

Voices and Viewpoints in Chronicling America: Uses of Historical News for Education and Outreach

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Abstract:

With over 10 million historical newspaper pages now available, the U.S. National Digital Newspaper Program, jointly sponsored by the U.S. Library of Congress and National Endowment for the Humanities, has a robust online archive that spurs varying educational uses. From teacher workshops to personal interest blogs, the content available through Chronicling America: American Historic Newspapers (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>) is re-used in a variety of ways to enhance access to the cultural viewpoints and historic voices represented in the archive. These uses are supported by the principles of open and persistent access using standard data interchange formats incorporated into the technical infrastructure of the site, as well as the program model. Many of the institutions involved have developed outreach activities based on the online content. By promoting use of the content through more channels than any one institution could manage, overall awareness and re-use of the material grows, leveraging each institution's investment.

Keywords: newspapers, education, reuse, digital, cooperative.

Introduction:

For the last three centuries newspapers have developed into an important record of history, from the local to the regional to the national and even the global. Newspapers give voice to political opinions, descriptions of events, satirical humor, cultural information, vital records and economic scenarios. Integrating analysis of newspapers with additional primary resources leads to insights into bias, seminal events, and the gradual pace of progress. In the United States, the free press represented by newspapers have historically provided diverse viewpoints on the development of practically every community in the nation. They are an intrinsic part of the historical record. However, they have also been extremely prolific. More

than 150,000 different newspapers are known to have been published in the US since 1690. Some came and went in a day; some lasted for decades through economic downturns, social upheaval, wars and natural disasters. Each issue can be examined to discover voices and viewpoints throughout American history. These voices and perspectives can be useful in research and educational materials for teaching a broad range of subjects, incorporated into educational classroom materials, primary source sets, even eBooks. Use of the material for other personal research, genealogy, data analysis, and commercial re-use can also lead to a variety of new insights into familiar historical topics – from the evolution of civil rights to linguistics to the effects of the public information on the spread of disease. Outreach to the education and research communities helps teachers learn about primary sources and tools newly available online and provides support for integrating those resources in the classroom.

Begun in 2005, the United States National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP),¹ a partnership between the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Library of Congress (LC), is a long-term effort to provide educators, researchers, and anyone exploring the rich history of the United States permanent access to a national digital resource of selected historic newspapers, eventually from all states and territories. The primary role of the LC in the endeavor is to provide technical support for digitization and aggregate and present the data. To that end, more than 10 million pages collected by NDNP to date are searchable through the LC-hosted Chronicling America site² by keyword, date, state, language, and individual newspaper.

To join the program, interested state organizations submit an application to the NEH and those selected are provided funding to digitize 100,000 pages of newspapers from their states for inclusion in the collection. The NDNP relies on each state to select and curate its own newspaper content. State libraries, historical societies, and universities submit newspapers dated from 1836 to 1922 that shine a light on the unique cultural, economic, social, and political characteristics of their states.

The newspapers are selected by each state to reflect the impact geographic diversity had on these characteristics. Louisa Trott, project coordinator of the Tennessee Newspaper Digitization Project says of the selection process, “From the outset of the project, TNNDP’s Advisory Board has endeavored to select titles that will provide educators, students, and researchers with an extensive range of voices and viewpoints.” During the selection process, the Tennessee advisory board sought to incorporate newspapers that also reflected the state’s expanse. “The state’s diversity is immediately apparent in its distinct geographic regions, known as the three Grand Divisions (West, Middle, and East). Advisory Board discussions emphasized the importance of including papers not only from these three regions, but equally from a cross-section of the state’s four major cities and a wide variety of smaller, rural towns (where the majority of the population lived during the timeframe of this project).” This focus on geographic diversity provides surprising perspectives on familiar topics. While Tennessee joined the Confederacy during the Civil War, East Tennessee remained sympathetic to the Union. One Tennessee newspaper in Chronicling America, *Brownlow’s Weekly Whig*, boldly proclaimed itself as “the last and only Union paper left in the eleven seceded States.”³ In addition to broad geographic coverage, the Tennessee advisory board, as do many of the other state advisory boards, sought to present a cultural cross-section of its citizens. Ms. Trott notes, “A diversity of voices and viewpoints can be found...in

¹ <http://www.loc.gov/ndnp/>

² <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

³ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045630/1861-10-26/ed-1/seq-2/>

newspapers published by African Americans and women, to German-language papers and papers from utopian communities.”⁴

Chronicling America picks up the story of the United States in 1836 – 60 years after the *Declaration of Independence* and a mere 43 years after the writing of the American Constitution – and continues telling it until 1922 (when American newspapers begin to fall under copyright) and currently includes newspapers from 37 states and territories. Given its scope and depth, it provides rich digitized material from perhaps the only egalitarian institution of the day: the nation’s newspapers. Simply put, Chronicling America gives voice to the people.

