



LOUIS WOLFSON II MEDIA HISTORY CENTER

A State of Florida designated moving image center and archive

STATEMENT TO THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS FOR THE STUDY ON THE CURRENT STATE OF AMERICAN TELEVISION AND VIDEO PRESERVATION

Submitted by: **Steven Davidson**
Director
Louis Wolfson II Media History Center

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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PHOTOGRAPHY, FILM,
AND RECORDED SOUNDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The Louis Wolfson II Media History Center was established in 1986 by Miami-Dade Community College, the Miami-Dade Public Library and the University of Miami. It is the only institution of its kind in Florida dedicated exclusively as a moving image archive. The Center's **mission**, important to Miami, the state of Florida, and part of a broader national effort, **is to collect**, film and video materials which were produced in or about Florida, which document our history and culture; **to preserve** our regions endangered moving image heritage through an aggressive program of film and video restoration and preservation; and **to make accessible** these film and video materials through wide ranging public access programs including, screenings, seminars, and exhibitions.

The timing of these hearings have particular significance, coming at the 10th anniversary of our founding; during Miami's centennial and only three years away from the 50th anniversary of television in Miami. The Wolfson Center began with the donation of a local television (newsfilm) collection, and was one of many newly established newsfilm/video based archives that arrived on the scene in the 1980's. Some distinguishing factors were the support of our board, the planning and research, and our carefully negotiated donor agreement for our initial collection, which set the tone for others. Certainly the Center was not the first institution to accomplish this, but there are too many examples of unfavorable arrangements, often made in crisis situations or collection by default.

The Center has grown significantly since its first television news film collection, and now encompasses a variety of moving image collections and materials, donated by other stations, production companies, corporations, organizations, individuals

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and other sources. Our collection dates from the 1920's (amateur film/home movies) and is as current as last night's news (off-air recordings). It is television (newsfilm and video) which still remains the largest component of our collection.

For the record, there are some universal factors that come with television newsfilm/video collections (regardless of donor agreements). The first is the size and nature of the collections themselves, often measured in millions of feet of film or thousands of videocassettes. Second, once accepted into an institution, these collections require an ongoing commitment, in staff, time, equipment and funding. Even collections that may appear to be in relatively good condition or perhaps come with documentation or some form of inventory, still require years of work, for organizations, preservation (cleaning, repair, film to tape transfer), indexing, cataloging and ultimately, access. Because of the size of the collections and the limited funding available, a "low" tech or "economic" approach must be taken. The third, and perhaps most important is the role "newsfilm/video" archives have in the preservation of the visual, cultural and historical record of our communities. The first step of preservation is in acquiring one of these collections. If not for the colleges, universities, historical societies and other institutions around the country which have done so, much more of this invaluable record would be lost.

This statement profiles our activities and collections and reports on what we have achieved in a relatively short period of time, with modest budgets and a small staff. We also know how much further we have to go, at our institution and in the field. The Wolfson Center is often cited as an example because of our preservation efforts, public access activities, educational and the scholarly use of our collection, and other areas. It is because of that record (and the efforts it took) that fuels the support for this initiative, particularly from the perspective of local and regional based collections. According to the Association of Moving Image Archivists, television newsfilm and video collections comprise the largest constituency in its membership and for those of us with television, video and newsfilm collections, this study is welcomed and long overdue.

OVERVIEW AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

The Wolfson Center is an independent organization, established by Miami-Dade Community College, the University of Miami and the Miami-Dade Public Library where it is housed. The Center is named in honor of Louis Wolfson II, a Florida state legislator and leader in Florida's communication industry.

The Center is headed by a Director and has a full time staff of two and several interns. Grants from local, state and federal sources have played an important part in our history, as has the commitment of our sponsoring institutions and the Wolfson family. Despite our size, our operations encompass eight areas, and additional staff and funding would enable the expansion of these categories into individual departments:

- Curatorial: Acquisitions, appraisal, off-air recording.
- Preservation: Inventory, organization, film preservation and repair, film to tape transfer, video preservation.
- Public Access: Screenings, seminars, exhibitions.
- Licensing: Providing archival footage for use and/or inclusion in new productions.
- Education: Archival internship program.
- Development: Grants, membership, fundraising activities.
- Publications: Screening/seminar schedules, newsletter, etc.
- Outreach/marketing: Publicizing all of the above.

