Archives in Context

Season 9 Episode 6: Rachel Antell and Stephanie Jenkins

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SPEAKERS

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Emily Mathay 00:00
From the Society of American Archivists, this is *Archives in Context*, a podcast highlighting archival literature and technologies, and most importantly, the people behind them.

Lauren Kata 00:26
Welcome to another episode of *Archives in Context*, everyone. I'm your cohost Lauren Kata.

Emily Mathay 00:32
And I'm Emily Mathay.

Lauren Kata 00:34
We're pretty excited today to be talking with two people whose engagement with archives is actually in a different realm than what Emily and I have experienced as archivists, and that is the realm of archives and documentary filmmaking. We're talking today with two leaders of the Archival Producers Alliance, Rachel Antell and Stephanie Jenkins. We'll talk with them and learn more about the role of archival producers and the role of the Archival Producers Alliance in advocating for their work.

Emily Mathay 01:02
Rachel Antell has worked in documentary film production for over two decades, but found her true passion in archival producing. In 2014, she cofounded Sub-Basement Archival, where she's had the honor of being archival producer on dozens of documentaries that have screened worldwide, and garnered FOCAL Awards and an Emmy nomination for research and use of archival footage. In 2023, Rachel co-founded the Archival Producers Alliance (APA) to organize archival producers, educate the film community about the craft, and advocate for the field. The APA's first initiative addresses Generative AI's impact on documentary film and archival work. Stephanie Jenkins has been making historical documentaries for fifteen years, primarily as an archival producer and producer with Ken Burns. She has also contributed research to multiple outlets including *The New York Times*, *Radiolab*, *This American Life*, as well as independent films. In 2023, she cofounded the Archival Producers Alliance and cowrote *Best Practices for Use of Generative AI in Documentaries*. The APA is working closely with

non-fiction mediamakers and archivists to protect the historic record in the age of Generative AI. Thank you, Rachel and Stephanie for joining our podcast. So excited to talk to you.

Stephanie Jenkins 02:13
Really great to be here.

Emily Mathay 02:14
So, how'd the two of you come together? How do you guys know each other?

Stephanie Jenkins 02:19
Rachel and I, along with Jen Petrucelli, our other codirector of the APA, we all met actually on an Association for Moving Image Archivists Zoom. We were archival producers there, and you know, immediately there was- there was chemistry. I knew that we had a shared passion for making archives accessible. That particular Zoom that we met on was about local television news preservation, and it just became clear immediately that we just had so much in common. And so, when they circled back to me later, we really entered each other's lives in a huge way.

Rachel Antell 02:59
Jen and I are based in California, in the Bay Area, and Steph is in New York, so I don't know that we would have met otherwise. And it was when Jen and I started to see generative AI entering our work, and we were trying to figure out what to do, we reached back out to Steph. This was about a year later.

Lauren Kata 03:15
Okay, so you're both archival producers. What does it mean to be an archival producer, and how did you find your way to this role?

Rachel Antell 03:23
I had worked in documentary film in a few different areas of it for about a decade, primarily producing, doing some editing, but then I was working on a very archive heavy film called *Regarding Susan Sontag* by director Nancy Kates, used archives in a really, really beautiful way. The director was very creative, and we did a very deep dive into like her journals and letters and all these different things. And it was this challenge of trying to tell the life of a writer and a thinker, and that's not a very visual thing. So, it was the challenge of using archival imagery and sound and footage to create a visual language. And I was really excited by that process, and just by the deep dive and finding out, you know, being able to actually hold her journals and- and just touch her life in that way; it was a really exciting thing. And so that kind of- I ended up doing a lot of the archival work on that film, and it got me excited about archival producing. And so, then I reached out to Jen Petrucelli, who we mentioned, and she was doing some archival work on another film, and we decided to form a small company called Sub-Basement that would just focus on the archival producing of films. So, since then, we've worked on dozens of films together, and mainly, you know, some are independent. A lot of them are independent films made by individual filmmakers who have a passion project and are stringing together grants. And then other times, we work on bigger projects that are out of Netflix or *Nat Geo* or ESPN or wherever.

