



## Audio Description Project: An Initiative of the American Council of the Blind

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To cite this article: Rachael E. Vacanti (2019) Audio Description Project: An Initiative of the American Council of the Blind, *American Journalism*, 36:2, 269-270, DOI: [10.1080/08821127.2019.1602422](https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.2019.1602422)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.2019.1602422>



Published online: 11 Jun 2019.



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more than 660,000 copies in 1910. The newspapers represent a variety of different political viewpoints and religious affiliations, as well as socialist and labor publications. This database is the first result of the Swedish American Newspaper Project, an eight-year collaboration of the National Library of Sweden; the Minnesota Historical Society; the American Swedish Institute; and the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center.

The historical record surrounding these publications is often sparse. Many of the titles included in these two collections were short-lived and lasted for only one or two years—or, in some cases, just a few months or a few issues. Previously, it has been easy to neglect analyzing these publications because of the difficulty in accessing them. Initiatives such as that of the Minnesota Historical Society promise to remedy the issue of access. For the historian, the trend toward making more newspapers like these available is an exciting one.



## **Audio Description Project: An Initiative of the American Council of the Blind**

Maintained by Dr. Joel Snyder, the American Council of the Blind  
<http://www.acb.org/adp/>

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*Reviewed November 2018*

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In the early 1990s, technological advances allowed more films to become accessible to the blind. However, researchers had no way to track the growing list of titles available to the visually impaired. The archives that did exist were incomplete and unorganized. In 2002, the Audio Description Project came to the rescue with an ordered catalogue. The ADP, based on the dissertation of Joel Snyder, is a combination of a film archive and a news website with the latest information on the use of audio description among different platforms and companies. This review focuses on the archive of films on the site.

A link called “Master AD List” is a good starting point. This page provides an alphabetical listing of all video titles, many of them from streaming services such as iTunes, Netflix, or Amazon Prime. Unfortunately, the website lacks any other identifying information such as genre, release date, studio, rating, and other variables. I have spent

more than a year using the film database portion of the site to develop my own master's thesis, which was a content analysis that explored the effect of film variables on the box office earnings ratio. A quick look at the links across the top of the page showed a perfect starting point with the link "All DVDs," a list totaling 994 films from 1997 to 2018.

Titles include Oscar favorites such as *Spotlight* (2015) and *12 Years a Slave* (2013), as well as Disney films such as *Frozen* (2013) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), and series films including the *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* franchises. The site also included little-known independent films specific to blindness such as *Blindsight* (2006), a documentary about blind mountain climber Erik Weißenmayer's ascent of Mount Everest, and *Ray*, a 2005 film about R&B legend Ray Charles, as well as box office flops such as *Jem and the Holograms* (2015) and *Pixels* (2015).

The site also lists films by year. Films released prior to 2010, for example, are all on one page. Within that page, however, each year is a separate table with the second column listing the total number of releases that year, and the third column showing the titles. Starting in 2010, each year is on its own page. The titles also include the release years in parentheses. Downloading the information, though, can be difficult. The list can be easily downloaded via copy-and-paste, but years must be manually re-entered in the next column.

Like any database, the Audio Description Project has its flaws. While the site is continuously updated, some movies with audio description are not yet listed, with *The Godfather* (1972) and *Casablanca* (1942) as notable examples. During the research process, I searched the "About AD on DVD" page and came across summary comments from a study that listed each major film studio's percentage of releases with audio description. In this section, the website failed to mention who the researchers were, what exactly the study measured, or where the study could be found for cross-referencing. It was useful information, but it seemed out of place in its location on the website.

Overall, the Audio Description Project has a solid list of titles. The website also provides identification of the platform the film is on, such as different streaming services, cinema, or DVD. It is fully accessible, for users who are blind or sighted, on a Mac or PC, and it can be a solid foundation for scholars studying film history, media history, disability, or any combination. While still incomplete, it is an improvement over older databases.