The Archival Life of Home Movies
Regional Reflections and Negotiated Visions of a Shared Past

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Abstract
This study investigates the ways in which private home movies are transformed into curated archival objects. Through the concept of the archival home movie, it explores the impact of preservation and content description on access, use, and, thus, regional historiography. Additionally, it maps out the relationship between ordinary home-movie imagery and regional meaning making.

Using material from the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection as a case study, the dissertation centers on the practice of researching family films and the possibilities for their contemporary cultural relevance. In recent years, home movies and amateur film have become topics of interest in studies of non-theatrical film as sources for unofficial histories. This dissertation intervenes into these discussions of the cultural value of home movies as a hands-on and self-reflexive investigation into the archive itself, as well as an activation of the archive. This methodology includes stagings of the home movie in live screenings, through which the dissertation investigates modes of spectator engagement with the historical material.

Chapter 1 assesses strategies for working with archival home movies that draw from areas such as the study of family photography and photo albums, as well as the study of diaries. The following chapters each move further away from the familial point of origin of the home movie and toward regional re-readings and archival reuses. Using “home” as a starting point, Chapter 2 engages with the domestic elements in a selection of home movies shot on a cotton plantation during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Through an expanded notion of home, it argues that work and free time, public and private, and family and nonfamily are intertwined—both onscreen and off. Chapter 3 positions a collection of archival home movies made in the Mississippi Delta in the 1950s as mediated witness to the ever-presence and—at times— invisibility of institutionalized racism in the mid-century American South. Chapter 4 maps the creative treatment of one collection of archival home movies in contemporary documentaries, museum installations, and experimental films. Finally, Chapter 5 evaluates the activation of home movies as constructed regional reflections in a series of live screenings associated with Home Movie Day.

Previous studies of family photographs and family film have pointed to the ways these media function to obscure discord and present a harmonious picture. Overall, this study of southern home movies demonstrates how a double logic of obfuscation is at work in these films. In addition to a vision of familial harmony, this dissertation argues that the southern home movie also puts forth a vision of racial harmony. This onscreen racial harmony, when presented during the Jim Crow years, should be understood as the result of a specifically white fantasy of racial togetherness that, at the same time, upholds traditional hierarchies.

Keywords: Home movies, amateur film, non-theatrical film, moving images, archiving, film archives, American South, Mississippi, Jim Crow, race, whiteness, witnessing, ordinary.

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Figure 1: "Welcome to Mississippi" (Fisher Collection, Delta State University Archives).
Several years ago, I was on a road trip from New York City to New Orleans with a group of Swedes. We were driving through the Mississippi Delta on historic Highway 61, the one revisited by Bob Dylan and where Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil at its crossroads with Highway 49. I heard a laugh from the backseat and looked into the rearview mirror. I saw my brother-in-law with headphones on staring intently into his smartphone. He was watching an episode of Parks and Recreation. “What are you doing?!?!?” I shouted. “We are in the Mississippi Delta. This is an opportunity of a lifetime. This is the birthplace of so much of American culture. You should be taking it in!”


His point was truer than I would like to admit. The Mississippi Delta has rows of cotton fields stretching deep into the horizon on either side of the arrow-like highway, but at this time in early July, no fluffy white cotton was yet emerging from the bolls. Like outskirts of Uppsala, roughly 45 miles (about 70 kilometers) north of Stockholm in Sweden, the land is flat and undistinguished. Rows of pine trees periodically break up the landscape. Driving at a certain speed, from north to south, with a clear sunset burning in the west, you could possibly mistake one for the other. Only the occasional man-made structures belie the apparent similarities.

In this case, it is not only the visible physical attributes of the area and its landscape that give meaning and spark identification. It is also our cultural and personal associations that are funneled into the surroundings. Highway 61 has a symbolic meaning in connection with the fabled history of American blues music. The Delta’s regional uniqueness within the state of Mississippi, the American South, and the country as a whole is constructed through a range of elements including landscape, history, iconography, local personas, and cultural productions. The view through a moving car window, whether in person or mediated through a home movie, will never be able to capture nor convey its full meaning. The point of this anecdote is that even when one is physically present in a location, it is still the conjuring of desires and filling the space with meaning that activates the scene. This happens perhaps even more so when the encounter is mediated by moving images. My interest is in how this works when the moving images are “private” home movies from another time or place.
I grew up in Southwest Mississippi in the 1980s and 1990s. The landscape there looked different than the Mississippi Delta or the greater Jackson metropolitan area, either in the 1930s, the 1960, the 1990s, or today. Instead of cotton, the area where I am from relies on the timber industry. The ground rolls in hills and is covered in lush forests of pine and expansive pastures. Two-lane blacktop roads wind through the countryside connecting small town to small town. My own small town, Woodville, had only 1200 inhabitants while I was growing up there. The downtown area was framed by a single square with the courthouse in the middle. It did not match the rugged sparseness of the Delta, nor did it look quite like the thriving downtown areas that spread for many city blocks in the parade sequences of some home movies from the 1950s and 1960s. It certainly did not mirror the suburban sprawl of Jackson in family films shot during the 1970s.

Emma Knowlton Lytle’s home movies of life on Perthshire Plantation in the Mississippi Delta in the late 1930s and early 1940s look strikingly similar to home movies made by the Ethridge family in Jefferson, Georgia. Also shot on a cotton plantation from 1939 and throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Ethridge home movies feature cotton farming and sharecropper life from the point of view of the planter family. Separated by about 500 miles (about 800 kilometers), these two cotton plantations from approximately the same time period share similar imagery and content, both in terms of life on the farm and in terms of domestic life preserved on family media. These rural films relate more to each other than films shot in other geographically distinct parts of Mississippi contemporaneously.

