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Access to Moving Image Collections

ASSIGNMENT #1

Introduction

Throughout the MIAP coursework it has been fervently emphasized over and over again that the purpose of preservation is to provide access to moving image collections. For our first assignment in the Access to Moving Image Collections course we are to compare two institutions that include moving images. I chose to analyze Third World Newsreel and California Newsreel. These institutions carry rare film and video collections developed by the social activist community from the late 1960's to present day.

Background History

According to the Third World Newsreel website, it was first “established in 1967 as Newsreel, an activist filmmaker collective. This NY group grew to become a network with chapters across the US. Its different chapters produced and distributed short 16mm films covering the anti-war and women's movements, Civil and human rights movements, getting unique access to such groups as the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party. Newsreel’s activism attracted many artists who became well known filmmakers - Norman Fruchter, Susan Robeson, Robert Kramer, Christine Choy, Tami Gold, Allan Siegel and Deborah Shaffer, among others.” In the mid-70s Newsreel became Third Word Newsreel (TWN) to focus their commitment to developing filmmakers and audiences of color. Today, TWN remains the oldest independent media arts organization in the U.S. devoted to cultural workers and social activists. They foster filmmakers through workshops, fiscal sponsorship, and distribution.

California Newsreel’s website states that it was founded in 1968 as Newsreel.

“Newsreel is the oldest non-profit, social issue documentary film center in the country, the first to marry media production and contemporary social movements...a leading resource center for the advancement of racial justice and diversity, and the study of African American life and history as well as African culture and politics.” California Newsreel offers filmmakers workshops, feedback on projects, and distribution.

Collections

TWN has over 500 films in their collection in 16mm, beta, digibeta, 1-inch, and hi-def video formats. Due to their dwindling budget, TWN has been forced to downsize their space and store most of their collections in three different locations in New Jersey and Wisconsin. They have around 30-50 films in 16mm format that have never been viewed for content because the titles have been in storage in Wisconsin for nearly 30 years. One-third of the TWN films are original prints and cannot be viewed by the public unless someone pays for the copy of the print. Access to TWN films depends mostly on titles that are linked to distribution. To view films you must pay a viewers fee of \$25. You can view them at TWN or they will mail it out to you. You can license or rent films, prices range from \$60 to \$500.

California Newsreel has over 200 films that have been fully processed and transferred to DVD and VHS. They have a small collection of 35mm films available to the public. Most of the films are available for streaming but you must purchase the DVD in order to get access. In addition to focusing on African American life and history, California Newsreel also has a collection of health and social justice issues, globalization, and diversity and multiculturalism.

Website and Catalog

TWN's website looks outdated and cluttered. However, they have several ways to connect to their online catalog and search engine that will allow you to find films by keywords, titles, format, country, maker's name, and subject. Once you find the title page it includes a synopsis, maker's bio, related subjects and guides. Not all of the entry are formatted the same. For example, one title may have a two-sentences describing the film, while other titles have a six-paragraph description. Some have reviews and trailers added to the title page. Overall the metadata is robust and you can easily find titles with keywords. Some of the titles have educational guides, and they have downloadable and print brochures of their distribution collection. TWN policies is online, and request forms are downloadable but must be faxed or emailed.

California Newsreel's website is clean and organized. Most of their titles have a still, description, movie clip, and facilitator/education guides. Customers can purchase titles through an online store. As mentioned before, most of the titles are available for online streaming. They have overnight shipping service and regular service between one and two weeks. They have links to related videos and critic comments.

Conclusion

Both Third World Newsreel and California Newsreel collections have surprisingly survived social-political churns and economic coil for over four decades. In spite of these challenges they have consistently made accessible their collection to the public. Their main patrons are public libraries, universities, colleges, and high schools. They also sell and rent their titles to government agencies, corporations, and individual researchers. They both have links to festivals and film resources, and are engaging in

social media with facebook pages and youtube channels.

The biggest challenge for Third World Newsreel is finding the digitizing funds to process and transfer their collections to DVD. They mentioned that they could use NYU's cinescan to view their collections of unopened films and pre-print elements. They are currently working with a MIAP student that is recreating their database system. They have worked with one other MIAP student and the activist archivist collective to organize their collections in New Jersey.

California Newsreel seems to be in great shape. They have enough funding to update their website on a regular basis, and continue reformatting their collection to meet the needs of their constituents. Their biggest challenge is helping the community understand about film copyrights. This legal issue has given rise to people not understanding a licensing fee for a public screening versus a home rental screening.

Third World Newsreel and California Newsreel can always improve their website, especially metadata information, and access to the collection. It is clear that the monetary advantage and smaller collection of California Newsreel allows for their titles to be more accessible. If Third World Newsreel received the funding they needed they would probably find gems in their untapped collections hidden in storage, offering the public never before seen footage from the 1960s and 1970s.