Stephanie Jenkins 04:57
Yeah, and I- I got started first as an intern with- with Ken Burns and Florentine Films. Actually, I started interning in 2007. This week marks my fifteen-year anniversary with them. I would say, in general, I'm a relatively indecisive person, but somehow I decided as a teenager that I wanted to make historical documentaries for public television, and I set my sights on that and- and here we are. What I really love about the work, both watching it and making it, is that you get to do a really deep dive into a subject and really breathe it, and that's

where the storytelling comes from. So, I got started as a production assistant and assistant editor on a film called *The Central Park Five*, and then was the associate producer and did archival and a lot of music licensing on a Jackie Robinson biography. And it was on that film that I touched 16-millimeter film for the first time. I went to the Fox News Archive with the amazing Brian Sargent. And I saw this, you know, sort of pizza box filled with 16-millimeter film, and I was like, wait, this tiny box represents how much of what's out there? And I just got so excited about being able to be in the presence of history in this very physical way, and think about, whoa, how do we make this more accessible? How do we explore what these images mean and why it is that they were saved in the first place? And I really got the bug at that point and then made it a much bigger part of my practice. So, I have a few other Ken projects under my belt, along with collaborators Dave McMahon and Sarah Burns and I produced and- archival produced an eight-hour Muhammad Ali series. And then I've been really enjoying and very deliberate about doing kind of freelance projects as well. So, one I'm really proud of from last year is I worked closely with the *New York Times* Op-Docs team on a series that we developed called *Encore*, where we went and found archival documentaries from the past- short documentaries- and put them on the *New York Times* platform so they would be in conversation with modern short documentaries, because short documentaries are often not- they never found commercial distribution and are often hard to access. So, one that I particularly love is called *Two* by Louis Johnson, which was sitting at the Film-Makers' Co-Op, and no one had checked out the film print since the 1960s, and we were able to secure the rights and all the music rights and all that stuff, and people could watch it on the *New York Times*. And so, yeah, I'm always trying to look to see how we can recontextualize the past, put it in the present, and be in community with and in conversation about all those things.

Lauren Kata 07:52
You mentioned research is a big part of the work, as well as, you know, research and something like rights management and- and the question that as archivists, we often get that is not always easy to answer, is, you know, what's a typical day, what's a typical week in the- in the life? And so, I'm wondering, how would you answer that about being an archival producer?

Stephanie Jenkins 08:14
It really depends on the project and where you are in the life of a project. So, for example, right now I'm producing an eight-hour series about reconstruction, the time after the Civil War. So, I'm deep into pulling in photographs. I'm in a deep research and sort of logging phase of pulling in photographs from, you know, what will end up being probably 200 archives from all around the world of this time period. And I think about this, part of the project is sort of creating a painter's palette of images for the directors and writers and editors to work with. With archival producing it's- you're kind of in preproduction, production, and post-production all at the same time, because you're- you're researching, that's the preproduction. You're getting it to everyone, that's the production. But you're also always thinking about budget and what will be possible and how you will get things on time into the finished film, and that's post-production.

Rachel Antell 09:13
And we get pulled into films at very different stages. I mean, the gold standard, of course, is to be brought in at the very beginning, maybe even before production, so that filmmakers can really think about their budget and their timeline and have an archival producer's eye on, you know, the subject from the very beginning, about thinking and helping them think through what's possible and how they should be directing the film, in terms of the archival. But that isn't always possible; films aren't always financed in a way that they can bring an archival producer on that long or have one in-house in that way. So, the process is usually, if we are brought in early, we'll do- we'll throw the net really wide for the subject and figure out what archives have the collections that we're going to be excited about and that we can start really digging into. And then at a later stage, the editor starts working with what we've brought in, and they may then come back to us, and there's a lot of back and

forth with them as they're editing specific scenes, and they're realizing there are certain moments they'd like to, you know, be able to see, or an interview subject mentions a story and they want to find out if there's any material to- to cover that, to show that story. We'll then go back and start to look at other archives, or go deeper into the archives we've already looked at. And then as we go along, budget does become a really big part of things, and we tend to do- well, for one thing, it's very important we always set up a tracking system, hopefully a really robust tracking system, and that's something an archival producer does for any film, where they're keeping track of where everything's coming from, what the right situations are for each one, doing a lot of keywording and tagging in terms of time period and style and, you know, many other things depending on the film. And then we do a review, usually, maybe late, rough cut, early, fine cut. We'll want to do a- they'll spit out- an editor will spit out what's called an EDL, which is an edit decision list that's just archival, and we can go through and see what is the archival that's actually being used, because we bring in usually thousands of clips and images, but maybe they're only using a couple hundred at that point. And so, we always will look through that and make sure that these are all things that we can clear, and, you know, that are going to be able to work and afford, both clear and afford, and then that gives them time to adjust the edit. So, we're part of that process. And then at the end, of course, we're very involved in the licensing and clearances and mastering of all the materials that are used. And sometimes we get brought in very late in a process. Sometimes people haven't hired an archival producer, and they've just been pulling stuff from archives and, honestly, off the web, and then they bring us in to see if we can track down rights holders and clear the material for them, and that obviously is not the best way to do things, but it is a reality in the documentary world, which is terribly underfunded right now, and it's more and more unfortunately what we're seeing happen.