Similarly, the 8mm home movies that my own grandparents shot in the mid-1950s and early 1960s in a small community on the outskirts of Mobile, Alabama (Mississippi’s neighbor to the east), could be easily mistaken for films from Mississippi when it comes to their scenes inside the house on Christmas morning. In these cases, my grandparents’ films are linked to other films by their contemporaneity instead of physical proximity. The signs and signifiers of the times are clothing styles and furniture, not to mention technology, from the 8mm Kodak Brownie camera that they used to shoot the films to the Bell and Howell 256 AB projector that appears under the Christmas tree in a home movie from 1957, to the make and model of the television apparatus visible in the background of many scenes.

As mentioned above, the Lytle and Ethridge home movie collections that share factors like time period and practices, while separated in terms of place, can sometimes relate to each other to a greater degree than other contemporaneous collections that are linked by a much closer physical proximity. Tangled into all of this is the way we, as contemporary non-family members, find ways to engage with the home movies of others. We channel our desires to identify with what is shown onscreen into the often-vague and fragmentary films in order to make them meaningful. This search for identification takes on many forms. Recognition of a place or a person, an action
depicted onscreen or a particular time period can spur this identification. And this form of desire is not only personal. Underneath archival policy and practice is another kind of desire. It is a desire to rescue these personal film fragments from the sidelines of history—both media history and cultural history. This form of desire, through the practices of organizing and describing archival materials, shapes the artifacts it sets out to collect as much as it preserves them.

Archival home movies emerge in this dissertation as what I refer to as constructed “regional reflections,” though their relationship is not just with the past. In that we shape these constructed reflections with our own shared communal wish to revisit a regional past, they also reflect the regional present—the collectors, the spectators, the users…
us.
A group of twenty white children assemble into a formation facing forward as a handheld camera pans back and forth so that all are included in the shot. The children are standing in the grassy area to the side of a large, white house. The sun shines brightly on the children’s faces, and some of them shield their eyes. The girls wear thigh-length dresses, and the boys have short, slicked haircuts. The camera continues to pan around the space. Adults stand in small clusters around tables of refreshments. It is a garden party in Jefferson, Georgia to celebrate Susan Chaisson’s fifth birthday. The scene was shot in the late 1940s on 8mm and is part of the collection of home movies and amateur film held at the University of Georgia.1

Along with shots of babies, the documentation of parades, and highlights from family vacations, the birthday party film is a classic genre in home movies.2 A search through the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection shot list shows that “birthday” appears 149 times within the descriptions of its 47 collections.3 Since birthdays are such common subject matter in home movies, this would seem to be just one more of many. In the home movie from this birthday party, though, the children join hands for a game of “Ring Around the Rosie” and circle an elderly African-American man wearing blue denim overalls and holding a cane. The man is dressed as the character of Uncle Remus. He hops from one foot to the other, performing a soft shoe routine. Interspersed among the children are several African-American sharecroppers dressed as other characters from the Uncle Remus stories, including Br’er Rabbit, Br’er Fox, and Miss Goose.4

1 Ethridge Home Movie Collection, Brown Media Archives, University of Georgia Libraries.
3 Similarly, “baby” occurs 236 times, “snow” 114 times, “parade” 61 times, “Easter” 96 times, and “Christmas” 246 times. This includes every mention of the word, both in reel headings and inside the actual description of onscreen content, so the number indicated is only meant to give a rough idea of thematic occurrence and not an actual number of scenes featuring such tropes.
4 The Uncle Remus stories are a series of tales published by Joel Chandler Harris in 1881. These stories were based on oral folktales of southern African Americans. Modern views see Harris’s portrayal of African Americans as racist and patronizing.
This utterly domestic scene—the birthday party for a child—is both ordinary and exceptional at once. The performance of a classic home movie genre in front of the amateur camera is what makes it ordinary. The fact that the birthday party in question takes place on a rural Georgia cotton plantation during the first half of the 20th century is what makes it exceptional. Here, I use “exceptional” to demonstrate how the familiar tropes of family film are nonetheless marked by the culturally and historically specific contexts of individual home movie examples. In some ways, this scene could be regarded as ordinary for its particular time and place. In fact, its inclusion into a regional archive is based on the fact that the collection as a whole depicts scenes from Georgia in the mid-twentieth century. The ritualistic family activity of filming celebratory moments like a birthday party is transformed into an archival artifact, also “exceptional” by virtue of the fact that it is saved, catalogued, and made available for public access.

What follows in this dissertation is an examination and activation of selections of archival home movies from the American South that further complicate this rather arbitrary dividing line between ordinary and exceptional. Seemingly mundane home movies can be read as exceptional through external interventions once they migrate from the family home to new, public situations, such as formal archives, live screenings, documentary reuses, or even scholarly attention. The “exceptional” status of some home movies
does not refer to judgments of value. Instead, it is a re-reading of the material that acknowledges the transformative power of the ordinary. As Ben Highmore suggests, ordinariness is seen as a positive value: “For something to become ordinary you have to become used to it, it must be part of your regular life, your habitual realm.” However, the term ordinary does not claim to represent the “average.” There is no one ordinary. Instead, ordinary, as I will use it in this dissertation, is a relative term that accounts for repetition and habit but also the slow process of cumulative change. The transformative power of the ordinary, in Highmore’s terms, will be demonstrated in the chapters to come through the way that imagery and form, content and context overlap and interact in the films.

