

Institution: University of Lincoln
Unit of Assessment: 36 Communication, Cultural & Media Studies, Library & Information Management
Title of case study: TV History Programmes and their relevance
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Our research on historians, TV history programmes and those who make them, brought together the perspectives of television scholars, academic historians and media industry professionals engaged in bringing history to the small screen. By involving key actors consistently throughout the life of the project, the researchers both challenged and begin to influence the shape of history programming on UK TV. Programme makers responded to the striking gaps in coverage our research identified in relation to class, race and gender. They also took the opportunity afforded by the research to think more widely/imaginatively about how their practices might alter to create different historical coverage on TV. The impact of our research extended beyond the UK as it provided the UK section of a report on televised history in Europe which was presented to the European Parliament in December 2011</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The period covered by our research (1995-2010) witnessed a boom in history programming in the UK, the USA and Europe alongside significant changes to the television landscape with new technologies delivering an expansion in stations. The key research question for the Televising History project was to discover ‘how we get the kinds of television histories we do, and why’. The research drew on theoretical and conceptual frameworks from historical studies (historiography), cultural studies (semiotics, memory studies, theories of identity) and media studies (media theory, production studies).</p> <p>The research had three strands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • history programmes, their genres, sub and hybrid genres and specific aesthetics and styles related to different types of programmes; • professional and public historians, as knowledge producers, disseminators and consumers; • production environment, including terrestrial and satellite broadcasters and independent producers. <p>Our methodology involved conducting interviews and discussion groups (with historians, authors and media professionals, including commissioning editors); analysing trade journals; and analysing a variety of television history programmes including documentary, commemorative, ‘reality history’ and hybrid genres.</p> <p>The research charted important developments in programme styles, genres, transmission times and channel location and identified the main production units and personnel involved. It also explored the processes through which academic historical knowledge came to the screen, the ways that academic historians were incorporated into the ‘business of television’ and their perceptions of their treatment within this process. Our exploration of television history as an important, and highly-visible form of public history was a key theme in these discussions. We explored views of key media professionals on the place of history programming within television and the commissioning and production practices. We also examined how independent producers developed and pitched successful commissions.</p> <p>Key findings relevant to impact:</p> <p>Television history programming is an important form of ‘public history’, in that it is the principal</p>

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means by which most people learn about history today.

Personal and professional networks within the media community exert a key influence on the production and working practices of TV history, which in turn shapes the resulting television output. The research thus encouraged this central constituency of practitioners to reflect on its practice.

There were significant gaps within the overall content and presentation of history programmes, and in particular those of gender, class and ethnicity.

The production process was 'commissioner led' meaning that themes and topics of interest to commissioners and broadcasters defined the resulting offer of programmes. Consequently only a relatively narrow range of perspectives on the past is offered to viewers.

Genres of history programming aimed at broader audiences, eg celebrity family histories and reality history could be, and often were, innovative in their approach to the presentation of the past.

The research was undertaken between 2006 and 2010 by Professor Ann Gray, Professor of Cultural Studies and Dr Erin Bell, Research Fellow, University of Lincoln. Dr Bell is now a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Lincoln.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Bell, E. (2009) 'Sharing their past with the nation: re-enactment and testimony in TV and related media' in E. Castello, H. O'Donnell and A. Dhoest (eds) *The Nation on Screen*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Bell, E. & Gray A. (2009) 'Televising History in the United Kingdom' in *Media and community culture: A European History of Television*, Assemblea Legislativa della Regione Emilia-Romagna.

Bell, E. & Gray, A.(eds) 2010 *Televising History: the pasts on the small screen*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Gray, A. & Bell, E.(2010) 'Rough Crossings and Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death: documentary, drama and radical otherness in history programming', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 7.3

Bell, E. (2011) 'Television and memory: history programming and contemporary identities', *Image [&] Narrative* (online journal).

Gray, A. & Bell, E. (2013) *History on Television*, Routledge

Grant:

Principal Investigator: Ann Gray
Televising History 1995-2010
Arts & Humanities Research Council
Date awarded: 07/12/2005
Start date: 1.03.2006
End date: 30.04.2010
£234,064

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**Media professionals**

Media professionals, authors, museum professionals, scholars and educationists were involved in

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the research from the outset, and were active members of the project advisory board. The CEOs of three independent television production companies, Flashback Productions, Testimony Films and Wall to Wall, who specialise in making Military and Archive, Oral History and 'Reality' and Genealogy historical programmes, were all active participants in the project's Advisory Board. They also contributed to the two main conferences associated with the project (2008 and 2009). These conferences brought media professionals and academics (media scholars and historians) together to debate key issues in the mediation of the past on television and gave them a valued opportunity to reflect on their practice. For example, an independent producer wrote that: *'I found the conference, and the advisory panel discussions, hugely stimulating. Turning out programmes to meet the demands of micro-managing commissioning editors doesn't give one much opportunity to reflect on historiography but Lincoln and the preparation for it did. [Your research] has had some influence on my current project, "The Dragon and the Eagle" an enhanced ebook or app on Welsh emigration to America. (CT.2013); another added, 'In the hectic, often full-on schedule of television production there is rarely enough time to stop and think about what one is doing. The advisory panel meetings were an excellent opportunity to do just that.... There were excellent discussions about different aspects of television history that were new to me'* (TD.10.7.13).

