<u>**Teaching Broadcast History**</u>

"Teaching Broadcast History to On-Demand Viewers"

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Students entering college this fall are the Class of 2020, which means that most of them were born in 1998. The television environment they grew up in is radically different from the one we, their professors, experienced during our formative years. Here are just a few examples of the things they "missed out" on:
- Standard definition television
- Television without content ratings
- Music videos on MTV
- Adjusting "rabbit ears"
- Getting up to change the channel

As teachers of broadcast history, we frequently hear students claim that they don't watch television or listen to radio. We explain to them how watching Netflix and listening to Spotify on computers is related to broadcasting, but is drawing parallels the best way to teach broadcast history? For over a decade, television studies scholars have asked the question "What is television?" in the post-network era.[1] This question is a worthy one, and is certainly connected to pedagogy, but it seems to us there are two bigger questions to that require attention.

The first question is: how do we help students experience the quotidian realities of broadcasting? The "everyday-ness" of television and radio (in whichever form) is consistent across broadcast history, but getting students to understand the everyday lives of people living in other eras is tricky. Teaching broadcast history frequently feels like an attempt to compact 20th century American history and media technology history into one course. And although research and reading about how people lived during a specific time period is helpful, it's no substitute for first-hand experience. A student might read about American families in the 1930s gathering around the radio to listen to *Little Orphan Annie*, but that historical account is completely foreign to the student's own experience of listening to the "radio."

One way we have tried to address this issue is to have students engage in primary source research that accompanies their course reading. Using an interactive class timeline, created using [Tiki Toki](), our students find and post primary source documents related to the time periods and events mentioned in their readings. For example, when students read about the relationship between Teddy Roosevelt's Progressive movement and the development of broadcast history, they can use the Historic New York Times archive to find articles that discuss those events (Teddy Roosevelt's acceptance speech at the 1900 Republican National Convention is particularly interesting for this exercise). The articles contain first-hand accounts and reactions, which help students contextualize the era.

After finding an article, each student writes up a short explanation of how the article relates to the reading and then posts a section of the article on the Tiki Toki timeline for the rest of the class to see. In any given week, a class of fifty students can find and post a treasure trove of primary documents that, taken together, provide a more complete picture than the contents of a couple of textbook pages. Perhaps one day we will require the students to dress in period costume and speak using historical slang words during our discussions of particular eras. Given our students' unfamiliarity with primary research, however, maybe it's better to start with small steps.

The second question we face is how best to replicate the experience of using older broadcast technologies. Serra Tinic has suggested that we should borrow from film studies and advocate for screening times.[2] Ideally, these screening sessions would use contemporaneous broadcast technologies to complete the viewing experience. As laudable as this idea is, ubiquitous resource constraints and university politics place it firmly in the realm of fantasy, unlikely ever to be realized.

Another way to work around this difficulty is to create assignments that simulate historic viewing practices. Requiring students to watch a live event together in-person or virtually over social media approximates the family living room of the 1950s, for example. Although this assignment doesn't familiarize the students with historic television content, it does demonstrate how people used to experience television as a communal experience. We would argue that this experience is quite different from having students watch old episodes of *Taxi* on Hulu—alone in their dorm rooms, huddled over a laptop or tablet. The current political season provides a rich opportunity to connect this assignment to discussions of national identity and broadcast technology.

The most reliable method for drawing parallels between past and present broadcasting experiences is to teach with contemporary counterparts. Derek Kompare notes that these kinds of comparisons offer an opportunity to chart "continuities and contradictions."[3] Even this method, however, is incomplete: as with summaries of history, these comparisons don't recreate the experience of using a historic technology. How do we fully represent the different day-parts, formats, and experiences of television and radio history? Perhaps the answer is that a single broadcast history course, covering more than a century of changes, cannot accomplish all that it must. But how do we convince our departments that we need more television courses when our students *don't watch TV*?

[1] For answers to this question see the books:
Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, eds., *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Durham: NC, Duke University Press, 2004).
Jostein Gripsrud, *Relocating Television: Television in the Digital Context* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
James Bennett and Niki Strange, *Television as Digital Media* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
[2] Serra Tinic, "Introduction: IN FOCUS: Teaching Television in a Post-Network Era," *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 4 (Summer 2011): 157-160.

[3] Derek Kompare, "Filling the Box: Television in Higher Education," *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 4 (Summer 2011): 161-166.