According to Patricia R. Zimmermann, the scholarly study of home movies involves seeing the films as “historical formations” as opposed to “reified objects.” This approach opened new avenues for the study of home movies and encouraged scholars to look through the films’ surfaces to the cultural fantasies encoded in the films through their making. However, as private home movies make their way into public archives, questions related to the concreteness of the films’ images come to the fore. Home movies enter the archive as visual imagery of the region or the nation created by its residents. If fantasy characterizes Zimmermann’s reading of the home movie in terms of its cultural production, then I would argue that desire characterizes the home movie when placed in an archival setting. Rather than look for fixed meanings, this dissertation links the meaning of archival home movies to contemporary desires for their cultural significance. Such an approach looks to find out what we want home movies to be in the here and now and how we think they speak to us in the present day. By sideling the original intentions of the films’ makers or the social context of their creations, this dissertation focuses on the hands-on aspects of researching home movies in the archive, an area that is presently lacking in the study of amateur film.

6 Highmore, Ordinary Lives, 7.
8 Here, I refer to “desire” as it is used in the vernacular sense and not in its psychoanalytical reading.
As the title of this dissertation suggests, this study is concerned with home movies that are held in archival institutions. As such, my discussion of home movies centers on both texts and contexts, on what the films show but also how meaning is constructed by the institutional framework on a practical level. Further, I create an intervention into the use of archival home movies through the staging of a series of live screenings. In these instances, I perform the dual role of both researcher and participant. The result is a conceptual approach to the home movie as archival object that takes into account place-based situations of activation on meaning making. I account for the transformation of private footage to curated collections—whether it enters the archive with contextual information intact or, in some cases, as more or less orphaned material. I also present the possibilities and challenges of archival home movies as moving-image source material that can influence our visual understanding of the past.

In the following case study of the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection, my own scholarly encounter with the collections is also presented here as a meta-reflection on the practice of archival research, as well as institutional practices of selection, preservation, contextualization, and access. These factors, as this dissertation will demonstrate, fundamentally structure the way these films can operate as sources of cultural memory and regional history. According to Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, “...as a site of both cultural and scholarly and administrative practice, the archive in its institutional totality has to be ‘read’ ethnographically every bit as carefully as the documents it houses and preserves.” Similarly, Dagmar Brunow points out a tendency for scholarly work on film archives to focus on the trifecta of “preservation, restoration and digitization.” She calls for the need for research within film studies that plots out the ways the audio-visual archive performs a construction of the very things it is said to collect. The effect of the archive upon the material it holds is not unique to home movies, nor is it specific to moving images, though it is a prominent characteristic of work in the field of amateur film. This is because of the crossover of interests, the transference of knowledge, and the general intermingled working relationships that are particularly strong between academics and archivists who work with this type of material.

Further, a study that focuses on both the institution and the material in its collections allows for an account of the archival institution’s own desires

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10 The title is also a nod to Giovanna Fossati’s work that theorizes archival practice as “film” transitions from celluloid strip to digital files. Giovanna Fossati, From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).
12 Dagmar Brunow, Remediating Transcultural Memory: Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 40.
that are wrapped around the images and objects that it contains. By this, I mean the way the films’ imagined use-value translates into policies and archival strategies for acquisition and collection description. What Paula Amad refers to as the “fantasies of the future nestled amidst the documents” are just as important subjects of study as the documents themselves. In this dissertation, I refer to archival home movies as distinct from the private footage that continues to be held by a family or an individual. This is not to imply that home movies that remain private property are not also shaped by ideological desires, however, this perspective lies outside of the demarcations of this dissertation. Hence, my analysis of home movie material is always in dialogue with the films’ institutional context as well as the cultural context that the films enter upon donation to an archive.

Just over 30 years ago, a special issue of The Journal of Film and Video was devoted exclusively to home movies and amateur film. Here, film scholars fixed their aim on the modest cinematic output of friends and neighbors, or, in the case of Chuck Kleinhans’s “My Aunt Alice’s Home Movies,” family members. Specifically, this issue attempted to outline the vague parameters of and lend credibility to home movies as a popular practice. It was published at a time when home video had established staying power in the amateur market and the amateur home. As a statement, it signaled the end of the era of home movies on filmstrips.

The 1990s, then, marks the turn to home movies not just as a form of folk expression or outsider art but also as cultural documents that have wider relevance. As Jan-Christopher Horak notes, “familial narratives become documents of history, documentary images are fictionalized, all of them inscribed by the subjectivity of their makers, by the desire of the audience.” Horak’s “Out of the Attic: Archiving Amateur Films” charts some of the possibilities of using amateur film in general, ranging from an unexplored source of hidden “gems” to the construction of national cinemas in countries that lack a formal commercial film industry. This article, based on the 1997 International Federation of Film Archives symposium dedicated to the topic of amateur film, came just two years after the publication of Zimmermann’s Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film. The first Anglophone monograph published on the subject, Reel Families examines how the discourse on amateur filmmaking in magazines and instruction books

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13 Paula Amad, Counter Archive: Film the Everyday, and Albert Kahn’s Archives de la Planète (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1.
directed production into the private sphere of domestic life and the family until its placement there was well established.  

