

# READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

## History in the Real World: A Documentary Filmmaker Video Transcript

### **Laurens Grant:**

I'm Laurens Grant. I love telling stories. It is really exciting for me to try and make history come alive. As a filmmaker, particularly in historical documentaries, I think you're tasked with trying to take a slice of history and put it into context.

Hello.

### **Man:**

Hey, how are you today?

### **Grant:**

Right now, I'm producing a documentary on the history of the Black Panther Party. And what that is is really trying to go back in time and bring to the present this very explosive, exciting, controversial moment in history, and this party. You really need to have the basic reading skills, writing skills, and critical thinking skills. And then we also talk to scholars. We've got talk to all those people, read all that stuff, and sort of distill it into a feature-length film.

### **Woman:**

We were making history and it wasn't nice and clean. It wasn't easy; it was complex.

### **Recorded Voice:**

From Chicago, Illinois, the mighty Chi-Lites.

### **Grant:**

I studied journalism and French, and I ended up switching over to documentary. That seemed to be the perfect next step to take my storytelling to the visual medium.

Hello, Professor Charles Jones? We are knee deep in the history of the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party and really, you know, how it has held the world's imagination for nearly 50 years.

**Charles Jones (recorded voice):**

The elapse of time has allowed one to gain more access to critical material. But now you're at a critical moment because a lot of those party members are in the latter stages of their lives.

**Grant:**

That's a good point. In some ways, yes, it's nearly 50 years later, but, in a way, maybe it's the perfect time to try and tell the story because so many people are interested in... you know, there's so much mystique out there.

One aspect that we discussed a lot was, when the Black Panther Party began to split, or fissure.

**Woman:**

The way the FBI would provoke and enhance conflict between Eldridge and Huey would be to have people write to Huey and say things to him -- letters the FBI wrote -- that Eldridge said about him to create the sense of distrust.

**Grant:**

So when you're hearing all these stories, they're great stories, but can we verify any of them? Well, we spent time looking through a lot of the FBI documents.

**Stanley Nelson:**

Looking at FBI documents?

**Grant:**

Yes, so, as you can imagine, there's millions of them, and so...

I do feel like I'm getting a Ph.D. somehow when I'm working on these films. Like, we are tasked to be experts in so many things, including history.

**Nelson:**

I think it's really important for the Panther film for us to be able to show the documents. Because so many times, you hear about, you know, "The FBI was involved, The FBI was kind of sabotaging." But I think what we're going to be able to do in this film is actually show you the documents, where you understand that the FBI was involved.

**Grant:**

In some ways, we're detectives, we're psychologists, we're counselors, we're librarians. They say it takes a village to raise a child. It takes a village to make a film. I mean, you really need people and smart, dynamic people.

**Sam Aleshinloye:**

I think that the five goals memo definitely needs to be in the film. This is the memo that talks about preventing notes in black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability.

**Grant:**

Everyone really has specific tasks to kind of get the film through, because we're on it for, say, over a year, and there's just so much information. Like, for example, we've got close to 10,000 items that we've got to get in, review, describe, and codify. And literacy is really crucial.

There's whole lot of documents.

**Aleshinloye:**

There's a whole lot, a whole lot.

**Aljernon Tunsil:**

That was the very first one.

**Grant:**

And now we want to try and add some veracity and verify what all these interview subjects are talking about.

**Tunsil:**

That's what the documents can do. People aren't just talking. I mean, you actually have this stuff that can actually support what they're actually saying.

**Grant:**

And get out of some of that innuendo.

**Tunsil:**

Let's hear it with the track.

**Recorded Voice:**

The Black Panther Party has split into two factions, namely the Cleaver and Newton supporters. This dissension offers an exceptional opportunity to aggravate and possibly neutralize through counterintelligence.

**Woman:**

The FBI was picking at Huey and picking at Eldridge and I don't know who else they were picking at to create this sense of distrust.

**Grant:**

Another thing we thought a lot about was how do we organically capture that spirit, that look, that sort of excitement that was in the air?

**Aleshinloye:**

Do you want to look at the Emory Douglas stuff?

**Nicole London:**

Yeah, let's see some Emory Douglas. Here's some of the ones we were really talking about. The emotion in the image that you can see in the faces, they really kind of capture the feeling.

**Grant:**

Emory Douglas really sort of captured the visual imagination of the times as well as of the Black Panther Party, but also of the struggle of the working class people. Talking about race in America, talking about class. That's why we make these films. You know, we want to tackle these issues and hopefully we can bring out the complexity as well as the beauty of all of that discussion.