

Porst, Jennifer, UCLA. “The U.S. v. Twentieth Century-Fox, et al.: How the Forced Disclosure of Documents in Legal Cases Provides an Invaluable Resource for Researchers”

As researchers of film and television history, we are limited by the choices made at some point by media companies to either archive or discard their working documents. We are also restricted by the extent of access granted to resources by companies like Twentieth Century-Fox who still maintain tight control over their archives.

Over the last year, I have had to deal with both of those challenges in my research on the relationship between the film industry and the early television industry in regard to the sale and licensing of feature films to television. I have the good fortune, however, that in 1952 the Department of Justice filed an antitrust lawsuit against the Hollywood studios for not selling or licensing their films to television. The lawsuit forced the studios to organize and retain any documents related to the case, and although the files that currently exist vary from studio to studio, they provide extensive insight into the workings of the studios, theatre organizations, and television industry during that crucial period. I also uncovered a key resource in the case files and transcript of the trial at the National Archives. The record the National Archives has of the testimony from the trial includes information from persons involved with the film and television industries that likely does not exist elsewhere.

For this presentation I would like to discuss the research I conducted in the Twentieth Century-Fox special collections at UCLA, the Warner Brothers special collections at USC, the Margaret Herrick Library, and the National Archives. My experience with this case and these archives have not only illuminated an often overlooked period in film and television history, but has led me to the conclusion that legal cases and their related files provide a wealth of crucial information for cinema and media scholars.

Jennifer Porst is a PhD student in Cinema and Media Studies at UCLA. She is currently working on her dissertation on the struggle over the licensing and sale of Hollywood's feature films to television before 1955.