Stephanie Jenkins 12:13
And the only thing I'll add to that is we're in constant communication with archives. So, when a production brings on an archival producer, what you're bringing on is that individual, of course, but then also their whole network of relationships with- with archives, with rights holders, their whole set of knowledge around how long it might take or the cost of certain things. And that's actually one of my favorite parts of the job is having kind of a reason and excuse to get in touch with- with my favorite archives and archivists. We're not supposed to have favorites, but, you know, we do.

Emily Mathay 12:53
I'm relating so hard to this. When you're brought into a project, I feel like, you know, I don't work as an archival producer, but I do work with students, and it is kind of funny; some students contact you at the beginning of the semester, and some of them contact you the night before the paper is due, and that changes how you can help them out. So, it's nice to see that it's true of all areas of the profession.

Stephanie Jenkins 13:16
Oh, yes. An archivist friend of mine who works in New Orleans, he talks about how if he gets an urgent request, he gets really dumb, really quick. In other words, he finds a reason to not answer that question, because he knows it's just, if it's a rush, he can't do the right job.

Emily Mathay 13:34
As you're both talking about, I think, all this- this licensing work, all I can like think about in my head is how much copyright kind of freaks me out in what I do, and I don't do stuff like, you know, in the documentary world. So I- could you talk a little bit more about navigating copyright? I don't know if- that's interesting to me.

Stephanie Jenkins 13:54
A lot of it is understanding the risk tolerance of your team and really understanding, you know, hopefully if the film has distribution, what is acceptable as far as claiming fair use for something on Netflix versus something on

HBO versus something on PBS. It's all different and speaks to different cultures in the different places. I happen to also really like figuring out copyrights and ownership of footage and of music, because to me it speaks to how something has been preserved. It's a sort of like chain of title, but that's sort of a unique and probably why I'm in this job is that I'm curious about these things. I'll also say something that can be really difficult to explain to people when they're maybe starting out or pulling things from YouTube, is that often who owns the underlying copyright to something and then who owns a copy to something are different. So, you're often explaining that you might need to do a double license somewhere or that there might be multiple rights holders, and that's when things can get really complicated and really expensive.

Rachel Antell 15:04
You know, we work very closely with copyright attorneys, so there's always a review at a couple points during the filmmaking process to make sure that if you are claiming fair use for anything, you really do have a, you know, a fair use claim, and also that you are touching on all the right rights holders. You've identified who all the rights holders are, and if you can't identify, that you've really done due diligence to find all of those rights holders. And it's a good thing to work with archives that you trust as well, because some archives have a really good handle on what they know and what they don't know. And you can trust that if they're saying this is the rights holder and this is cleared, that that is the case, and other ones, you can't. There are a lot of clearing houses now, and they have media from all different places, and we sort of try to steer the filmmakers we work with towards the archives that we feel we can trust implicitly, because there is going to be less risk down the line. And, you know, we feel like we can- they can vouch for their materials.

Stephanie Jenkins 16:03
Yeah, and I want to give a shout out here to our Senior Advisor Dr. Patricia Aufderheide, who was a co-author of *Documentary Filmmakers' Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use*. She and Peter Jaszi, who really spearheaded this project, saw, I'd say in like the early 2000s, that documentary filmmakers didn't necessarily understand their fair use rights, or their rights to fair use the news, which meant that only very particular stories could be told by very particular people, i.e., people who had the funds to license materials. And they did a job that I think really has changed the game as far as teaching filmmakers that if they're commenting on the news, if they're commenting on material that they want to include in their films, that they could get a fair use claim and thus be able to use it in their films without paying for the copyright of it.

Rachel Antell 16:56
And just understanding what transformative use looks like and what that means, which I think has become a more- of more second nature for a lot of filmmakers. I think it is part of the vocabulary at this point, but it is a really important piece of how things have evolved over, like, the last twenty years or so.

Emily Mathay 16:57
So, the APA has three main initiatives, the first of which is, and I'm going to quote from your website, creating standards for and assessing impacts of generative AI in non-fiction media and audiovisual archives, and you posted an open letter detailing the challenges the documentary community is facing; the biggest of which revolve around authenticity, integrity, and ethics, which are really big concepts. And in a major effort to confront these issues, the APA released a set of *Best Practices Guidelines*, along with the toolkit, for *Use of Generative AI in Documentaries*. Could you speak a little more about, first, how you started working on the guidelines and what that process was like? And second, although it might seem obvious to our listeners, but you never want to assume, why is the historical record in need of protection in this age of generative AI?

