James O'Toole, History Dept. Boston College
Dr. Bruce Schulman, History Dept. Boston University
Dr. Deborah Schildkraut, Political Science Department, Tufts University

1. Session context and brief production process profile by Mary Ide
2. Review of stock footage and original footage elements, showing of clips, more extensive review of elements and discussion questions by Leah Weisse

Participant response summary.

USE OF MOVING IMAGES - An initial request for further definition of stock footage was followed with discussion on how original footage can be used in teaching history; both for providing historical evidence and sources for teaching visual literacy. G. Herman uses original out-take footage from National Archives on the Berlin Blockade. He has compiled original footage and newsreel programs on the Blockade. Students view finished newsreels and contrast with out-takes; this shows both evidential and production interpretative analysis.

G. Herman uses finished television/film programs already available via the Web; especially Pathe on-line. His students are already making their own productions with Pathe et. al. content available on-line. Students are turning in Visual Term Papers that are mini-productions.

COPYRIGHT - all realized this was an issue.

CATALOGING/SEARCHING - all noted need for good navigation tools to content, controlled vocabulary and finding aids. It was noted that program logs were helpful but subject and name indexing critically important. Given the volume of material available, some sort of consolidation and focused access is important.

Key words and subject access and importance of vocabulary issues mentioned several times.

While preference was voiced for a one-stop shopping type of universal catalogue to moving image content, all understood local resources are not always accessible via such a route. Ideal access route is akin to American Memory with hot links; in short, some central website that allows links to regional or local servers for actual moving image content.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES - B. Schulman said there are three general principles regarding use and value of television content: 1. because we do not know now how things will turn out or uses that could change over time, cataloging should be both very general and specific; 2. is space really an issues in digital world? If so why? This important consideration with multiple users of tomorrow, 3. WGBH original footage content, such as interviews with historians and others, can be gotten in books, articles etc. Interest in unique content in footage was deemed more valuable.

Giving researcher context to elements is very important.

APPRAISAL - J. O'Toole asked what the national state of preservation is concerning television materials? Discussion of 1997 LC Report and NDIIPP long range plan.

AVAILABILITY - D. Schildkraut was not aware so much rich material was available to scholars and students at WGBH. She and others indicated that we need to build greater connections with faculty regarding availability of multi-media materials from and at ptv. We should present at their professional conferences.

In the field of political science, interest is in data points over time and thus having large volume (or complete set) for sampling and statistical analysis is important.

ACCESS/QUALITY - proxy copies a must for reference while access to high quality may or may not always be necessary; it depends on use. But it was noted that when compression compromises picture clarity, historical information can be lost. Example of Russian Revolution crowd footage; high quality image allows researcher to determine clothing in crowd scenes and thus identify individual's political, religious and other affiliations. A proxy quality tape would not show such detail.

Fees for access to moving image content are understood to be a most likely scenario but not ideal; libraries are already struggling with costs to research dbs. This circled around to issue of our need to build constituencies with higher education if we are going to ask for payment. If we make it valuable to them, they will pay for access.

There is a real interest in having access to programs being produced in other parts of the country.

NON-VISUAL ELEMENTS - Interest in having transcripts and text documents available. Group felt there would be increasing interest in understanding how documentary television programming is constructed -- how done in the past and in future. Text transcripts and documents like used in WGBH *Midwives' Tale* provide excellent opportunity for students to compare original handwritten text with modern type transcript -- very valuable.

Session was energetic and responses forthcoming. Started and ended in allotted time-frame.