Historic Themes and Chronicling the Promise of America

There are many versions of the American tale, versions derived from a diversity of perspectives and told in the strains of many voices and accents, spanning decades and geographical space. It is the mission of the National Digital Newspaper Program to provide access to these uniquely American stories. For this paper, we will use the story of suffrage in America as an example, describing how that tale was woven throughout the newspapers of the period and how researcher and educators use Chronicling America to discover and understand that story and other stories.

In the *Declaration of Independence* (1776), Thomas Jefferson eloquently spoke of “inalienable rights” and governments “...deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Ironically, two classes of Americans – one figuratively born in chains and the other literally in chains – were legally barred from giving their consent to be governed. The *Constitution of the United States* as enacted in 1789 left the issue of voting rights to the states, none of which granted suffrage to women at that time. In addressing the status of African-Americans, the Constitution stated that they were not citizens: 60% of their total number would be counted only for the purpose of apportioning states’ representation in Congress. Thus, the struggle for true American enfranchisement was left to future generations.

Suffrage for Women

In July 1848, 200 women gathered to discuss their own treatise of government. At the Seneca Falls Convention in the state of New York, women drafted and revised *The Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances*. The opening phrase echoed Jefferson’s words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” The nation’s newspapers reported on this meeting and subsequent meetings of women’s rights advocates. The 17 August 1848 *Daily Crescent* covered “Another Women’s Rights Convention” held in Rochester, New York, in relatively positive terms, “The proceedings throughout were of a highly interesting character, and the discussions of the convention evinced a talent for forensic efforts seldom surpassed.”

⁵ Coverage like this bolstered the movement’s efforts and may have contributed to subsequent gains in the battle for women’s suffrage. Still, it was a long road to progress and newspapers were far from unified in this support; seventy years later, a 1918 ad in the *Tulsa Daily World* read “Discriminating Against Mother. Protect the Family and Vote ‘No’ on the Woman Suffrage Amendment.”⁶ This ad is featured along with other historic materials in

⁴ Trott, Louisa. E-mail interview. 31 July 2015.

⁵ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015378/1848-08-17/ed-1/seq-3/>

⁶ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042344/1918-11-03/ed-1/seq-31/>

LC's primary source set on Women's Suffrage.⁷ A variety of these sets, on themes frequently taught in American education, are available from the LC Web site. Two short years after that advertisement, the 19th amendment was ratified, giving women the right to vote.

Suffrage for African Americans

At the Seneca Falls Convention, a few male invitees objected to its explicit demand for women's suffrage. Frederick Douglass, a prominent African-American activist, however, stood up and declared his support for the resolution, later giving an "eloquent and argumentative appeal for women and women's rights," as recorded in contemporary accounts.⁸ Abolitionist, author, newspaper editor, and escaped slave, Douglass ardently sought suffrage for all, including himself and his fellow African-Americans. Newspaper reports, such as these, can be used to follow the evolution of public attitudes and bring new perspective to these events and their impact on American history.

Eventually, this suffrage arrived with the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, which freed slaves and granted equal protection under the law, including the right to vote. Tragically, this came at the cost of a devastating civil war that killed approximately 700,000 and wounded over 400,000. The war's tumultuous aftermath also claimed the life of President Abraham Lincoln.

Using Chronicling America, users can learn more about how the nation, recently at war with itself, reacted to this critical event. Most newspapers from the states, territories, and overseas nations published the news of Lincoln's death along with expressions of grief and sadness. The 17 April 1865 edition of the *Cleveland Morning Leader* declared the assassination "The Affliction of the Nation! Terrible Grief of the North" and published reports from around the country and the world.⁹ The 18 April 1865 issue of *Der Lecha Caunty Patriot*, a German-language publication from Pennsylvania read, "Traure, Columbia, Traure! Die drohung der secessionisten im süden und deren fruende im nordern verwirklicht" (Mourn Columbia, Mourn! The threat of the secessionists and their friends in the south is carried out in the north).¹⁰