Now, we find ourselves well into the second decade of the twenty-first century where home movies’ inclusion in cinema studies and film archives is what seems to be established. The archival life of home movies is something that has been touched on through archivists’ perspectives, however little attention has been paid to the questions of how archival politics function to transform formerly private films into curated collections. This includes how the home movies are transformed into findable objects within the archive, as well as into explicit forms of representation associated with regional history. The bi-annual Orphan Film Symposium and the annual Northeast Historic Film Summer Symposium both feature presentations by archival practitioners and academics in the area of amateur film. The journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists, *The Moving Image*, publishes archival perspectives side by side with more classically academic texts. While I am not a trained archivist, I am fascinated by the cross-pollination between the archival world and the academic world within the field of amateur film. This type of boundary crossing is by no means unique to the study of amateur film, but it is one of its most defining features. Further, the crossover is not limited to archivists’ and academics’ trespassing, it is also defined by practitioners who approach work with amateur film from other distinct points of entry: artists, artisans, and amateurs themselves. These meetings, which represent not so much the crossing of disciplinary borders as the crossing of professional borders, are wrapped in questions of technologies (both emerging and archaic), preservation, reuse, imagination, and the politics of representation. Just as the process of formation and meaning making is ongoing for home movies, so are the spaces for their interrogation. This study intervenes with the meaning of home movies at one point during this journey.

The aims of this dissertation are twofold. First, my case study of the Home Movie Collection aims to illuminate the institutional processes that transform the family film from anonymous fragments of domestic life to curated archival collections that impact regional and cultural heritage. Overall, my ambition is to inquire into the possibility of archival home movies’ contemporary cultural relevance, the kinds of new uses that can be imagined for them, and the spaces they create for questioning visual representations of the past. Archival home movies are deployed in each of the chapters as links that connect regional politics to archival politics. Second, I investigate the use-value of archival home movies through three types of interventions:

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17 “From A to A: The Five A’s of Amateur Film Preservation,” conference panel with Simona Monizza et al at the Saving Private Reels Symposium, University of Cork, September 18, 2010.
academic writing, documentary film, and live screenings. Parts of this dissertation itself are regarded as a form of textual reuse of portions of the Home Movie Collection. Documentary films produced in the United States and aired on television, streamed over the Internet, or presented in museums are studied as examples of audiovisual enactment. Finally, live screenings of family films at Home Movie Day events in the American South are approached as performative reuses that operate in dialogue with members of the audience. In this last instance, my role as researcher and participant blur as I instigate the screenings.

In order to meet these aims, I focus on southern home movie material as a means of demonstrating the links between archival collections and questions of cultural memory and heritage. I question how the archival curation of private films transforms their meaning and potential use value. I specify “potential” because there are hindrances stemming from the pre-archival history of the films and the new archival context that limit their use value. Finding new narratives within the films is possible, but this requires strategic readings, something that I develop through the idea of the constructed regional reflection.

The Archival Home Movie: Definitions and Demarcations

Formerly sequestered in the personal collections of families, what I refer to as “archival home movies” are the private films that have been donated to or otherwise acquired by public institutions. Home movies, and amateur film in general, have been sought out by regional and national archives in an effort to preserve views of the nation that tell stories outside of official history. As Roger Odin points out, archives that specialize in amateur films often exist in regions where questions of identity are actively being negotiated. In these instances, “[f]amily productions are deployed for a local or identity claim context.”18 In a country as large as the United States, the collection of amateur works has become the province of smaller regional archives.19

Through the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection, I examine the status of private home movies at a point in time when archives’ interest in them—as well as amateur film more generally—is expanding. This worldwide phenomenon is linked to archives, libraries, museums, and other

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official cultural institutions of varying sizes and levels of resources. There is a strong presence of regional archives specializing in amateur film based on geographically specific areas, such as Northeast Historic Film in Buckport, Maine that focuses on moving images of northern New England in the United States, or culturally specific groups, such as the Moving Image Archive of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California that aims to provide “visual documentation of the history and experience of Japanese in America.” Similarly, official national archives, such as the Scottish Screen Archive in Glasgow and the National Library of Sweden’s archive of nonprofessional, nonfiction film in Grängesberg, as well as unofficial national archives, such as l’Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia in Bologna, Italy, focus on the preservation of the identities of a country and its inhabitants through its moving images. What was formerly the Swedish Film Institute’s archive in Grängesberg, now part of the National Library of Sweden, is a government-appointed project with an explicit agenda of “housing the Swedish peoples’ cultural history and experience, as expressed via the film media.”

Such attention to minor cinematic practices is accompanied by claims to usage—claims to the ways in which these films are significant, for whom they are significant, and how they can be mobilized in the service of telling cultural histories. These claims are not always linked directly to the nature of home movies. Instead, I see the claims linked to, on one hand, the archives’ own desires for the way this kind of private material can be used to fashion a history from below. On the other hand, the claims also shed light on scholarly desires for these previously ignored scraps from the margins of film histo-

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23 Co-founder Karianne Fiorini describes the archive as “a serious and collective project to safeguard Italian cultural patrimony from the risk of oblivion.” Guy Edmonds, “Associazione Home Movies, l’Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia: An Interview with Paolo Simoni and Karianne Fiorinin of Italy’s Amateur-Film Archive,” Film History 19, no. 4 (2007): 427.

ry to prevail as lost traces. In the United States, the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection at the Department of Archives and Special Collections consists of locally produced moving images of the American South. Since the Home Movie Collection was created in the mid-1990s to be used as part of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture’s project, *Picturing Home: Family Movies as Local History*, a strong tie between the images themselves and their place of origin is explicitly established. According to early promotions of the archive’s collection, the films are said to show “depictions of everyday life singular to the South.”