Another media professional emphasised the value of the research and in particular, its engagement with members of the industry and observed that academic researchers rarely did this: *'[this research] has helped me understand how our work fitted more widely into the spectrum of public history narratives available on television'* (AG.21.10.13).

The research also produced tools that enabled producers to analyse their products and consider their content. A number of producers acknowledged the value of the concepts explored in the research and the insights it provided (AG 21.10.13). One producer observed that the research had *'forced us to continue to interrogate our methodology and our purposes, ensuring not only that our programmes continue to entertain large numbers of people but that they also seek to properly and responsibly inform and educate our audiences about their history and those of the people around them; working with Ann and Erin it soon became obvious that what we were doing was a form of public history* (AG 21.10.13). Following publication of *History on Television*, Taylor Downing, (Flashback) noted that: *'Television producers are notoriously bad at reading academic critiques of what they do. But they would be well advised to read the Gray-Bell book'* (TD 10.7.13); Steve Humphries (Testimony Films) added: *'For me it is the best analysis of history programme making in Britain that has ever been produced. On this basis I have recommended it to friends and colleagues'*. (SH 17.6.13). This reception shows that our research has permeated the professional community causing them to reflect on their practices, and that the impact of the research is continuing to grow amongst the professional community.

European Context

Whilst the project focused on UK television productions, our preliminary research attracted interest from scholars in other parts of Europe who were pursuing similar but isolated forms of research. This was reflected in participants in a symposium organized at Lincoln, 'Televising the History: the past(s) on the small screen' (Lincoln 2005), which resulted in a journal special issue and an edited collection.

Our research was picked up by Professor Pierre Sorlin's project for Assemblée Legislativa della Regione Emilia-Romagna 'For a European TV History'. We produced two reports on UK television history programmes for their symposia 'Audio Visual Media and European Community Culture' and 'For a European TV History', Bologna, 2008 and 2009. We challenged the conservative tendency of their project to emphasise traditional forms of documentary. Our final research report, which argued for the value and importance of popular forms of history programming, was included in the *Tanti passati per un futuro comune? La storia in televisione nei paesi dell'Unione europea 2011* report by Pierre Sorlin (Sorbonne). Sorlin and the other contributors, including Gray and Bell, were invited to present to the European Parliament in Brussels in December 2011 by Salvatore Caronna, a leading Italian MEP. Attendees included politicians and media professionals: Caronna,

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an MEP and representative of the Partito Democratico; Dario Carella, vice-director of the regional news section of the Italian broadcaster RAI; Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar, MEP and president of the commission on civil liberties, justice and internal affairs; Marc Tarabella, MEP; Anna Colombo General Secretary of the Social Democratic Group of the European Parliament; and Sorlin. Such interest in this research points to its potential wider impact upon politicians as well as scholars and media professionals. One of the MEPs and an Italian news site reported on the event on-line.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- Downing, Taylor (2011), 'TV History: Requiem or Resurrection?', *History Today* 61:1, 28-30.
- Cigognetti, L. Servetti & P. Sorlin (2011), *Tanti passati per un futuro comune? La storia in televisione nei paesi dell'Unione europea*. ISBN-10: 8831709712.
- Regione Emilia-Romagna assembly report on European Parliament delivery of report, 2011: http://assemblealegislativa.regione.emilia-romagna.it/wcm/antennaed/news/2011/12_6_libro_parri_bxl/parri/Invito_6_dicembre_2011.pdf.
- Salvatore Caronna, MEP coverage of report, 2011: <http://www.salvatorecaronna.it/index.html?pg=18&id=961>.
- Coverage on Italian radio, 2011: <http://www.radio24.ilsole24ore.com/main.php?articolo=europa-unita-nuovi-paesi-turchia-corazia-crisi-economia-concorsi>.
- Televising History, University of Lincoln 22-25 July 2009 conference report <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/confreport.php?issue=16&id=1195>.
- Statement (by e-mail) corroborating effects of research on thought and approach from head of Testimony Films.
- Statement (by e-mail) corroborating effect of research on future work by Independent film maker.
- Statement (by e-mail) corroborating effects of research on his thought and approach from head of Flashback.
- Statement by CEO of Wall to Wall outlining the impact of the research on his professional practice.