Meanwhile in Hawaii, residents were unaware that the war had ended, let alone that the president had been assassinated because the news had not yet traveled the long distance across the nation and the Pacific Ocean. Fifteen days after the president's death *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* was reporting that General Lee was on the verge of surrender and that President Lincoln was in Richmond, Virginia "...actually engaged in the business of peace."¹¹ It was not until 13 May 1865 that the *Advertiser* reported simultaneously on the end of the Civil War and on the assassination, calling Lincoln's death "Terrible News."¹²

Still, not all newspapers expressed sorrow over Lincoln's death, illustrating the fractured state of contemporary American society. An article in the 27 April 1865 edition of the *Columbia Phoenix* pointed an accusing finger at the "Yankee authorities" who attempted "to fasten suspicion on the leaders of the Confederates at Richmond." The article continued, "We have

⁷ http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/womens-suffrage/pdf/teacher_guide.pdf

⁸ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015378/1848-08-17/ed-1/seq-3/>

⁹ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035143/1865-04-17/ed-1/seq-2/>

¹⁰ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035143/1865-04-17/ed-1/seq-2/>

¹¹ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015418/1865-04-29/ed-1/seq-4/>

¹² <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015418/1865-05-13/ed-1/seq-3/>

no sort of sympathy for the victims. They deserved their fate – we may say they provoked it – and we only wonder that something of the kind did not take place long ago.”¹³ Through the examples in Chronicling America, these voices provide new perspective and understanding of society and culture during events renowned for their historical importance.

This representation of editorial resentment continued well into the post-war Reconstruction period, with particular vitriol towards the 15th Amendment which granted African-American men the right to vote. One provocative headline in *The Democrat* read: “Radical Villainy O’erleaps Itself.” The writer of the 27 June 1870 article railed against “the present radical Congress” for passing laws “exclusively in the interest of the negro”, later hoping that “...the radical negro and the Fifteenth Amendment Party...hoisted upon their own petard.”¹⁴ As with women’s suffrage, African-Americans were able to declare incremental victories with the election of African-Americans to local, state, and federal offices and, ultimately, the presidency of the United States of America.

Using newspapers to illustrate the principles of the fight for suffrage for both women and African Americans brings the voices of the past alive. Newspapers from across the continent reported on this struggle in many languages, in cities and in territories. The story of suffrage is one of many multifaceted stories illustrated in Chronicling America. Students, genealogists, teachers, and historians have discovered these stories and have repurposed the site’s poems, political cartoons, jokes, articles and advertisements in expected and unexpected ways. Content from Chronicling America has appeared in individual works like documentaries on slavery¹⁵ and textbooks on the media landscape.¹⁶ But the content has also been harvested en masse by digital humanities researchers and commercial genealogy sites. This wide variety of reuse has been accomplished by making the content as accessible as possible as well as promoting the use of the content via outreach activities.

National and Local Educational Outreach

In the United States, there has been an increased emphasis on critical analysis skills and a push for the use of informational texts (as opposed to literature) in support of new educational standards referred to as the Common Core. Historic newspapers fit these requirements, and educational outreach ensures that teachers are both aware of the newspapers and can seamlessly fit them into the curriculum.

The NDNP relies upon existing national and state-based networks for educational outreach, rather than trying to create new programs. At the national level, the NDNP reaches teachers and students via the educational outreach program at the Library of Congress (LC) and via the EDSITEment program at the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Both institutions provide teaching tools and topic guides for exploring Chronicling America.

On the local level, the individual state projects often have deep roots in outreach that they leverage for increasing awareness of these historical newspapers. Many state projects, particularly state historical societies, host field trips from local schools and are active participants in National History Day, a nationwide history project competition for middle- and high-school students. Other state projects, such as university libraries, have created

¹³ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84027006/1865-04-27/ed-1/seq-2/>

¹⁴ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026840/1870-06-27/ed-1/seq-1/>

¹⁵ Streeter, S. (Director/Producer). (2014). Episode Two: The Age of Slavery [Television series episode]. In H.L. Gates, Jr. (Producer), *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*. Washington, DC: PBS.

¹⁶ Turow, J. (2011) *Media Today*, 4e. New York, NY: Routledge.

research guides to support student inquiry¹⁷ and built ties to education and journalism departments. For example, in the North Carolina project, journalism graduate students draft the newspaper histories that enhance title information in Chronicling America. These national and state outreach networks know how to best reach and support teachers, from classroom tools to social media campaigns to professional development offerings.