The Wolfson Center's progress can be attributed in part to a highly successful two year National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) newsfilm grant which ended in 1990. Building on the experiences of other NHPRC projects at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, the University of Baltimore and San Francisco State University, the Center was able to fine tune systems and methodologies for the organization, preservation, film to tape transfer and public access for newsfilm materials. Our work on that project and other collections continue to serve as a model for institutions considering a television newsfilm/video component.

A hallmark of the Wolfson Center has been its cooperation with other archives around the country, and our involvement in the field has ranged from participating in the 1987 Madison Television News Film Conference, being the first "local" moving image institution to host the annual Film/Television Archives Advisory Committee (F/TAAC) meeting in 1989, and continuing with active participation in The Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) and its committees. The Center's Director served on the Future of F/TAAC Committee which lead to the founding of AMIA, to co-chairing its The News and Documentary Working Group, chairing of the Cataloging and Documentation Committee and serving on the AMIA Executive Board.

The Wolfson Center has also collaborated with the National Center for Film and Video Preservation on the forthcoming publication entitled The Administration of Television Newsfilm and Videotape Collections: A Curatorial Manual. Co-edited by Steven Davidson, Director of the Wolfson Center, with contributions from moving image archivists, broadcast educators, filmmakers and other experts, the manual will provide the field with its first authoritative guide. The publication contains over 200 photographs, provided by the Wolfson Center to show the equipment, procedures, and processes described.

In addition, the Wolfson Center (often with San Francisco State University's Bay Area Television Archive), has provided information about television newsfilm and video collections to archival, historical, broadcast, educational, library, and other professional organizations and forums around the country. Since 1987, presentations have been made at meetings and conferences including the Society of American Archivists; the Broadcast Educators Association; Fast Rewind; the Radio-

Television News Directors Association; the American Library Association; the American Association of State and Local History; the Society of Florida Archivists; the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and others. Later this year other presentations will be made to the Art Librarians Association and Broadcast Educators Association. On a local level, the Wolfson Center has continued to promote the work of television archives through its public programs and outreach efforts throughout South Florida.

COLLECTIONS

The Wolfson Center's moving image collection includes over 12 million feet of 16mm film and thousands of hours of videotape chronicling over 80 years of Florida history and culture, with the earliest (amateur footage) dating from the 1920's and television newsfilm beginning in 1949. Our moving image collections are supplemented by scripts, photographs, scrapbooks, reference files and other related documentation which enhance the study and understanding of the film and video materials. With few exceptions, moving image materials donated to the Center have included copyright, which enables the licensing of footage, generating income to support our operations. Similar to other archives, our first newsfilm collection lead to the acquisition of other collections. The list below outlines our moving image collections:

16mm TELEVISION (NEWS) FILM

The Center's first and largest newsfilm collection was donated by WTVJ, which began broadcasting in 1949 and is the oldest station in Florida (and the 16th in the United States). It has continued to make subsequent donations and we have received donations from others. However, many stations had already discarded the majority of their film materials before the Center was established. Individual news stories and outtakes comprise the majority of the newsfilm collection, but also included is entertainment, sports, documentary and public affairs programming and approximately 400 kinescopes (complete broadcasts) from the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's. Together, our television (news) film collections span over 30 years, amounting to approximately 10 million feet of 16mm newsfilm.

TELEVISION (VIDEO)

The Wolfson Center's television collection contains over 10,000 hours of videotape from the 1970's to the present. These materials include cut (edited) stories, complete news, documentary and public affairs broadcasts, sports, entertainment, and local government productions. The tapes are on a variety of formats with 3/4" U-Matic comprising the largest percentage. Other formats are 1", 2" tape, 3/4" SP, VHS, SVHS, 8mm, hi8, MII, betacam and betacam SP.