Stephanie Jenkins 18:01

A great place to- to answer the second part of that question would be to talk through the- the four pillars of our guidelines. They are: the Value of Primary Sources, Transparency, Legal Considerations, and Ethical Considerations of Creating Human Simulations. On the historic record, something that's really tricky that we're all becoming more and more familiar with about generative AI and synthetic media is that it seems uncannily real, but it's not real. What we say in the guidelines is that primary sources, the owner, the context, and the intent of the creation and of the preservation, can be known and wrestled with and debated, which are all key parts of understanding our shared history. But by contrast, AI software, algorithmic software, often pulls from multiple unknown sources, creating realistic-seeming materials that can often mislead audiences into thinking they are real. So, GenAI materials are elements with perceived authority, with no accountability of authorship. At the heart of what it is that we're doing as filmmakers, as people who work in preservation or alongside preservationists, is to make sure that what is real is understood as real. The part that I think was, in some ways, the hardest to wrestle down, is thinking about the value of primary sources. It's not just that these new things you know need to be reckoned with and they're always changing, but that there is something inherently valuable about primary sources and then- so then, from there, transparency basically says, if you're using synthetic media, your team needs to know and your audience needs to know, and that will actually heighten the audience's appreciation of the film because they're in on your process. And then legal considerations says that we don't yet know what about synthetic media engines will be considered legal or not legal. There are so many open lawsuits around copyright. There's so much about copyright in the US and then also throughout the world. So, what's considered copyrightable that's created by a large language model in the US is different than it is in Abu Dhabi, than it is in Hong Kong, than it is in Tokyo. So, it's something that as we are so aware as archival producers, you're trying to make a film for an international audience at this point, is using synthetic media going to somehow get in the way of that? And then the last is Ethical Considerations of Creating Human Simulations, which is a fancy way of saying deepfakes. So, if you're going to create a simulation of someone, you really need to think about participant care. Is this person able to give their consent? What does it mean to raise someone from the dead, if you're using- if you're putting their voice into a synthetic voice model and having them say something? What does that mean? And really making sure that your team is all on the same page and that your participants are on the same page. Because when you're taking someone's voice or their body or even a sacred or historic site, you really need to think about the implications moving forward of creating a new historic record, which seems real when you're using a voice.

Rachel Antell 21:39
Emily, you also asked about why the historic record needs protecting, and it seems like a lot of people are really focused on how AI is changing the future, but not a lot are really focused on what happens if we change our understanding of the past. So, generative AI, even with all of its power and promise, it's brought with it the ability to rewrite history, you know, both through the creation of fake historical imagery, but also by sowing doubt in the authentic. I mean, right now, we're at a time of, like, all time low trust in media. Most people would say they don't trust what they see on the internet, even on the news, necessarily, but historically, like most people have shared a belief that, like the moon landing happened, the Holocaust happened, the Kennedy assassination happened, and when people have raised doubts, there's always been this documentary proof to keep those in check. But it seems like in the very near future, that visual evidence, it like could mean nothing, and it can be a really staggering problem. A statistic we often quote is that in a single recent year, there were 15 billion synthetic images generated, which is nearly the same numbers that were created by humans during the first 150 years of photography. And so, the deluge of generated content is just arriving faster than we can really process its implications. And so, that's kind of what our guidance is aiming to do is to help us be able to get our head around what this really means for our understanding of our world and our history.

Lauren Kata 23:09
So, what's the story behind organizing the APA and when and why was it important to create this alliance?

Rachel Antell 23:17
The way we were founded was Jen Petrucelli and I were working on a documentary, which was a very broad survey piece that covered many centuries, actually, of history. And we had been asked to find photos of a woman from the early 1900s and we did a really deep dive, and we're quite confident it didn't exist. And then one day, we were watching a cut of the film, and there was a photo of her, and we were like, Huh, that's amazing. Where did you find that? We were sure that didn't exist. And they said, "Oh, we didn't find it. We created it." And this was 2023, the spring of 2023, and it was just when ChatGPT was kind of all over the news, but we really had no idea that this was even possible, or that it was something we were going to see within the documentary world. So, here was this photo that was fake, synthetic, but we couldn't even tell, and we were up close with it, so that was very concerning. We asked them what their plans were for disclosing this, and they're like, "We don't really know. We don't think there's any regulation around it." So, that raised really large concerns for us, both about the future of documentary and how there would be a contract of trust between the filmmaker and the audience, and then also just about how we were impacting the historical record potentially. So, we reached out to Steph, as we said, we had met her on a Zoom about a year prior, talking about something totally different, but we were like, Steph is really well connected, and she will know what to do. So, we reached out to her, and she reached out to her network, and we brought together a really wide swath of archival producers who were concerned about how this was going to impact documentary as well as archival work. And we released just an open letter that was signed by about 100 people, and it was covered by *The Hollywood Reporter*, and it really did confirm that this was a concern that went far beyond archival producers and needed to be addressed.