Classroom Tools: Primary Source Sets

One incredible asset of working with educational outreach staff is their expertise in creating tools for the classroom, from full lesson plans¹⁸ to primary source sets and analysis tools.¹⁹ These tools pair newspapers with other relevant contemporary materials to create discovery tools on specific topics. A forthcoming primary source set on Lincoln's assassination juxtaposes the *Columbia Phoenix* article mentioned earlier with Whitman's "O' Captain, my Captain" and a diary entry on Lincoln's death, showing how a single event can be captured in a multitude of writing styles and from opposing perspectives. By aggregating these sources into a set, teachers easily grab the whole collection, including sources that may have required curatorial knowledge to find otherwise. For example, the diary entry comes from a patent examiner's manuscript collection. His account, though, draws on the recollections of his son, one of the physicians at Lincoln's deathbed.

Classroom Tools: Primary Source Analysis Tools

Historic newspapers also provoke readers to ask questions about bias, relative importance based on page layout, and how the content type matters. Editorials, advertisements, and political cartoons—each type has a special set of attributes to consider and inspect. In a Teaching with the Library of Congress blog post, Stephen Wesson commented on this heteroglossia, "In a typical paper from 1900, you might find factual reporting, fire-breathing editorials, biographical profiles, literary nonfiction, weather reports, box scores, charts, graphs, maps, cartoons, and a poem about current events—maybe even all on the same page!"²⁰ The primary source analysis tools help students parse these differences. An analysis tool developed for political cartoons encourages students to ask "What do you see that might be a symbol? What do you think the cartoonist's opinion on the issue is?"²¹

Classroom Tools: Lesson Plans

In addition to the primary source itself, outreach can be based on developing curriculum guides and actual lesson plans for use in the classroom. One lesson plan available from the LC site, "Suffrage Strategies: Voices for Votes," includes the *Tulsa Daily World* anti-suffrage advertisement referenced earlier.²² "Discriminating Against Mother" provides a starting point for students, spurring them to consider how an advertisement differs from an article and helps students see the push-and-pull of history. State partners such as the Vermont Digital Newspaper Project²³ and the Ohio Memory projects²⁴ have also created lesson plans in alignment with local standards and curricula.

¹⁷ <http://guides.library.sc.edu/content.php?pid=227314&sid=1888383>

¹⁸ <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/>

¹⁹ <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>

²⁰ <http://blogs.loc.gov/teachers/2013/03/teaching-with-informational-text-historic-newspapers-from-the-library-of-congress/>

²¹ <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>

²² <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/suffrage/>

²³ http://library.uvm.edu/vtnp/?page_id=1904

²⁴ http://apps.ohiohistory.org/ondp/images/8/88/LessonPlan_OhioAsAmerica_Grade8_ChronAm.pdf

Professional Development

Nearly all teachers in the United States report participating in professional development activities during the year,²⁵ and many states require professional development as part of renewing a state teaching certificate or license.²⁶ Due to the new push by the Common Core standards, teaching with primary sources has become a popular topic for these courses. During Summer Teacher's Institutes held on-site at the Library of Congress, teachers are exposed to Chronicling America and other Library of Congress resources. These teachers are often thrilled to find hometown papers and are excited by how easy it is for students to access the resource.

At the state-level, subject-based professional development courses are often administered by colleges or universities fluent in state requirements for recertification and graduate credits. Opportunities to further exploit the NDNP content also exist within these programs. For example, NDNP has participated in courses designed and hosted by universities in Virginia and Colorado on topics of local interest, such as coal-mining labor disputes, providing live tutorials and insights into techniques in discovering content relative to the theme.

Social Media for Educational Outreach

Social media can be an excellent way of reaching teachers, and one popular tool is Twitter. Eleven NDNP state projects have Twitter accounts promoting the use of newspapers and specific articles of interest, and the LC and NEH educational outreach Twitter accounts (@teachinglc and @EDSITEment) have thousands of followers that primarily reach an audience of educators. Tweets often include hashtags with traction in the educational field, like #APUSH for Advanced Placement United States History and #sschat for social studies chat, with content-specific hashtags like #chronam and #chroniclingamerica. Thus the messages are highly targeted and relevant to the people receiving the tweets. The tweets are also in tune with the school calendar, posting about national teacher conferences when they occur or posting lesson plans during the summer when teachers are preparing for the fall semester.

Beyond Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest (two other popular social media tools for LC, NEH, and state partners) blogs provide a fantastic opportunity to connect with teachers, identifying great primary source material as well as providing context as related to teaching particular subjects. A blog post on “Teaching Difficult Subjects Using Primary Sources” garnered such feedback that it prompted a follow up post, “Teaching Difficult Subjects Using Primary Sources: Our Readers Respond.”²⁷ In that follow up, one reader suggested using Chronicling America to illustrate how word usage reflected contemporary attitudes.