OFF-AIR RECORDINGS

Most local stations routinely recycle (erase) the daily newscasts within a week. The cut or edited stories that (sometimes) are

kept do not provide the context in which the stories were broadcast. As a result the Wolfson Center initiated its off-air recording program in 1991 with one local station and currently records over 60 hours of television news programming a week on both English and Spanish language local and network stations.

WOLFSON CENTER FILM & VIDEO AWARD ENTRIES

The Center began its Film and Video Awards program in 1989 to recognize outstanding productions made in or about Florida and to underscore the importance of preservation. Entries are received each year from Florida, around the country and abroad.

CORPORATE/INDUSTRIAL

Donations from Eastern Airlines and the Miami Seaquarium are among the film and video materials in this category. The Eastern Airlines collection consists of over 1,500 titles (film and video materials) including promotional films, commercials and in-house productions dating from the early 1950's. The Seaquarium collection contains over 200 titles produced over its 40 year history. Other materials in this group come from advertising, production companies, and other sources.

AMATEUR FILM

Donated by individuals, these 16mm and 8mm/Super 8 films contain images of Miami, Florida, other parts of the country and Cuba, with the earliest dating from the 1920's.

PRODUCTIONS INCORPORATING ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

All licensees are required to provide the Center with a copy of the production (for reference purposes) which incorporates archival footage from our collection.

NON-MOVING IMAGE COLLECTION

Though the Center was established as a moving image archive, it has acquired a variety of film and television news scripts, documentary scripts, scrapbooks, photographs, card files, and other paper records. These materials support the study and understanding of the collection and are used by the public and staff alike.

SCOPE OF THE TELEVISION COLLECTIONS

Television news/film and video comprise the largest component of our collection and a priceless record which documents our history and culture. Reflecting the ever changing look of Miami, and Florida they chronicle day by day, our lives, our culture, and on a broader scale, show how television documented them. From perspectives on national and international events which took place here and were also local news, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the space program, the Democratic and Republican Conventions of 1972, and local reactions to events and issues around the country or around the world.

Over the past fifty years, (almost since the advent of television) South Florida and Miami have experienced a profound transformation unlike any other American city. The Center's

television collection documents this period of growth and transformation from a local perspective. While impossible to outline all the subject areas, the following is a very abbreviated listing of some of the research and footage requests received over the past 6 months: civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and local demonstrations, the rash of hijackings in the late 1960's, the Everglades, The Beatles, ethnic diversity, the early days of television, gay lifestyles, fashion of the 1970's, ballroom dancing, the Art Deco District, Miami Beach, and a myriad of other topics.

THE ONGOING PRESERVATION WORK

Television film (16mm) and video materials come to the Wolfson Center in an unorganized fashion. Film footage of varying lengths is taped together on reels or cores holding up to 30 segments of film or is in cans holding multiple individual cores of film. In either case, the film has usually not been viewed or inspected since it was first televised and requires hours of preservation and transfer work including replacing all old cans with archival cans. For the Wolfson Center, preservation of film encompasses organization, cleaning, repair and transfer to video for access purposes by making a 3/4" master and a VHS reference copy. Selected materials are also transferred to betacam format.

Video materials undergo a similar evaluation and inspection process. The tapes are checked for loss of signal, dropouts and other defects. In most cases, new master (and reference) copies are made for access purposes, requiring specialized equipment for the variety of formats of the original video recordings. Older videotape in various formats present other problems and require remastering to new high grade tape stock which must be done before the video image deteriorates and can no longer be transferred. Video for which we have equipment are: 3/4", 3/4"sp, VHS, SVHS, betacam, betacamSP, 8mm and hi 8. Materials we do not have equipment for include all open reel tape formats and MII.