Stephanie Jenkins 25:13
Yeah, and so from there, we realized that there was a large interest, and this was also at the time when the WGA and SAG strikes were going on. And so, there's also, I think, a wider interest in- in organizing, as we've seen, the ways that streamers have really transformed documentaries and workflows and all of that stuff. So, after the release of the public letter, Abby Sun, who is with the International Documentary Association (IDA), invited us to submit a draft the IDA conference... getting real. So, we worked for about ten weeks, meeting once a week with a set of volunteers. I think there were fifteen to twenty of us, and worked really hard on developing *Best Practices for Use of Generative AI in Documentaries*, like it was sort of like going to- I haven't been to grad school, but it felt like going to grad school. It was a master class in- in ethics and- and proclaiming what we see the value of our work as archival producers is within documentary film. But also just the place of trust and truth and archives is as a foundational piece of how people understand history. So, we wrote a draft and had a few people react to it during the festival, and realized that we were much further along than we thought. From there, we had the draft reviewed by E&O insurers, that's Arizona Omissions Insurers, by lawyers, by technologists, by filmmakers, and got a bunch of feedback, and from there, realized, okay, we don't necessarily have the mechanism to be any sort of a body that could police this or- in any way, but what we can do is get people to sign on and get people to read it and to share it with their communities. So, from there, we spent the summer of 2024 getting endorsers, individual filmmakers, as well as production companies and groups such as, you know, ADOC and many others to come on as endorsers. And then we released the events at the Camden Film Festival in the fall of 24. And writing these got- this guidance was a great way to bring people together that are- whose voices are not often heard on productions, but are really thoughtful about the work that we do.

Emily Mathay 27:44
I'm curious what the reception has been, less so from kind of the archival end, and more so on the documentarian end. Have you had feedback from folks working in that arena?

Rachel Antell 27:57

We've been surprised that it has actually been quite positive. I think people are grateful for the guidance, and we were really committed to having this be a very deeply grassroots effort. We knew that any kind of guidance for documentary filmmakers had to come from documentary filmmakers and be rooted in the industry and in the- the ethics that the documentary community has always held. So, we were thinking of this less as something entirely new, and more as a way of reaffirming vision that documentary filmmakers have always had, and then just incorporating in: How does this new technology fit in with the ethics we've always had? How can it be integrated in a way that doesn't compromise those and compromise what documentary film is as a genre? Because, you know, we always have said that you can make a historical fiction, that's a perfectly reasonable genre, that's a great genre, and there's lots of wonderful historical fiction films out there, and there are a lot of reasons to watch one, but if you do sit down to watch a documentary, you're doing that for a specific reason. And if we start to blur the lines too much, then we're really undermining documentary as a cultural resource, which I think most, you know, people in the industry value greatly. So, everyone sort of did feel like we were- we were doing this in the best interest of documentary. We weren't policing them or telling them, "Oh, you shouldn't do this. You shouldn't do that." It really was all in service to the longevity of documentary as a- as a genre, as a film.

Stephanie Jenkins 29:31
Yeah, and I think when it first came out, some people were like, "You went too far." Others were like, "You didn't go far enough." And we were like, that's great. Yeah, that's a great place to be. And, yeah, and- and I think, actually, I continue to be proud of the writing and of the articulation of these- these principles, because we- we put them out last year and started writing them a year and a half, two years ago, and there's- the technology has changed so much, but the guidance, we wrote it so that the guidance would stay the same, and I think that they still very much hold up and will for a long time, which, yeah, I'm very proud of. If anything, I think people are using them more now than they were when they came out. I think when we went to all of these industry groups, truly everyone I had ever met in documentary film in my fourteen years at that point of producing, heard from me while we were trying to get into- their endorsement and- and I think they were kind of like, "Why are the archival producers the ones talking about generative AI, like, they're the ones in the dusty basements. Like, what are they doing, talking about emerging tech?" So, I think our work was actually quite prescient, and in seeing where this could potentially go. And so, I think I'm happy that we came out with the work when we did, because people have been referring to it ever since, and it's really spread. And I'm also really proud that it's being integrated into college courses about documentary film and- and high school courses about documentary film. And putting out these guidelines has led us to doing almost a talk a week ever since we put them out, at least. And, you know, we've spoken at over a dozen universities on over forty panels. We've spoken to, I think, to over forty media outlets about them; like there was definitely a hunger for this work, and there still continues to be.

