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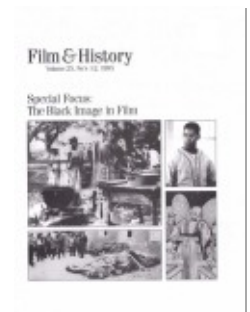
Tales From the Cutting Room Floor

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Peter C. Rollins
Editor-in-Chief

Tales From the Cutting Room Floor

The 1996 American Historical Association Meeting

John O'Connor and Peter Rollins attended the American Historical Association meeting in January this year to field the Historians Film Committee session and to spread the word about its activities as an affiliated organization to the AHA.

On Friday evening, the *Film & History* session addressed the issue of WWII: Propaganda For Everyman. The keynote speaker was Robert Fyne, author of *The Hollywood Propaganda of WWII* (Scarecrow Press, 1995)—and Book Review Editor for *Film & History*. In his inimitable way, Prof. Fyne (Kean College of NJ) described and introduced a 65-minute film entitled *Gangway for Tomorrow* (1944), a film in the “B-movie” mode, aimed at the home front audience of war workers.

A group of factory workers, participating in a car pool, make their way to work. Although ordinary folk on the outside, each has a secret and dramatic life leading up to the factory job and each has been redeemed spiritually by contributing to the national crusade to the defeat of Fascism. In the concluding scene, the workers walk arm-in-arm from the parking lot to the airplane factory where they will contribute to an allied victory.

John O'Connor, author of *The Image as Artifact* (Malabar, Fl.: R.E. Kreiger, 1990) spoke to the audience about how the film could be used to document the war years. He suggested research sources and strategies to enhance an understanding of the images, stressing that “the film is not the only evidence about the film.”



Dr. Robert Fyne: Keynoter.

Peter Rollins suggested ways in which a popular culture scholar might approach the film. The five vignettes in the film (one for each character, explaining the special link to the war experience)



John O'Connor Comments.

are mini-examples of the popular formulae of the film industry—tapping audience exposure to sports/success films; gangster films; entertainment/success films. In addition, the filmmaker clearly molded episodes to trigger memories of such famous films as *Casablanca* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, not to mention *The OxBow Incident*. Indeed, *Gangway for Tomorrow* is a veritable jukebox of recognizable formulas and allusions—and thus a film aimed with great accuracy at a pool of genre associations held by a mass of Americans.

Robert Matson, moderator of the session, opened the discussion to the floor—at which point the room went wild. The audience had so much to say and so many good things to say! People were interrupting each other, they were so excited. The program said “The Audience” at the bottom of the session; little did we know how prophetic the prediction would be. (Prof. Fyne later received an invitation to speak at Oxford University on the topic—minus the commentators, alas.)

Later in the day, the John O'Connor Award (for best historical film) was conveyed to an episode of *The American Experience*, an episode dealing with FDR. It was indeed a pleasure to sit in the audience and hear the O'Connor Award being conveyed. John O'Connor has been an inspiration to us all—the staff, the Editorial Board, and the readers of *Film & History*.



Prof. Matson keeps the peace.

Rob Toplin, film correspondent for *Perspectives*, the newsletter of the American Historical Association, took time to congratulate John O'Connor on the annual success of the O'Connor Award. The two senior professors attend a special reception by H-NET, the internet connection for historians and humanists. (See picture, below.)

A very busy Greg Bush took time out from his interviewing duties to pass on the mantle of Editorship of *Film & History* to Peter Rollins.

We are delighted to announce that our session for the New York meeting of the American Historical Association will feature a distinguished panel chaired by Prof. Robert Toplin. (See picture with John O'Connor.) The auteur of *Nixon*, Oliver Stone will discuss his film. He will be followed by two commentators—George McGovern and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. This cluster of talent and experience should make for a dynamic session at the New York meeting. (Readers will remember that Rob Toplin is assembling a special issue of *Film & History* on Oliver Stone.) Be there!

The Popular Culture/ American Culture Association Meeting

The 1996 meeting was held in Las Vegas. (The 1997 meeting will be in San Antonio.) *Film & History* was represented in two ways: first, Richard Bartone conducted a workshop on selectivity in documentary; second, a reception for readers and helpers brought folks together for conversation and plans.

Bartone Hosts Workshop on the Compilation Film

Richard Bartone ran a ninety-minute workshop for *Film & History*, an event attracting thirty people. Speaking without notes and without microphone, Prof. Bartone (William Paterson College) discussed the issue of selectivity in relation to a project he completed back in the days when he was a film archivist at CBS. For a conference, various archivists were given 90 minutes of tape about the rise of fascism and WWII. They were asked to bring a three-minute edit of “the essence” of the footage to the conference for discussion.

Bartone screened his version of “the essence” and discussed the decisions made as it was produced. He stressed the need to employ the language of film to communicate historical ideas and derided narration-heavy approaches. A British attempt at conveying “the essence” was guilty of “sound conservatism,” the overuse of narration to force picture progression and to override the inherent messages of film materials.

