

The Boston TV News Digital Library is a true landmark, one of the most innovative and progressive archival undertakings of the young 21st Century. By bringing together news cast segments, special reports, news film, and other televised news coverage materials from the period when television was the media heartbeat of the region and nation, this project recognizes and makes accessible for multiple research purposes a socio-cultural commitment and legacy of news coverage that will help make history come alive and be renewed.

Local television news is a fundamental feature (and regulatory necessity) of U.S. television, which, in the decades after World War II, grew proportionally with the TV industry, expanding to become as much a part of the everyday public sphere as were daily newspapers and radio broadcasts. Many would say that television news eclipsed these other media during this era. The online Boston TV News Digital Library makes newly available the means to assess the literal and figurative stakes and achievements of this ascendance, especially regarding Boston and related areas of the Northeast region.

The significance of this digital library is therefore relevant to various academic fields across the Humanities and Social Sciences, both within this region and beyond it.

Local television is a chronically under-studied area in Film and Media Studies and Communications Studies. Despite the fact that local broadcasters were licensed to serve in the public interest, historical and historiographic investment in the coverage and representational practices of these stations has been largely casual and anecdotal, when it exists at all. The extant historical work is not without merit, but the Boston TV News Digital Library affords an entirely new and different series of opportunities for innovative research in this field and in this area.

The narrative saga of local television in Boston is already recognized to be historically significant, even rather byzantine in its complexity of licensing, ownership, production facilities, and station affiliation. Two stations represented in the Boston TV News Digital Library are central to this surprisingly arcane narrative: WHDH and WCVB. The present report is not the place to recount this singular history, which includes the only instance in U.S. history in which a local television station lost its FCC license to continue broadcasting. But this context is surely part of what will make this project of great interest to researchers and scholars.

What is even more primary to this online collection of film and video materials is the period it captures in relation to the empirical and indexical realities of the era. These materials capture a period of Boston, its neighborhoods, and neighboring regions that is distinctive and renowned, but also deeply contentious and troubled. These news materials capture a deep historical sense of local and regional place and invested self-identity, but also a vernacular address to national and international events during an extraordinarily eventful period. The materials also provide valuable evidence of historicized formats in local television news and public affairs programming, that document the range of address that was realized in performing television's role as a source of topical information and a public forum.

My cursory initial experience with the digital library's news materials demonstrated to me the range and depth of what already exists online, and the promise of more to come. The period represented is filled with literal reports but also incidental coverage of many major news figures

and landmark events, but also local interventions such as call-in shows and public forums, that help to demarcate with precision the historical interpretation and stratification of topical issues at the time they were most pressing and immediate. The degree of detail in the descriptions, metadata, and supplemental online posts that accompany the media materials for the Project also make possible deep research across and within specific collections over time. As Sadie Roosa demonstrated in her blog post memorial to [Nelson Mandela](#), the materials in the Project can range considerably in relation to indelible historical figures, expanding and modulating our awareness of their impact on public history and memory. It is worth noting that the Project also affords access to items and reports on more decidedly ephemeral and ineffable topics and events. The new research that the Project affords may well alter the historiographic weight of some of these materials.

Efforts at other archives and repositories across the inter webs to provide online access to news collections and archival deposits will learn much from this project, and all will benefit in relation to one another. The Vanderbilt News Archive has been collecting network news broadcasts since the late 1960s. Access to online examples of this collection requires a subscription, which will place their materials at a remove from most scholars and researchers. But many other University archives have already demonstrated a commitment to make at least some of their news materials available online. Prominent examples include The University of Virginia's [WSLS-TV News Film Collection](#), which already features over 3500 clips from this Roanoke, Virginia station as a searchable online collection; The University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collection, which features both a [Fox Movietone News collection](#) and news materials from several local television stations in their [Newsfilm collection](#); and The University of Georgia's local television station [WSB-TV Newsfilm Collection](#) and materials from the [Peabody Awards Collection](#).

Within the fields of Film and Media Studies, the Project will soon be foregrounded in major academic conferences and symposia this spring. It will be featured in at least two workshop panels at The Society of Cinema and Media Studies conference in Seattle in March, 2014, and prominently featured on a panel about online archives and scholarship at the Orphans Film Symposium in Amsterdam in April, 2014.

The Project will also be prominent in emerging online academic research environments such as The Media Ecology Project. The participants in the "News" pilot study group for MEP, for example, have initiated a search across select media archives focused on the keyword "protest". The range of semantic values of this term, and scope of attendant historical events and formats of coverage, will provide a rich test case to demonstrate the new capacities for scholarship that The Boston TV News Digital Library realizes within its own collection and in relation to other collections. Such scholarship can facilitate and/or be facilitated by online practices of curation and categorizations, metadata generation, and emerging inter-disciplinary dynamics related to data-mining. The efforts at WGBH, Northeast Historic Film, Cambridge Community Television, and The Boston Public Library to digitize, make available, and augment (produce blogs, curatorial notes, and other finding aids) regarding these historic media materials are exemplary 21st Century archival and scholarly achievements.

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