But social media is not just a method for reaching out to teachers, it can also show how teachers are integrating content into their classrooms. For example, the images in Chronicling America have embedded source metadata; searching for these metadata tags surfaced a user-generated Pinterest board for a Civil War lesson plan (#teachcivilwar) with Chronicling America content.²⁸

²⁵ https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2013314_t1s_008.asp

²⁶ <http://www.teachtomorrow.org/continuing-education-for-teachers/>

²⁷ <http://blogs.loc.gov/teachers/2012/01/teaching-difficult-subjects-our-readers-respond/>

²⁸ <https://www.pinterest.com/markwestpfahl3/teachcivilwar-twitter-lesson-plan/>

Social Media for Genealogists and Others

Of course, social media is not exclusively for teachers. Genealogists and historians (#twitterstorians) are very active users of these tools. The majority of Pinterest pins using Chronicling America source tags are genealogy-related.²⁹ Social media also complements in-person outreach efforts; most state projects report providing outreach to genealogy-interest groups in the past year. Similar URI-based trackbacks for Chronicling America content include Linkypedia³⁰, which tracks the number of time Wikipedia users refer to Chronicling America pages (over 5,500 during the last 2014 crawl), and @Paperbot, which retweets all tweets that include links to Chronicling America (over 10,000 tweets to date, including some system-related and machine-generated messages).³¹

Open Access to Chronicling America Data

The National Digital Newspaper Program allows diverse voices to be heard together. From the program's start, some uses of the content could be guessed at, such as educational use and genealogy. However, it was also a given that the data would be reused in a number of unexpected ways. Thus, the program strove to build a standard and consistent data model with a flexible and robust access mechanism.³²

The simple and well-documented application programming interface (API) has encouraged instructors to use Chronicling America as a learning tool in the digital humanities classroom. For his Introduction to Digital Scholarship class at the University of Oregon, John Russell noted: "In general, having the capacity to take the JSON [a Web data interchange format] from search results and import into R [a common data analysis tool] means that it is so easy to work with the Chronicling America data. The API means, for me, that it's an obvious source for teaching students how to do digital scholarship, particularly when there are so few other sites where there are easy to use APIs. Even without R, it is not especially difficult to find JSON to CSV converters that allow you to upload your results into something like Google Maps Engine to make a quick, simple map."³³

Another tool created in response to researcher requests is an OCR bulk data download feature.³⁴ These OCR sets have been used in several projects. One project text-mined newspaper reports during the 1918 Influenza Pandemic.³⁵ An offshoot project will conduct similar research on the 1889-1893 Russian Influenza Epidemic and will include newspapers from Chronicling America as well as other digitized newspapers from the United States and Europe.³⁶ Another project is the ViralTexts.org, that maps how content was republished in different newspapers and highlights unique cross-state connections. For example, one newspaper published in Vermont and one in Missouri ran a surprising amount of shared material; after investigating the duplication, the researchers discovered that the editors of the publications were relatives.

²⁹ <http://pinterest.com/source/chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

³⁰ <http://linkypedia.inkdroid.org>

³¹ <https://twitter.com/paperbot>

³² Yarasavage, N., Thomas, D., and Higley, G. (2014) *Bulking up: how accepted standards and evolving technology advance research in Chronicling America*, presented at IFLA Newspapers 2014, Salt Lake City, Utah.

³³ Russell, John. E-mail interview. 6 January 2015.

³⁴ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ocr/>

³⁵ <http://www.flu1918.lib.vt.edu/>

³⁶ <http://www.neh.gov/divisions/odh/grant-news/announcing-6-nehdfg-bilateral-digital-humanities-program-awards>

Beyond the technical tools and the site itself, people are the greatest asset in this type of outreach. In addition to transparency and easy access, the NDNP provides support mechanisms such as a “chronam-users” group,³⁷ API documentation on site,³⁸ and individual support mechanisms (conference calls with researchers or emailed reference questions) to those wishing to use Chronicling America content.

Overall, throughout America’s history, people have believed that they, too, could add their voices to the American story. Despite cultural, economic, social, and political obstacles, they had faith that they would experience the promise of July 4, 1776. Chronicling America covers these struggles throughout the building of the nation. This unique repository encompasses the myriad stories that span America’s history and provides the greatest possible access to its users, in the hope that all voices will be heard, lost stories will be found, and new narratives will be written.

³⁷ <http://listserv.loc.gov/archives/chronam-users.html>

³⁸ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/about/api/>