The Visual History Archive (VHA)
Access Through Indexing
USC Shoah Foundation Collection

• Video–taped testimonies from survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust of WWII.
• Nearly 52,000 testimonies taken in:
  – 32 languages
  – 56 countries
• Currently working to include additional genocide experiences collected by the Foundation and like minded organizations:
  – Rwandan Tutsi Genocide testimonies
  – Armenian Genocide testimonies
  – Additional Holocaust testimonies
Experience Group Classification

- **Holocaust**
  - Jewish Survivors
  - Homosexual Survivors
  - Political Prisoners
  - Sinti and Roma Survivors
  - War Crimes Trials Participants
  - Jehovah’s Witness Survivors
  - Librators and Liberation Witnesses
  - Rescuers and Aid Providers
  - Survivors of Eugenics Policies

- **Rwandan Tutsi Genocide**
  - Tutsi Survivors
  - Aid Givers

- **Armenian Genocide**
  - Armenian Survivors
Indexing Needs

• **Thesaurus Manager**
  – For the creation and management of indexing terms in a hierarchical structure

• **Biographical Indexing Application**
  – For data entry from the Pre-Interview Questionnaire and from the video itself

• **Video Indexing Application**
  – For dividing the video into 1 minute segments and attaching indexing terms from the thesaurus to those segments

• **Video**
  – Indexing copy
Thesaurus (Controlled Vocabulary)

- **Indexing Term Creation Process**
  - Proposed by indexers as new content is encountered (content driven)
  - Reviewed by indexing supervisors
  - Researched by staff who find sources that support the creation of the term and write the definitions.

- **Metadata for Indexing Terms**
  - Label
  - Definition
  - Geographic Coordinates (for geographic terms only)
  - Scope Note
  - References sources used for validation
  - Synonyms
  - Relationship to parent term(s), sibling terms, and child terms
  - Attachments to testimonies
Thesaurus Creation Challenges

• Lack of access to good reference sources
  – Under documented:
    • genocide experiences
    • ethnic groups
  – Wartime and inter-war Geographic materials:
    • gazetteers
    • atlases
    • maps
    • name change reference works

• Geographic terms are difficult to research because:
  – many communities no longer exists
  – borders fluctuate during war and genocide events
  – place names change when borders and languages change
  – many place names are the same or similar to others
Challenges Inherent in the Testimony

• **Languages used:**
  – Language(s) spoken were chosen by the Interviewee
  – Multiple languages spoken in a single testimony
  – Multiple languages used in one word
  – Mispronunciation of non-native language terms

• **Use and miss-use of:**
  – antonyms
  – synonyms
  – homonyms
  – abbreviations
  – acronyms
  – slang
  – nick names

• **Dates:**
  – Unknown
  – Accurate/specific
  – Approximate
  – Span dates
  – Falsified
  – Multiple for a single event (birthdates)
  – Refused (interviewee is reluctant to give a known date)

• **Health and age of interviewees:**
  – Speech problems (i.e. stroke victims)
  – Hearing problems (i.e. deaf interviewees)
  – Memory issues
Solutions

• **Guidelines** for indexing and thesaurus development

• **Appropriate staff:**
  – fluent in the language(s) spoken in the testimonies
  – fluent in English (the language of the Thesaurus)
  – knowledge of the history
  – knowledge of types of experience

• **Intensive training**

• **Quality Assurance Reviews**

• **Attention to detail and nuance**

• **Cooperative work culture**

• **Active pursuit of reference materials**
User Applications

— **VHA**
  - Available at 40 access sites round the world
  - Used by scholars and the general public
  - Full Collection or partial collection depending upon the site

— **VHA Online**
  - Available online at [http://vhaonline.usc.edu/](http://vhaonline.usc.edu/)
  - Used by scholars and the general public
  - Full set of data is searchable but only 1,120 videos are available at this time

— **IWitness**
  - Available online
  - Developed in concert with secondary school teachers
  - Used to develop lesson plans for secondary school students
  - 1,020 testimonies available at this time