Working with archival film and video materials is a labor intensive and time consuming process, with each step requiring proper equipment and supplies (and funding) and adherence to archival standards. Each year the Center expands its technical equipment base (beta was added last year) thus providing the capabilities to preserve and make accessible a larger part of our collection. The Center handles all film preservation, film to tape transfer and video preservation and remastering work "in-house" for the formats we have.

The majority of our collection is housed on-site, additional material is kept at an off-site storage facility. We do not have "cold storage" vaults, but are able to maintain constant temperature and humidity levels (monitored 24 hours a day).

PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

Every collection entering the Wolfson Center must first be inventoried and examined. Eventually all the film will be transferred to videotape and older videotapes remastered. Like most television (and moving image) archives in general, we have a backlog of materials and lack the staff and resources to work on the entire collection. Priorities are determined by a number of factors, including the condition of the materials, programming considerations, and funding. When requests for footage are received, the licensee is required to pay all preservation costs in addition to research and license fees.

CATALOGING

Collections must first be inventoried and preserved so they may be "cataloged", however, there is still debate (and rules to be written) on how to properly catalog these collections. For the Wolfson Center, we first establish a collection inventory, often relying on any (paper) records or index cards that sometimes come with donations. These logs and inventory records are then updated and verified during the preservation and repair.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING/ACCESS

Public access has been underway since our establishment, beginning with monthly or special screenings and within two years expanding to twice weekly programs. Each year the Wolfson Center increases the breadth and scope of its public access programs which now include, screenings, seminars, exhibitions workshops, educational, individual and scholarly use. The Center's public access programs are presented throughout the year and in 1996 we anticipate that attendance will surpass the 5,000 mark.

Our public programs provide the widest diversity of screenings, seminars and related exhibitions drawing on the Center's collections and materials from other archives. A broad spectrum of archivists, broadcast historians, film/video makers and subject experts also participate in our programs. In line with our mission to provide an understanding of these images, all public access programs are set in proper historical and cultural context through commentary or program notes.

A partial list of recent programs presented exemplify the breadth of screenings, seminars and exhibitions presented: IMAGES FROM THE ARCHIVES with participants Barry Sherman (Peabody Awards) and Helene Whitson (San Francisco State University); DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING with award winning film/video makers Jim DeVinney (WGBH), Elizabeth Deane (WGBH), Ron Mann (Sphinx Productions); READING TELEVISION with Tom Glennon (Miami based reporter) and Florida historian Dr. Paul George; EYEWITNESS DALLAS, presented on the anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy, featuring local, national and international coverage of that event; and THE NATIONS NEWS: A STUDY IN DIVERSITY .

Other screening and seminar topics have included an examination of trends in film and broadcasting; the space program; a look back at the year 1969; television programs produced in Florida

from the Peabody Archives; Miami and Florida on television; Florida television coverage of the Civil Rights movement; and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Center has also exhibited materials from other archives around the country, including the annual Peabody Award winners and materials from The National Archives, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the National Center for Jewish Film, UCLA Film and Television Archive, Prelinger Archives, San Francisco State University, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

WOLFSON CENTER DAILY TELEVISION PROGRAM

Five years ago the Center initiated its REWIND series, which is broadcast twice daily on Metro-Dade Television in Miami. REWIND features vintage programs from our collection, from the 1950's through the 1970's, and each program is put in cultural and historical context, followed by a promotional segment about the Center. REWIND is seen throughout South Florida, and is among the most popular programs on MDTV.

OUTREACH AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

The Wolfson Center works with other local institutions and many of our screenings and seminars are presented in collaboration with those organizations, such as the Miami Film Festival and Fort Lauderdale Film Festival. Our public programs are presented at a variety of venues in addition to our facility.

The Wolfson Center actively promotes and markets its programs, screenings, seminars, exhibitions, individual access, preservation and other activities to the entire South Florida community in print media and radio and television. The broadest possible audience is sought through outreach to the general public, educational and scholarly community, cultural organizations, broadcasters, film/video makers, senior citizens, tourists, professional groups, and others.