Rachel Antell 31:30
It's true that people are always like, why are archival producers talking about this? But part, it really makes sense, in a way, because we're often the fact checkers of third-party media within documentary films. So, all of a sudden, if there's this flood of synthetic media, and sometimes there's a flood, and sometimes there's a trickle, and sometimes there's none, but if there is this possibility of synthetic media suddenly entering the flow of documentary media streams, then we need to be aware of it and alert to it, because we're the ones who are going to be that first line that sees it and has to, you know, think about how it should be approached. And I do think that we were really careful about making this a framework, not answers, but a framework to think about it, because we were very intimidated by how fast both the laws, the legal landscape, as well as the technology, were changing, and it just didn't make any sense to do this kind of work, and then two months later, have it not be relevant, you know, if we were speaking very specifically about how certain technology worked or would impact and so, it had to be broader. It had to be just, you know, a set of ethics about how filmmakers would think about things and- and it also sort of put the onus back on the filmmakers themselves to think about, what

are their values? What do they want people to get out of their film? How do they want it to be seen and all that? And just to say we also did go beyond the documentary community. When we were writing these we certainly consulted with technologists, with scholars, with lawyers, with E&O insurers, which was fascinating. We had some of our best conversations with E&O insurers, which- who we had never met before. So, we really- it brought a lot of interesting things into play. And it was, you know, signed on to by like 100 different bodies, between individual filmmakers and organizations, which included, like film festivals and production companies, as Steph said, and funders and people from really all different aspects of the documentary industry did sign on and support it. So, it wasn't just us, you know, the archival producers out there saying this is something to pay attention to. And more recently, there's something called the (Nonfiction Core) App, which filmmakers use to apply for funding to all different foundations. And it's run, it's created by Sundance and the International Documentary Association, and they approached us this year to help them write the third version of it, you know, like v3 that was incorporating an AI addendum into it. So, that was exciting. And seeing how it is kind of spreading around the industry and becoming more of a standard. And the (Core) app now does point people towards the APA Guidelines as well.

Lauren Kata 34:06
I think it's true that you- you're connecting now with the Society of American Archivists, acknowledging that the way that you met was through the Association of Moving Image Archivists. So, is there anything more to say about working with those two organizations specifically?

Rachel Antell 34:21
Last year, we were at the National Conference of the Association for Moving Image Archivists, and we gave a panel talk about our guidelines. And then we also did a roundtable to discuss, you know, we were very deeply involved in how generative AI was impacting the documentary world, but we were curious about how it was starting to impact the actual archival world, because that's the well from which we draw, you know, all of our water, our historical imagery. And so, when we asked the question to about sixty people gathered, "How many of you were concerned about how this is impacting your institution?" Everyone raised their hand. And when we asked, "How many of you have a plan for dealing with it all?" About three people raised their hand. And so, we realized there was a lot of work to be done, and we know that archives are very underresourced, and it seemed crazy that people start to reinvent the wheel. So, along with AMIA, the APA started an interest group, an AMIA interest group, to look at the issues that were impacting archives. And we broke it down into four different areas. One was licensing like, how did license agreements reflect this new- this new technology? In other words, were there any provisions that limited the ways that licensors could add generative AI to the imagery that they were licensing? So, that was one thing is for them to think through how they wanted their license agreements change. Another one was authenticating their collections, because, as I said, people are starting to doubt authentic media that archives hold. And how is it that archives can, you know, provide the provenance or attestations that what they have, what they're representing as authentic, is authentic? And how can they also screen for synthetic media that might be submit to them, which is starting to happen, absolutely? So, that's one whole other area. A third is taxonomies, just developing taxonomies to be able to have a shared language and talk about generative AI in the context of archives. And then the fourth one is collaborating. We're not collaborating with tech companies because we know that there are bots that are roaming the internet and scraping people's collections, you know, and we know that most archives have been approached by technology companies offering these deals and- and they- it's hard for archives to know what the value or potential downsides are to create to going into these deals. So, we wanted to create, if not best practices, just tools within all of these four areas that could be boilerplate language, decision trees, things like that, to help archives consider all of those four areas, and we would host them centrally and just make them freely available to archives to just kind of frame those questions for them.