What begins to happen could be described as an identity crisis within the archive itself, where it becomes uncertain whether it maintains a collection of home movies or a collection of southern amateur films. This identity crisis stems from the fact that the criteria for intake are shaped by both how the material’s future use is imagined as well as the justification for its storage and upkeep. For example, if, from the perspective of the archive, home movies’ potential for reuse only corresponds to the films’ potential as historical evidence, then material relevant to a given collection of home movies may not be saved. One criterion for material to be accepted into the Home Movie Collection at the University of Mississippi is that the films feature, to some degree, life in the South. While some collections, such as the Lotterhos Collection, contain footage from faraway places like Lake Tahoe, Rocky Mountain National Park, and even Bermuda, in the shot list compiled by the archive, the following note is written with reference to the Buckley Collection:

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28 The Lotterhos Collection consists of 2 reels of color 8mm film and 87 reels of color Super-8 film shot in Jackson, Mississippi and beyond between 1967 and 1979.
“Reels 11-14 were shot in Europe. We returned them un-transferred.”

Films shot on the European continent may not function as a record of life in the American South, but to discard them is to break up the collection and to participate in something closer to item-level identification and grouping. This practice, then, is a clear signal of the kind of relationship between the films the archive holds and its vision for their significance.

Similar to an archive’s own curatorial decisions is the self-editing on the part of the donor. A public call for material sometimes results in the donation of only portions of collections, usually the segments that the donors think are important. Three of the University of Mississippi’s collections in particular are shaped by this self-curatorial act on the part of the donor: the Therrell Collection, the Treas Collection, and the Lytle Collection. The Therrell Collection consists of footage from the early 1950s to the late 1970s. However, instead of children’s birthdays or family Christmas celebrations, the Therrell Collection visualizes a more idiosyncratic family obsession: harness racing, a type of horse race, at the Neshoba County Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

The Treas Collection, on the other hand, featured an eclectic mix of shots from life on Hereford cattle farm in the 1940s, the construction of a drive-in movie theater in Aberdeen, Mississippi in the 1950s, and life inside the Mississippi University for Women’s home economics house in Columbus, Mississippi around the same time. Like the Therrell Collection, I found this group of films to be fascinating but incredibly cryptic, with little more than visual notations and vague references to time periods on the archive’s shot list as a guide. When I interviewed Charles Therrell and Charles Treas about their collections, it became evident that they donated the portions of their families’ films that seemed to have the most clear-cut connection to

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29 Home Movie Collection shot list, Buckley Collection, reels 11-14. The Buckley Collection consists of 11 reels of color 8mm film shot in Hattiesburg, Mississippi between 1956 and 1964.
31 The conditions of the Lytle Collection’s donation will be discussed in further detail in Chapters 1 and 2.
32 The Therrell Collection consists of 2 reels of color 8mm film and 7 reels of color Super-8 film shot in Neshoba County Mississippi (outside of Jackson) from the early 1950s to 1978.
33 The Neshoba County Fair is a weeklong event that has been held annually at the end of July since 1889. During the fair, the 60 acres function as a self-contained city with over 600 cabins that are passed on through generations among family members. The fair consists of horse races, musical performances, rodeos, and even as a stop for politicians during campaigning seasons.
34 The Treas Collection consists of 3 reels of color and 1 reel of black-and-white 8mm film shot in northeast Mississippi in the 1940s and 1950s.
Mississippi history. Unfortunately, since donor contextualization was not gathered at the time of collection—due naturally to the fact that the archive was essentially a one-person operation until it merged with the library—these segments had remained mysterious and incomplete.

There is, of course, an economic necessity on the archive’s part to limit the material taken in, or at least make judgment calls on what is to be accepted and what is not. The cost of digitization and storage for small institutions with limited-to-no operational budget, combined with the necessary manpower for screening, cataloging, researching, and maintaining the material makes for a difficult situation. As Karen Glynn noted in her paper for the 1998 Association for Moving Image Archivists conference, the Picturing Home project was a “disastrous success, bringing in 100,000 feet of film which swamped our limited resources and took years to process.” In this case, it is obvious why the films shot overseas were not among the material that was prioritized for processing and including in the collection. Complete collections would make it easier to contextualize the sections that are immediately recognizable as culturally significant, yet most institutions do not have the resources to take in anything and everything.

In this dissertation, I refer to the archive as a concrete, physical place that houses cultural objects, and in this case, moving images. This does not, however, mean that I consider the archive as a neutral storage place. Michel Foucault’s concept of the archive posits archival materials as worked on by the institution itself. According to Alan Munslow, Foucault’s archive is understood as “the body of narrativised evidence representing and signifying the episteme in which it was generated, but which is, of course, encountered by historians within our own historical epoch or episteme.” Similarly, Vivian Sobchack calls for a “new type of historian” who considers the “use value” of historical objects and documents rather than emphasizing their

36 Karen Glynn was the first archivist and founder of the University of Mississippi’s Southern Media Archive. In 2000, the archive became part of the Department of Archives and Special Collections. This information is taken from Glynn’s presentation text titled “AMIA Presentation 1998,” which is filed in the archive with other internal documentation relating to the Home Movie Collection. This and other internal documentation cited is not normally accessible to visitors of the archive but was presented to me by Jessica Leming, archivist at the time of my research trip in 2014.
“truth value,” Her argument highlights our mediated relationship to the past, whether this refers to the objects that mediate our perception of a bygone era or the way the archive itself mediates our encounter with those objects. This inherent mediation, according to Sobchack, signals the impossibility of total objectivity in any historical pursuit:

[…]{"original"} documents and “authentic” material traces of past events are now widely recognized as never given to us by the past or taken up by us in the present as “raw”—and, consequently, their previous overvaluations as “authentic” evidence and “primary sources” that provided historians privileged access to the “truth” or “real” meaning of past events is diminished by our contemporary awareness that no matter how historically “old,” no representation of the past is ever original.40

Such focus on the mediated nature of our understanding of the past emphasizes the material qualities of its representations, be they documents, sound recordings, or even images. As Ludmilla Jordanova points out, “…apart from dreams and visions most images are ‘material’; a picture is generally an object.”41 The objecthood of cultural representations is something that will be developed further throughout the chapters of this dissertation. According to Jordanova, it is when we consider a visual representation as an object—as an artifact, even—that it can provide a kind of historical testimony.42 Here, the testimony resides not necessarily—or not entirely—in the text, but in the context. Studying home movies demands working through the excesses and lacunae of visual imagery and thinking about the films as mediated objects, that is, as artifacts.

