



Jacob Smith, Lecturer at the Institute of Film and Television Studies, The University of Nottingham

For the first time ever the cross-searchable, full-page images and article images of newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* are available online. The digitisation of these historical resources is part of the *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* programme, an ongoing project that initiates the digitisation of key newspapers dating back to the 1760s through to 2003.

Jacob Smith is a Lecturer at the Institute of Film and Television Studies, which is part of the Department of American and Canadian Studies at The University of Nottingham. He has taught film history, the history of recorded sound, film and television studies, advertising and consumer culture, children's media culture and film musicals. His research centres on the history of broadcasting, performance in the media and the uses of sound in media production. He has a forthcoming book on vocal performance in the media, *Vocal Tracks*.

"Film and TV Studies is really booming, and we get more and more single Honours students. Graduates go on to teach, become journalists, work in cultural industries, do PhDs. One of the things that people write about more and more is that regular corporate work involves knowledge of how the media works. The Institute provides students with a broad understanding of film and television, increasingly crucial knowledge for many professions."

When Jacob started at Nottingham, he joined a board of academic and library

staff. Having found *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* so important to his own historical research at his previous teaching post at Indiana University, he strongly recommended Nottingham Hallward Library to subscribe to the resource. "I use ProQuest as a first stop on research projects. I search for performers, film and television programs, types of performance and other historical phenomena in order to see the ways in which they were discussed in the popular press. It has become an essential part of my research process, helping me to get a sense for how media texts and performances are discussed and understood in the culture at large."

"Doing what I do, using several of the resources, you can get a sense of how phenomena were covered in the press, how topics resonated in the country at large and amazing regional differences pop up. An artist will get enormous coverage in one area and none in another. Especially in the 1920s and 30s, there are coastal media differences going on, which you can track using *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Some television programs and personalities had an intense following in the Midwest, and were covered extensively by *The Chicago Tribune*, but not on the coasts. I've also found circus performers, for example, who are treated as major celebrities by California papers, but get no coverage at all in New York."

As well as finding *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* invaluable for its broadranging scope, Jacob says that access to the resource saves time. "Yes – lots of time. It has also made possible

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ProQuest allows you to search much more broadly and intuitively. You find unexpected connections that you never would have known to look for. It really is my first port of call now, my first point of reference, which then points me in other directions I need to go.

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types of historical research that would not have been possible if I had to go through stacks of newspapers. I was at the British Library yesterday, where you have to painstakingly go through newspapers week by week." He says that as an academic he really enjoys pouring through newspapers, but admitted that "you're lucky if you find what you're looking for, it's kind of a needle in the haystack. ProQuest allows you to search much more broadly and intuitively".

This accessibility has the added benefit of opening up the world of research to students who are new to the discipline. "One student interested in the representation of Italian-Americans in Hollywood films was able to discover and investigate the activities of Italian-American groups who protested films such as *The Godfather*, adding an important dimension to his historical research." Jacob speculates whether some traditionalists might be mindful of making research too easy for students and that they should be learning 'the slog of going through newspapers'. "There is an element of truth in this" he says, "but students today are the Google generation and this makes sense to

them. It gives them the opportunity to see the payoff and they get a sense for the joys of research".

"When you give students this tool, it helps them to experiment themselves. It's an easy first way to give them an idea of the rewards. They can tangibly see results and their essays can be much more than a rehash of other writing. They get excited about research and the fact that they can do it themselves. It's a truly invaluable research tool!"

The University Nottingham is world renowned as a centre for excellence. The Institute of Film and Television Studies, part of the School of American and Canadian Studies, is in the top band of teaching performance nationally. As a major research-led university, staff are all heavily involved in research as well as teaching. In the last three national research selectivity assessments, the School received a Top 5 Research Rating and in the most recent one they were the only American studies school to be awarded the Top 5* rating.



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