Stephanie Jenkins 37:14
Yeah, and we really are bringing our methodology that we developed through making the guidelines with APA so everything is highly collaborative, which at some points can feel inefficient, but for the most part, I mean, archivists and archival producers are really great at getting down to work, and they need to be heard, and are often not heard. And so, it has been an extraordinary way to connect with archival producers and archivists from all around the world with so many different forms of expertise to develop tools that then everybody can use.

Rachel Antell 37:49
Yeah, and since starting the interest group, there's been more interest than- it's gone so far beyond AMIA and APA that it's no longer under the AMIA umbrella. It's become its own initiative. It's called the Trust in Archives Initiative, you know. So, the idea is, what we're trying to do is develop trust in archives, make archives trustworthy, and make sure that they retain their status as very trustworthy institutions, and do what needs to be done to sort of sew that up in this current landscape. And so we've been joined by the SAA, by FIAT-IFTA, by several different larger umbrella organizations, and there are more to come. And it's very open. We invite individual archives as well, and we really invite any archives that are interested in discussing and researching and putting our guidance on these issues to join us. It is an open group at the moment.

Stephanie Jenkins 38:40
You can visit us at trustarchives.org.

Rachel Antell 38:44
Yeah, trustarchives.org. Exactly. And there's a form you can- to get more information, all of that. So, that's a whole separate initiative that we've been involved in, and it's big, and it's taking over a lot of our time. You know, archivists and archive- like archives and archival producers really do share, have shared interest, and I don't know that we've all been working together so much historically. And I really feel like, especially in this moment, we kind of all either rise or fall together. And so at the Archival Producers Alliance, we really are trying to find ways to work together to make sure this industry retains its value and its viability, basically. And so, that's, yeah, so that's one of the big things that's important to us.

Stephanie Jenkins 39:27
Yeah, and what started as us being in sort of a defensive position has really grown into community building, which makes sense, because that's how you build collective power and collective awareness around culture. So, I'm proud of the work that we're doing, and excited to see it continue to grow.

Lauren Kata 39:45
That's incredible. Thank you so much for sharing about that. I want to ask you about other initiatives that the APA is currently leading, because, you know, not that this huge Trust Archives Initiative and the guidelines isn't enough, can you talk a little bit more about some of the other work the APA is doing?

Stephanie Jenkins 40:02
Yeah, so I'm- I'm really excited that we got a grant from the Ford Foundation last year that continues through next year, a look at local television news preservation as archival producers making films about American history, which is largely what I've been doing. We've seen that it is really hard and really expensive to access local television news. I look at it as a sort of first record of history, local, sometimes bordering on folk art, set of materials from television stations starting in the 1940s. So, these stations were often owned by individuals, by companies, and as TVs were entering people's homes and people were getting their news from television and not from radio, people had to imagine a whole new way of getting information and- and the local community out to viewers, and that's- that's what television news is. However, according to work done by the extraordinary

Channel US, the Association for Moving Image Archivists, 80 percent of local television news has been destroyed or lost, and of the remaining percentage, very little is accessible online. And, if it is accessible, if it could be made accessible to filmmakers, for example, it comes at very high rates. Sometimes, you know, $24,000 per minute of usage if you can even get to it. And it is not accessible to students, to historians, to activists, to the people that were being filmed when local news was made about their own communities. And so, I've had a really- a bee in my bonnet about this ever since I worked on a Jackie Robinson documentary and realized very little was actually accessible from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s about Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier, or something that's considered to be one of the most important days in sports history, some might say American history. But there isn't actually that much accessible about it, because a lot of the news was destroyed. So, we brought this to the attention of the Ford Foundation, and what we're doing is we're starting with New York City as a sort of test case. What- what happens if we develop a grid of the, I'll say, the extant materials? If they're held, if there's any sort of metadata information anywhere, how much it would cost, who owns it? Just sort of assess the problem and to think about ways that these materials could be made accessible to the public or to filmmakers, or even to the stations and copyright owners themselves. This is really a sticky wicket of, you know, private ownership of news that was not on public broadcasting that is actually often accessible because of the American Archive of Public Broadcasting, but things that were once accessible in people's homes are no longer accessible to them much later in the form of an archive. So, how do we bring people to the table to think about that and to- to really show the value of these things, both to the copyright owners and to local communities. So, yeah, it's been great to work alongside folks from AMIA on that, because we bring such different perspectives. We are not trained archivists, so I really don't know anything about preservation, about the timeline of what it- about the best practices of saving the materials, or the timeline that it takes to evaluate a collection, or any of those skills. And so folks from AMIA are bringing that, as well as academic and historical background, and as archival producers, what we can bring is our experience trying to access these materials, what works as far as story like, how to evaluate what is valuable from that point, and also just our our licensing and producorial skills of trying to- to convince people to give us access to these materials. So, I'm really excited to see where this project goes. It's quite ambitious, but- but one that I'm- I'm really passionate.