There are, of course, problems with this line of thinking. To see films like home movies as objects threatens to imply their discreteness, that is, their status as a finite or finished thing that can be studied. While that illusion is sustained by the way we encounter archival home movies, it belies the nature of their initial and current circulation. On a material level, sometimes only certain parts of a family’s films are donated to the archive or are accepted by the archive. Not all images are transferred to a viewing copy if the imagery does not fit within the archive’s guidelines, or if the imagery is essentially unviewable due to issues like shrinkage, low lighting, or blurriness. In turn, a family member may have edited these films into longer reels—sometimes with a thematic unity or focusing on a single family member—long before donation to the archive occurred. In terms of meaning making, the chain of

39 Vivian Sobchack, “What is Film History?, or, the Riddle of the Sphinxes,” in Reinventing Film Studies, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (2000; repr., London: Hodder, 2008), 300-204.
40 Sobchack, 303.
42 Jordanova, 2.
production of these films does not stop with the home-moviemaking family. Instead, it continues as the films are donated to the archive and are then used by outside actors (or even the family itself). This will be further explored in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Home movies are a subset of the overarching category of amateur film. Generally speaking, films that are amateur made are usually shot on “substandard” film formats, such as 8mm, Super-8, 9.5mm, and 16mm. Amateur fiction films and documentaries produced by cine clubs were usually created with the intention of being screened publicly, even if such public was miniscule in comparison to that of professionally distributed films. In this way, these amateur fictions and documentaries are not the same as those other types of amateur films called “home movies.” For the purpose of this dissertation, home movies are defined as homemade media that were originally intended for a close-knit viewing group of family members and friends. They are often concerned with domestic material or familial themes; however, “domestic” content is not a fixed concept and is problematized throughout this dissertation. Further, I find judgments of image quality and the technical ability of the home moviemakers to be less helpful points of entry than the perspective of intended audience or screening history.

Home movies, in the classic sense, are a materially specific form of amateur media that differs from home video in both analog and digital forms. Like the broad category of amateur film, home movies are generally shot on substandard film formats. As Susan Aasman points out, delimiting “home movies” to material shot on filmstrips is a potentially dangerous practice that falls into the trap of fetishizing its material qualities. Instead, she argues for a focus on “a more plural concept of domestic media technologies” that links home movie practices on film with similar practices shot on home video and digital video.43 While this is an important point for shaping scholarly work and archival policy, in this dissertation I refer solely to home movies shot on film. In the case of the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection, only material shot on 16mm, 8mm, and Super-8 film has been acquired to date. Thus, my focus is not media-specific in and of itself but is instead delimited by the nature of this specific archive’s collection.

Adding the modifier “archival” to the term home movies, I intend to further delimit the kinds of claims that I make about this dissertation’s object of study. Instead of attempting to speak of all home movies (which would be impossible anyway, as I hope this study will exemplify), I only make claims about what home movies are capable of doing once they have entered into a public collection. This transfer is not just one of physical space—from an

attic, a basement, or a closet and into cold storage. Instead, this transfer also signals an ideological movement—from private significance to public significance, from family keepsake to region relevance, and, not least, from chaos to seeming order. The figure of “the archive” enters in this study as a shaping agent. It is linked to the state, and it functions not just to preserve the past but also to actively create versions of it.44

By speaking of archival home movies, I draw a line of division between then and now, that is, between the time and context when the films were shot and originally screened and their entry into the archive. In this case, terms like then and now are floating signifiers. This is one of the methodological repercussions of working with material that spans numerous decades. Instead of delimiting my choice of material based on a narrow range of dates, as is common in many historical inquiries, I mark these boundaries based on one archive’s acquisition of films.45 Similarly, now implies more than just our present moment. As I refer to it, I mean the time period post-film donation and archival acquisition. As I will elaborate in this dissertation, even this portion of time needs to be further subdivided as it relates to archival home movies.

This then/now division requires a reformulation of the kinds of questions we can ask of home movies. This shift in focus moves away from their varied original contexts and the way they were meaningful then and looks to a reworking of their interpretations, their viewing situations, and their significance now. It looks to the way users and spectators of archival home movies engage with the films as constructed regional reflections. The term “engage” here refers to Sobchack’s reading of Belgian psychologist Jean-Pierre Meunier’s schema of cinematic identification. This schema seeks to account for the ways in which the spectator negotiates between the information shown onscreen and their own knowledge of the subject.46

The University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection

This dissertation focuses on archival home movies shot by families living in the state of Mississippi in the American South. “The South,” as the southern region of the United States is often—rather myopically—called, and the state

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of Mississippi figure as central sites in the country’s struggle with racism and ongoing debates over cultural heritage. The University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection has a significant number of home movies on 16mm, 8mm, and Super-8 formats ranging from the 1920s to the 1980s. The date range of films included in the Home Movie Collection roughly coincides with the Civil Rights Era and the latter part of the “Jim Crow” period in southern history. The Civil Rights Era is typically thought of as the period between 1955 and 1968 with moments such as the Montgomery bus boycott and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 acting as historical bookends. However, some historians, such as Jason Sokol, disagree with such a narrow range and see the era stretching from the post-war era well into the 1970s. The Jim Crow years were roughly between 1877 and 1965, with the end of Reconstruction and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 considered to be their start and endpoints. For the United States, the Civil Right’s Movement is perhaps the 20th century’s greatest cultural legacy. The tie-in to issues of race and representation is explicit in the categorization and marking of this collection. The Home Movie Collection, therefore, presents an excellent point of entry for inquiries into southern historiography and debates in current heritage and cultural memory projects.

