

N O R T H W E S T E R N

U N I V E R S I T Y

DEPARTMENT OF RADIO/TELEVISION/FILM

Mr. William T. Murphy
Coordinator
Report on the State of American Television and Video Preservation
Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division
The Library of Congress
Washington, D.C. 20540-4800

Re: "Request for information ..."

Statement of Lawrence W. Lichty, Professor, Department of
Radio/Television/Film, Northwestern University, Evanston IL

Background

I have been teaching the history of broadcasting, documentary film and television, and a variety of other courses and seminars since 1961. In these courses, I have often used recordings (disc, audio tape, film, and video) of important broadcast programs. I have conducted these course at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Maryland, UCLA and there at Northwestern. I have also use these same material for lectures on numerous other campuses.

On several occasions I have worked as a staff member or consultant on documentary and other historical media projects. Specifically, I was Director of Media Research for Vietnam: A Television History (PBS 1983), a consultant to CBS News for The Vietnam War with Walter Cronkite (A&E and home video) and two CBS Reports documentaries, and Historical Consultant to Making Sense of the Sixties (PBS 1991). I have advised a number of other documentary projects--CBS, PBS, CNN, Discovery Channel and independent producers--in a variety of roles.

In 1967 with the late A. William Bleum, Syracuse University, I researched and wrote the original plan for the William Paley Foundation for what became the Museum of Broadcasting (later Museum of Television and Radio) in New York and just recently expanded to Los Angeles. In that role during 1967-8 I visited all the extant broadcasting archives.

I have writing and/or edited a number of books, articles and chapters on the history of broadcasting, documentary, and related topics. My doctoral dissertation was a history of WLW, Cincinnati, a significant radio station.

I was consultant to the first edition of and, as Director (1990-3) of the Media Studies Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the sponsor of the revised version of Scholars' Guide to Washington D.C., Media Collections, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

In these capacities I have used more than 50 different media archives and libraries in the US and about 20 in other countries as well.

A vita is affixed for further identification should you need it.

The Need

Many who have done film and tape research for more recent projects than I can give details on missing, lost and damaged materials. But in the hope they will serve as additional illustrations I will cite only three instances of valuable material gone astray.

Edward R. Murrow. I once inquired of CBS for copies of important Edward R. Murrow radio commentaries during the 1950s. While it was on the air all of the Murrow CBS broadcast were audio taped on large reels, then stored on a shelf about six feet long--say several months of the program. But when the shelf filled, and old tape was taken down from the starting end--a new program was taped over an old one. To the best of my knowledge there are only a VERY FEW scattered copies of Murrow's radio broadcasts during the 1950s.

Vietnam. At one time the CBS Morley Safer "Cam Ne" report of the burning of part of a village in August 1965 and the NBC Howard Tuckner report on General Loans shooting of a Viet Cong prisoner in February 1968 were both missing from the film libraries of their respective networks. [In fairness, the originals, or high quality copies, were eventually found.]

Many contributors to your inquiry will have excellent examples of what is lost, what should be save, and sage advice on preservation, use and distribution.

Accordingly, I would like to limit my comments to only two points: (1) saving materials NOT otherwise available elsewhere and (2) the leadership role of the Library of Congress.

Lawrence W. Lichty . . .

What Should Be Saved?

We are all aware that the combination of reruns on independent stations, cable channels, and the growing market for home video has convinced media owners of the value of saving many programs as well as news film/tape and other artifacts.

Thus, I would like to appeal for special effort and care in locating television and documentary materials from the 1950s. First, much of this material will soon deteriorate if it is not subject to special preservation. Second, it is not likely to be save for its rerun and reuse value. Specifically, I ask a special effort for:

- (a) local and regional programming of TV stations in the 1950s, including but not exclusively news programming;
- (b) documentary, news coverage, and other programming (especially music, instructional and informational) by pioneer educational (now "public") TV stations; and
- (c) radio and other audio material from this period.

[I am aware of several important collections of educational films and TV programs and PBS programming but there is an ENORMOUS amount of material out there in need of preservation and MUCH more still to be 'found.']

I predict that much of this material could make very valuable contributions to future CD 'books' and other newer forms of distribution and publication. BUT they must be preserved NOW so that they are available to the new technology that will restore and enhance them.

For example, many of the great teachers and thinkers of the 20th century are thus recorded but even their own universities have forgotten or are otherwise unaware of this material.

There is not enough room here for all of the arguments but note, for example, that during this period there was no video tape, and little audio home recording. Hugh personal stores (of even marginal quality) of this programming will not suddenly be found in someone's attic. Even into the 1980s, there was not widespread home video recording. Further, many of the formats on which material was save are only longer available. Newsreels were going out of business (some sustained by the CIA), network news crews and documentary teams were just being formed, and there was no National Public Radio to provide a (partial) audio record of events.

I have given my priorities from the 1950s above ONLY as an example. I know other have different appeals. I offer this only in the hope that a discussion can begin and continue on priorities. I applaud your undertaking this inquiry and seeking so widely opinion from across the country and from many divergent sources.

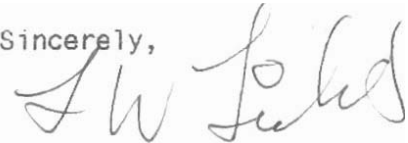
The Leadership of The Library of Congress

It is clear that The Library, even with The National Archives and The Smithsonian Institution, as well as others in Washington, does not want to--and could not--be the repository of 'everything.' Yet, only (or at least, best) The Library must be the catalyst for the careful preservation, use, and distribution of this material. The Library can inform and urge regional and local institutions.

Just as important, The Library is not omnipotent, many local libraries and museums serve as 'checks and balances.' [It is not fair to just bring up, and drop without evidence, this charge--but much of The Library's description and publication of materials on radio, to cite just one example, is woefully inadequate and filled with errors.]

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my written comments.

Sincerely,



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