Rachel Antell 44:24
And then the very last area that we're working in, is just, is really to support archival producers and be, you know, an advocacy kind of organization. We're trying to raise the profile of the work because we see the value in the work as a tool for both education and democracy, and the people pushing it forward need to be acknowledged and supported. It's very sidelined, even within the documentary industry, and it's largely, it's a- it's very disproportionately women in the field, and I think that that's definitely part of it. And we've all been very siloed for a long time, siloed from each other, and also sometimes siloed even within the productions that we work on. When we first came together, it was really exciting to hear that so many of the issues each of us had been struggling with individually are really shared across the industry. And so we- one of the things we did was we wrote a guide called "How to Work with Archival Producers" that we've released to the documentary community that really helps people understand what we do and why we do it, and how we do it, and how they can get the most out of those relationships. Because it is very different to bring on an archival producer than it is to try to kind of, you know, trudge through that work yourself and, you know, piece it together in a less intentional way. We're also working to, now that we are something of a guild or, you know, an organization, not exactly a guild, but an organization that has some numbers, we're approaching archives and talking about how to create some sort of preferential partnerships, and we've been greeted quite warmly by every archive pretty much that we've approached. And that's really exciting. Along the lines of what I was saying about we all rise and fall together, archives that depend on licensing have seen their profits go down about 30 percent over the last couple of years, and they're nervous. And documentary filmmakers are less and less using archival producers and becoming less and less reliant on archival materials because they are so underresourced and having such a hard time being able to afford it. So, we really want to try to find ways to bridge that issue and

help everyone at the same time. And so we have created a list of preferred partnerships, and we're hoping that that brings more documentary filmmakers to the archives and more archival materials into their films, and really kind of tries to raise the barriers on that. We're also advocating to get awards for archival producers who are very rarely recognized for the work that they do, even though they're very integrated into a lot of these films that are historically heavy.

Lauren Kata 47:00
Oh, the work that you're doing is clearly critical. It's so timely and really valuable. I wish we could talk for another hour about it all. Is there anything that we haven't asked you that you'd like to end our episode sharing?

Stephanie Jenkins 47:19
If you want to stay in touch and are interested in our work, you know, please visit us at archivalproducersalliance.com, there you can sign up for our mailing list. We send out a mailing list note every you know, six weeks, two months, just about our work. You can also check out our Press page and Our Events page. If you really like what- what we're doing, you can make a tax deductible donation to support the work, and would be very much appreciated as we're at a time of great change in the philanthropic landscape. So, please do stay in touch. You can also follow us on social media, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, all of that you know. Please do stay in touch.

Rachel Antell 47:59
And thank you so much for having us on and for highlighting this work. I think it's really exciting just to have these conversations. It's time. And we have a lot of resources on the website as well. One of the things we didn't talk about is we did also create a toolkit that's specifically for documentary filmmakers. That- there's a lot of different things in the toolkit, but two of the most interesting, I think, are the case studies which are looking at how GenAI is actually being used on the ground right now in the world of documentary film. We also have some external resources like articles and trackers and things like that on that page that might be of interest beyond the documentary community that's really just keeping track of news as it comes out about GenAI in the archival and documentary worlds. So check those out. They're both on the website.

Emily Mathay 48:46
We'll also be adding those to the show notes, so feel free to click the link through there. Thank you both so much for your time today. I feel like I'm leaving with- I love this idea of something defensive morphing into community and how we're all stronger together. Think that's kind of the overarching theme that I'm feeling from this episode and for sharing so much about the Archival Producers Alliance, this was fascinating, exciting. You guys are doing really good work. I highly recommend checking out their website. I guess we'll catch you next time on *Archives in Context*.

Rachel Antell 49:19
Thank you.

Stephanie Jenkins 49:19
Thanks so much for having us. Appreciate you.

Emily Mathay 49:24
You've just listened to an episode of the *Archives in Context* podcast, the official podcast of the Society of American Archivists. Members of the podcast team include Mary Caldera, Adreonna Bennett, Conor Casey, Lauren Kata, Emily Mathay, Camila Zorrilla Tessler, Carmela Furio, Kate Greenberg, and Hannah Stryker. All opinions expressed in this podcast are our own and are not reflective of a particular institution. Be sure to

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