After setting up a contrast between the two approaches to WWII, Bartone presented a series of clips about the 1960s, every academic baby boomer's favorite period. Many participants in the workshop took notes about the clips in anticipation

of a discussion period about "the essence" of the decade as revealed by the selection of raw footage. Interesting and provocative suggestions about a "proper" edit were introduced by Charlene Blair (Bowling Green U), James Ferreira (W Michigan U), Peter Rollins (Oklahoma St U), and others. One lesson that emerged from the session was that the compilation film is subject to as many interpretations as there are historians and filmmakers—the materials speak quite differently to different mindsets. The lesson was not brand new, but the context of a workshop and the dynamics of discussion made it particularly memorable.

Film & History Reception in Vegas

That evening, a reception for *Film & History* friends and staffers allowed people to talk informally. A number of graduate students attended to begin planning how *Film & History* could make itself more visible on the internet. One step has been to establish a WEB site. The WEB site will have a modest beginning, presenting basic data about the journal and carrying a sign-up form for prospective subscribers. Advertisers will have a chance to see what they can do within the journal and to inspect a rate sheet.

The Editorial Board is listed with institutional associations. Finally, the staff—new and old—is presented in detail. As the WEB site is expanded, we will try to carry the table of contents of issues plus the first page of articles in new issues. We are delighted with the prospects for the WEB site and we want to thank the following graduate students for their help in reaching out into cyberspace: David Silver (U Maryland); Elizabeth Abele (Temple U); and at Bowling Green University, Sarah Heck, Laurel Gilbert, Charlene Blair, Bryan Fruth, and Ken Dvorak. (If I left anyone out, I apologize.)

WEB Site for *Film & History*

Please try out our WEB site and suggest what we might do to enhance it. Here is the address in isolation: <http://www.nevada.edu/home/9/draza>

Send suggestions for additions, improvements, etc. to the following local overseer of the WEB site, Kevin O'Brien, at: draza@nevada.edu

Prof. O'Brien (Film Studies, UNLV) has been of enormous help with the WEB site and is to be thanked for his conscientious labors.

The reception adjourned early in the evening so that members could visit the gambling activities to (hopefully) pay for the trip to Las Vegas!

Film & History looks forward to participating in the following conferences and urges readers to attend them:

WWII Conference at Siena College, June 30-31. Peter Rollins, Bob Fyne, Robert Matson will attend.

Literature/Film Association, November 7-9. John O'Connor and Robert Fyne will attend.

IAMHST Conference, Nov. 7-9, 1996. Robert Fyne, John O'Connor, and Peter Rollins will attend.

We are hoping to cull papers from these events after the hosts have made their selections for publication.

Please look for the journal sections feature announcements for future meetings and which describe future special issues. The best way to be published in *Film & History* for the near future is by getting on board one of the special issues. On the other hand, the door is open to manuscripts and we urge you to join us at the many meetings and workshops we see coming up in the 1996-97 academic year.

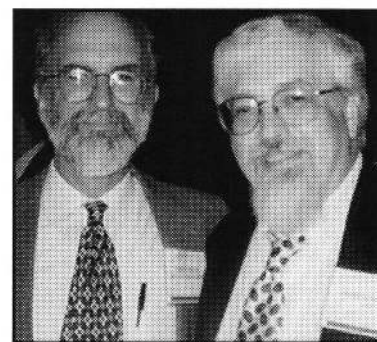
Have a great summer and let us know how you think we are doing. Editorial Board members and veteran film scholars Leslie Fishbein, Daniel Leab, and Tom Cripps have all sent us encouraging notes and letters. Please keep them coming in!

Best regards,

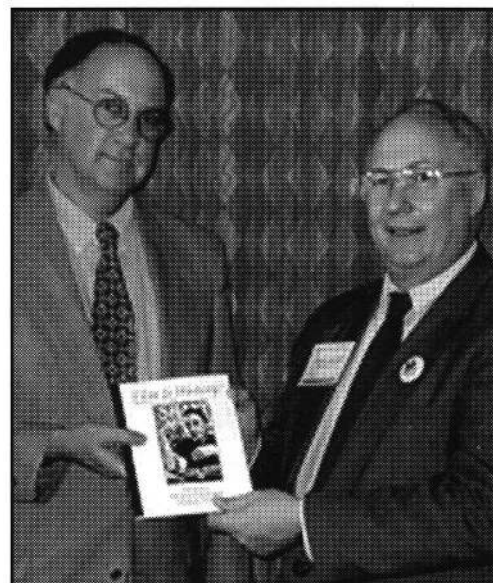


Peter C. Rollins

PS: On a sad note, we announce the death of E. Bradford Burns, an expert on the Latin American film and a good friend to *Film & History* over the years. R.I.P.



Profs. Toplin and O'Connor.



Gregg Bush passes *Film & History* to Peter Rollins.