I also turn to the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection because, as a small regional archive, it clearly demonstrates many of the issues relevant to the public preservation of home movies today, such as the question of determining cultural relevance, the problem of access, and the impact of indexing on use. Further, the Home Movie Collection figures as both a representative example of a small regional archive and as an anomaly. Established in 1994, it was an early effort to collect these private films. However, unlike many other home movie archives today, it has only a minimum of digitized content and until recently had not made any films or portions of film available online. The reasons for this point to factors relevant to the archival politics of home movies and amateur film in general.

Finally, on an ideological level, it is my hope that in pushing the material from the Home Movie Collection further out into our “visual archive,” my

47 As Matthew Pratt Guterl points out, despite the region’s seemingly self-evident label, “[i]t is a great irony that ‘the South’ is technically locationally southern in just one rather limited context: within the borders of the United States.” Matthew Pratt Guterl, “South,” in Keywords for American Cultural Studies, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007), 233.
own study will facilitate their acknowledgement by others. Other than Karen Glynn’s study of mule-racing footage held by the archive (written in 1994 as a master’s thesis, which was reworked and published in Zimmermann and Ishizuka’s *Mining the Home Movie* in 2008),\(^{50}\) the Home Movie Collection was only otherwise briefly mentioned in the footnotes of Judi Hetrick’s “Amateur Video Must Not Be Overlooked.”\(^{51}\) Selections from the Home Movie Collection have been subject to reuse by compilation, poetic enactment, and historical representation in contemporary documentaries (as will be discussed in Chapter 4). However, they circulate in these productions anonymously, without reference to their current institutional context or their former family contexts. I interrogate these reuses as a means to shed light on how the collection is by no means dormant and is actively working in our current audiovisual culture.

The fact that the Home Movie Collection, which is touted as containing unique images of the daily lives of African Americans, is housed at the University of Mississippi makes for an interesting step in the university’s turbulent history of race relations. In 1962, James Meredith integrated the University of Mississippi, colloquially known as “Ole Miss.” Meredith’s acceptance and enrollment came seven years after the Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed the racial segregation of educational institutions. Meredith’s entrance to the Oxford, Mississippi campus and the riot that ensued is a practical example of the dissonance between federal laws and state compliance in the United States. On Meredith’s first attempt to enroll at the university the governor of Mississippi himself, Ross Barnett, turned him away.\(^{52}\) Over the next few days, the National Guard and local students were in a standoff until violence erupted. Armed extremists from around the state joined in. The mob attacked the Lyceum (the oldest building at the university) where federal troops were stationed and retaliated with tear gas. In the end, there were two fatalities and hundreds of injuries.\(^{53}\)

Today the Home Movie Collection is housed in the Williams Library, just behind the Lyceum. A monument to Meredith was erected between the two buildings in 2002. The statue shows a man walking through a four-pillared structure. The words “courage,” “perseverance,” “opportunity,” and “knowledge” are carved into each of the sides, though the statue makes no direct mention of the fact that Meredith’s enrollment to the university was controversial on racial grounds. The white stone pillars echo both the Greek revival style of the columns that grace the fronts of countless southern plan-

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\(^{51}\) Hetrick, 79-81.


\(^{53}\) Wilkie, 106-112.
tations, as well as the front of the Lyceum itself.\textsuperscript{54} I consider the university’s framing of its troubled past—and, with regard to the continued presence of the Confederate flag, its still controversial present—to be part of the metatext of the Home Movie Collection that informs how meaning was assigned to the films at the time of their acquisition and how their meaning continues to be negotiated today.

Regional Reflection: Key Concepts and Perspectives

For Douglas Reichert Powell, “region is always a relational term (even when it appears not to be).”\textsuperscript{55} Appropriating the term from Kenneth Frampton’s idea of critical regionalist architecture, Powell argues that critical regionalism regards regions as socially invented and, therefore, proposes region making as a site of cultural politics.\textsuperscript{56} Numerous overlapping, concurrent or even opposing discourses cut across any physical place at any point in time. A critical regionalist perspective rejects discourse that, on the one hand, regards “region” merely as “the kind of nostalgic nationalism that sectional theorizing produces” and, on the other, privileges terms like “global” and “local” as if they were somehow value-free concepts.\textsuperscript{57} Instead, it sees region as a concept that both considers the relationship of translocal systems to any conception of place and can take into account the myriad of cultural attitudes at work in such a relationship. Further, Bruce R. Brasell argues that the regional—unlike the local, the national, or the global—is not dependent on spatiality. He claims, “although it is about spatiality it exists only temporally; any appearance of substance is the result of repetitive action.”\textsuperscript{58} This perspective facilitates a discussion of home movies that is related to particu-

\textsuperscript{54} The image of the Lyceum has come to gradually replace “Colonel Reb” in all officially licensed University of Mississippi iconography and merchandise, starting in the early 2000s. Colonel Reb (short for rebel, the shorthand term for those who fought for the Confederate States during the U. S. Civil War) is a white man with white hair, mustache and goatee, wearing a 19th century suit and string tie, and leaning on a cane. In 2003, the university retired Colonel Reb as the official mascot during sports events. In 2010, the university asked students to vote for a new “official” mascot, and the student body tepidly chose a black bear. Colonel Reb continues to have a strong presence on the campus. A student group called The Colonel Reb Foundation actively works to make the mascot visible on game days, if only in an unofficial capacity. In October 2017, the university named the landshark as the new official mascot.