The Center receives frequent coverage of its activities in a variety of daily, weekly and monthly publications in traditional and specialized publications as well as community newspapers. Activities are also promoted on local television and radio stations and screening schedules, brochures and other information about our activities is distributed free at all branches of the Miami-Dade Public Library and to our extensive membership.

RESEARCH/LICENSING/ OR REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

For materials in which we hold copyright, footage is licensed for research purposes or for use in new productions (in which case a copy of the final production must be provided to the Center). Each year hundreds of phone calls, faxes, and letters are received from around the country and abroad, in addition to walk-ins and scheduled appointments regarding our collection or our activities.

FUNDING

All of the activities described in this report have been accomplished with a full time staff of three, in addition to interns. The Center receives modest annual support from an endowment and from its sponsoring institutions. Other operational funds are derived from memberships, donations, license and research fees. In-kind support and/or donations of equipment and supplies is also important. Additionally, grants, from local, state and federal sources have greatly enhanced our activities. The Center has received support from the Metro-Dade Cultural Affairs Council, the Florida Humanities Council, The Florida Department of State Division of Cultural Affairs, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and The American Film Institute/National Endowment for the Arts. It is, however a matter of scale, and it is unfortunate that there are not more funds available, so that more of our collection could be preserved and made accessible.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This report outlines the work that one institution has been able to accomplish in its ten year history, yet there remains so much more to be done. At our institution and at others around the country. Money, equipment, space, local and national awareness, staff training and cooperation with the producers/originators of these materials are among the issues. Our concerns are many, and not just from the perspective of South Florida, but a view which is shared with many in the "local" television archive field.

One of the ironies is that for so ubiquitous and pervasive a medium, television is leaving almost no record. Much more has been lost than survives. We know that much of the television (news) film produced has already been discarded, from the late 1940's through the 1970's, and with the advent of videotape, recycling was possible, literally making possible the ability to erase our history tape by tape, story by story. Of course there are many television stations, production companies and other originators of programming and materials who share the concern about preservation and work closely with archives, but many more do not. There has to be something better - that works for the archives, the creators of these materials and ultimately the public.

Television is part of our collective memories and the history of us all. We each have those memories, programs we grew up watching for entertainment and for news, brought into our homes. Everyone in Miami who lived through Hurricane Andrew of course remembers not only the experience of the storm, but also watching the television coverage. More often than not we turn to television for our information and it is part of our awareness. There will always be debate about television's impact and influence, television violence (the "V" chip today), or the "golden age" of television and other issues of programming content. It all becomes a moot point if television is not preserved.

In his keynote remarks, presented at the Wolfson Center's Film and Video Awards Ceremonies, Jim DeVinney (writer/producer EYES ON THE PRIZE) provided this perspective, stating "...as you go out into the world...or around Florida... remember that you are witnesses to history, and so do your job well, and then think for a moment. As you get busy and rush out to cover that story...what tape are you using? Is it the tape you used last night or last week, and are you about to throw away some of our history in order to get tomorrow's headline? Examine your work. Think about the importance of your work. Recognize your responsibility not just to tonight's deadline, but for all time...".

Those comments have relevance for every city and every television station and production company around the country. Each has a unique point of view, and while the network news may cover the same story, it is the local perspective and the local news which provides the pieces of the visual mosaic. DON'T THROW IT OUT! DON'T RECYCLE must be heard from all corners, from all directions. For those that have been involved in the preservation of these collections - and have seen the value not just in keeping these materials, but in their use (for research, in learning, in the classroom, in exhibitions, in new productions), know that more funding must be found (certainly for television as a whole) but specifically for locally produced television (film and video) materials.

The Wolfson Center is, of course a Florida archive and as such, helps provide our community with a sense of who and what we are and where we came from. In a region that is constantly reinventing itself, it is important that there is a repository for our shared past and that these images be made available to everyone. It would be unheard of if newspapers or books were not available (and accessible) after publication. It should be the same with television.

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