

# Guide to the WNYC TV Moving Image collection 1949-1996

## Sub-Group Description:

**Creator (originating agency):** WNYC

**Title of the Collection:** WNYC-TV Moving Image collection

**Date(s):** 1949-1996

**Extent:** 503 cubic feet

**Abstract:** This collection consists of moving image materials produced by WNYC-TV from 1949-1996.

**Processing Information:** This collection was originally processed by MJ Robinson with updates from Danielle Nista and Rachel Greer in 2017. Access to this collection was made possible with funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the New York State Archives' Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund, and the Tisch Foundation.

**Repository:** New York City Municipal Archives, Department of Records and Information Services

**Access and Use:** These records are held at 31 Chambers Street, New York, NY. Access copies are available on VHS and DVD.

**Preferred citation:** Courtesy of New York City Municipal Archives

**Historical Note:** In the late 1940s, Seymour Siegel, the Director of WNYC Radio, wanted the station keep up with new technological advances in media. Thus, he pioneered WNYC-TV in 1949 with the creation of the WNYC Television Film Unit (TFU). The TFU was involved with the production of films for the purpose of training municipal employees. These films were also shown on commercial broadcasting networks throughout the 1950s for public consumption. In the early 1960s, after participating in the FCC's testing of the viability of UHF transmitters, WNYC-TV secured the rights to broadcast on Channel 31. The station pursued a commitment to showcasing life in New York City and keeping the public abreast of local politics including: budget meetings for a variety of departments and mayoral press conferences, advisories from NYPD and FDNY, and educating citizens through culturally important documentaries, particularly with regard to the city's minorities. For example, WNYC-TV boasted more programming devoted to African-Americans than any other station in the country, and also allotted time for programming in Spanish. In spite of these triumphs in promoting local interests, WNYC-TV's place in the municipal government was frequently contested, and it often struggled with maintaining an appropriate level of funding and staffing to meet the costs of producing quality programming. Despite these setbacks, WNYC-TV continued to provide unique content geared towards the citizens of New York City, until 1996 when Mayor Giuliani sold WNYC-TV to WBIS. At that point, Channel 31 transitioned away from a municipal channel to being a sports network.

Sources:

*The WNYC Story: The Past and Present of the Municipal Broadcasting System – A Special Report to the Administrator*

Municipal Services Administration

April 20, 1973

*“Voice of the City:” The Rise and Fall of WNYC-TV*

*“WNYC-TV: More Black Programming than any other TV Station in America” by Ali Stanton in the New York Amsterdam News 9/26/1981*

**Scope and Contents:** This collection consists of two sets of original media: film produced by the station from 1949-1981, and video produced from 1981-1996. The collection also includes materials duplicated from the originals in the following formats: VHS, BetaMaster, and DVD.

Major show titles on film include: *At the Mayor’s Desk, Baby Knows Best, City of Magic, For the Living, Home for Baby, Our Senior Citizens, Price of Liberty, Safety First, Winners All, and Winning Goal.*

Additionally, the film collection includes footage of City Council meetings, borough association meetings, budget hearings, and press conferences, plus raw local news footage. The film also covers some of the election and swearing-in ceremonies of Mayors Beame, Koch, Lindsay, and Wagner. There is also a large amount of footage from FDNY and NYPD regarding public safety and civil defense. The collection also includes footage of various parades, strikes, and demonstrations in New York City, as well as information about public works projects, and public service announcements.

Programs on video include: *Adopt-A-School, AIA Guide to NYC, Around New York, Bookmark, Endangered: Our Urban Environment, Flashpoint, Heart of the City, In the Mix, Kwitny Report, Neighborhood Voices, New York Hotline, and NYC Votes.* Other special programming, documentaries, footage from other news networks, and historical events in NYC—including Nelson Mandela’s visit, the AIDS crisis, and gay rights hearings—are included on video. This collection includes b-roll and unedited footage for both film and video formats.

Titles for film and video reels were taken from identifying information on the original cans and cases, respectively.

Some screener copies are available on VHS and DVD. These copies are listed in the finding aid. Please contact the Municipal Archives for assistance.

**Arrangement:** The arrangement of the WNYC-TV Moving Image Collection is based on how the materials were originally produced. The Collection is in two series based on format. The film series is arranged roughly chronologically. The video series contains boxes that are variously processed, and are either arranged chronologically, anachronistically, or currently unprocessed with little arrangement. The footage is described at the item level in the container list.

Series I: Film

Series II: Video

## **Series Descriptions:**

**Series I: Film**

**Date(s): 1949-1979**

**Size (Extent): 293 cubic feet**

**Scope and Content:** This series consists of original film footage recorded on 35mm and 16mm film.

**Arrangement:** This series is arranged chronologically by year.

**Use:** VHS screeners are available for selections of the film. Please see container list for details.

#### **Series II: Video**

**Date(s): 1981-1996**

**Size (Extent): 210 cubic feet**

**Scope and Content:** This series includes footage recorded on magnetic tape covering programming created for and shown on WNYC-TV. This content includes WNYC produced footage as well as other stations', such as the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), programming. This series is partially processed and consists of multiple acquisitions of video from WNYC-TV over a period of years.

**Arrangement:** This series is arranged chronologically by year.

**Use:** DVD screeners are available for selections of the video. Please see container list for details.