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Clyde Jeavons, Jane Mercer, Daniela Kirchner, eds. *"The Story of the Century!": An International Newsfilm Conference; Papers, Presentations and Proceedings*. London: British Universities Film and Video Council, 1998. 170 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-901299-69-7.



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Conferences are often a mixed bag, at times incoherent or inarticulate, fascinating or facile, but their published proceedings are usually a different matter, intended to reflect the best of the conference, presented in a more considered manner. The case in point, *"The Story of the Century!": An International Newsfilm Conference*, the proceedings of a 1996 conference on the past, present, and future of newsfilm, contains papers and some transcripts of presentations made at London's National Film Theatre. Although the proceedings were published in the spring of 1998, they are newly available in North America through a distribution agreement with an imprint of the Columbia University Press.

A gathering of professionals, practitioners, and academics held under the aegis of the British Film Institute, the conference covered topics ranging from the introduction of newsreels in the 1890s to television reporting in the 1990s, the eponymous century featured in the title. The participants included news correspondents, producers, directors, students, and scholars of film history. The latter group represented institutions as disparate as Britain's Royal Military Academy and Florida State University, not to mention archivists from Canada, the United States, Britain, and France. During an exhaustive and comprehensive three days in the fall of 1996, the forty-nine participants (whose biographies are found at

the end of the book) created the forty papers reproduced in these proceedings.

These entries have been divided, first chronologically (by day given), then thematically. The first day consisted of the conference commencement and introduction, the keynote address (given by Anthony Smith, president of Oxford University's Magdalen College), and ten other presentations falling under the rubric of "Putting News on the Screen." This day was further divided into three sub-themes: "News Before Newsreels," "Cinema Newsreels," and "Television News." The first of these categories includes the only non-English presentation reproduced in the volume, a study of the birth of French newsreels in the period 1895-1914, given by Michelle Aubert, head of the Services des Archives du Film of France's Centre National de la Cinématographie, and president of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). The first day also included two roundtable discussions concerning personal experiences in producing newsreels and the impact of television on the newsreel whose transcripts are reproduced.

The second day dealt with "The Newsfilm Audience—Who and Why?" and was further divided into "Newsfilm Audiences," "Specialist Interest Newsreels," "Local News," "Newsreels and Digital Technology," "Colonialism and Newsfilm," the "Holocaust," and "Censorship." The top-

ics cover older newsreel history, and even newsreels as created and/or used in India and Rhodesia. This section also includes a description of the unlikely survival of hundreds of newsreels from the 1920s, found buried in a disused swimming pool in Dawson City in Canada's Yukon Territory. A discussion of censorship and control is also provided, with John Simpson (BBC foreign affairs editor) providing responses to questions from the general audience, under the supervision of Roger Smither (the keeper of London's Imperial War Museum's film and video archive).

The third day was concerned with "Newsfilm—Use and Abuse" and was divided into six categories: "The Archive Newsfilm Record"; "Where Has All the Footage Gone?"; "Alternative Newsfilm"; "Use and Abuse"; "Personal Perspectives"; and "Using Archive Newsfilm." The papers given reflect a wide range of historical events, from the film of the 1935 trial of Bruno Richard Hauptmann (the alleged kidnapper of the baby of aviator Charles Lindbergh) through to a panel discussion on the value of film in documentary film production and assessments of its future historical utility. The participants in this discussion included a number of distinguished producers, directors, and newsmen, and was moderated by Clyde Jeavons of the National Film and Television Archive of the British Film Institute.

In gathering these papers and presenting them, first at the conference and then in these published proceedings, the organizers have recognized the innate value of such material. They have also managed to secure serious corporate support for this venture with the conference held under the auspices of British Pathé, along with other historic producers of newsreels (such as Reuters and British Movietone) and several archival repositories. In addition, the proceedings themselves were published with the financial support of the Kraszna-Krausz Foundation, a body dedicated to the support and encouragement of the photographic record.

Not all of the papers and presentations are equally successful in their published incarnations. A number of the presentations were heavily dependant upon video

components. And while the proceedings are illustrated with three sections of black-and-white photographs and accompanied by a brief listing of screenings (p. 170), such references only provide a hint of what is referred to in the text. In addition, many of the presentations were given by practitioners rather than academics, and there is little provided in the way of documentary support or references. Indeed, only two of the forty published presentations include footnotes, although a number of the other presentations contain citations for video components buried in the text. The lack of references is disappointing; nonetheless, a number of these accounts provide first-hand information concerning the history and use of newsfilms. Their utility should not be overlooked.

Newsfilms have long been a valued and distinct source for information, albeit occasionally a misleading, or even fraudulent source. Regardless of this value, there has been a decided dearth of research into the history of this medium. Certainly there have been a limited number of scholarly studies (such as journal articles, or even monographs such as that written by one of the presenters, Raymond Fielding, in a 1972 study from the University of Oklahoma Press, *The American Newsreel 1911-1967*). But this conference was the first devoted to all forms of newsfilm. In doing so, it has helped to fill at least part of the knowledge gap, albeit not fully bridging that gap. Clyde Jeavons recognizes this in his foreword to the proceedings when he writes, "Sadly, a prosaic published volume of this kind cannot reproduce or even convey the visual excitement of the occasion" (p. 5). But, he hastens to add, "we hope that this mixture of formal papers, impromptu presentations and discussion sessions—packed with information ... will at least serve as a vital, permanent and faithful record of what was an enlightening and (not the least of its purposes) entertaining enterprise" (p. 5). An impartial reviewer who did not attend the conference cannot attest to the accuracy of the reproduction of the presentations, but can certainly endorse part of Jeavons' declaration, as the text is what he desired, both entertaining and enlightening. As such it is a worthwhile addition to the study of newsreels, newsfilms, their uses, and their abuses.

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