\textsuperscript{56} Powell, 8.


\textsuperscript{58} Bruce R. Brasell, \textit{The Possible South: Documentary Film and the Limitations of Biraciality} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 10.
larities but not unconditionally bound to them. Similarly, it allows for home movies to be rooted in “place” without their meaning being strictly dictated by it. By this, I mean that the reverberations of home movies have the ability to travel regionally and are not necessarily limited by local specificity.

To focus on the specificity of the films—their exact location and the particular people seen onscreen or holding the camera is, in a sense, to construct local history. The choice of local versus regional has to do with the aim of the reuse or project. The University of Mississippi’s *Picturing Home* aimed at pairing home movies with a specifically local history. The travelling project was essentially a screening of a handful of home movies and an appeal for the donation of private films. The “local” in the title spoke more to the appeal to film donations in each small community than to the screening of films from other communities throughout the region. The appeal for donation was on a local level, however, I argue that the contextualization and activation of the screenings was on the regional level.

I use the term “regional reflection” as opposed to “local history” in order to highlight a significant strength of archival home movies. When the films are deployed on the local level (in a local screening context, for example), the application could be said to be historical. However, when the films are screened outside of the specific “local” context, we can understand the relationship as regional. The focus is softened. The specifics are generalized one step further away. The films are not required to mean their specifics: a particular family, a particular farm, or a particular day. They can take on something more along the lines of regional significance.

In my formulation, the constructed regional reflection is an active, productive process and not a passive occurrence. It is an intentional building of a visual narrative about the past. It is in service of—whether intentional or not—the creation of the region and functions to sustain it. Regional reflection is, therefore, something that is attained through reuse and recontextualization. This definition infers mobilization; hence the reflection is not automatic.

The archival home movie as constructed regional reflection both implies and demands curation. It is in the migration to the archive that we can see how the institution itself imagines the future meanings of the material. The home movies that become parts of public archival collections tell regional stories, but these stories, often like the films themselves, are fragmented and non-linear. Through contextualization and reuse, the films can be used to create regional stories, that is, specific versions of the past. By invoking the theme of constructed regional reflection, I formulate the presentation of the region through home movies as neither complete nor direct, but mediated. As Brasell argues, “The region is never represented, but always presented.”

The region does not exist separately as something to which representations

59 Brasell, 7-9.
of it can be compared. Instead, it exists through those very representations. If, as according to Benedict Anderson, any groupings larger than “primordial villages” rely on a type of imaginative bond for cohesion, then those groupings are constantly in a state of definition and negotiation based on the ways in which that bond is imagined. 60 To speak about a region is to participate in the further definition of it. The reflection is thus a social construction of the region that participates in its creation and definition.

I take the term “reflection” to invoke several things at once. Reflection is, in one sense, the return of an image by a surface such as a mirror. However, unlike this sense of the word, archival home movies as reflections give neither an automatic nor a complete picture. The films, even when considered in the totality of a family-bound collection, are fractured and incomplete. They are removed—at times even orphaned—from their original contexts of creation and lose the instantaneous meaning that was constructed within the family. New meanings are possible among the disparate pieces, but they require activation. This dissertation’s case study, thus, illuminates how archival home movies can be researched and acknowledged in their potential to influence our visual understanding of the past. In this way, they add to our historical knowledge, and they exemplify the function of domestic representation in historical and contemporary media culture. Further, the archival curation and public screening programs of these films may even support public memory work. As Svetlana Boym points out, “Re-flection suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis.” 61 Archival home movies, then, are perhaps most valuable to us because they are fragmented and not in spite of it. As constructed reflections of the region—and always broken, always lacking—they give us room to write the scripts and question the voids. These scripts are no different than other stories we tell about the past. Full of interpretation and arguments, they are ordered versions that have the possibility to open up for polyvocal tellings. In the chapters to come, this will be addressed directly through examples from the Home Movie Collection.

Recollecting “The South”: Memory and Heritage in Regional Historiography

Memory and the urge to memorialize is a pressing issue in contemporary culture, especially in the United States. Erika Doss classifies contemporary American memorial culture as a sort of “memorial mania.” In her sense of the term, memorialization relates not only to an “obsession with issues of

memory and history” but also to a grasp for power—an effort to publicly define which stories from the past need to be preserved and to lay claim to those stories. The effort to preserve or even resurrect certain stories from the past is at the heart of contemporary heritage projects.

Both history and heritage have distinct relationships to what we think of as “the past.” While historians like Hayden White point out the narrative emplotment inherent in any telling of history, the concept of heritage has a specific tie to the way we understand the past through customs and traditions, objects and artifacts, as well as works of art and architecture. As such, heritage is constantly being worked out and agreed upon by members of the culture. Heritage is, thus, “the continually evolving and creative selection and generalization of memory that blends historical ‘truths’ with idealized simulacra on the individual and collective levels.” In this sense, heritage is open to interpretation and contention. According to Celeste Ray, “When we choose to remember a selected past in a similar way, we celebrate our unity and experience communitas, but in doing so we also emphasize what divides us from all those with other memories or perhaps a different memory of the same selected past.”

Certainly, much public debate in the name of heritage is linked to conservative tendencies or even enacted in service of racist or xenophobic agendas. Charles Reagan Wilson illustrates the alignment of some southern heritage efforts with a neo-Confederate identity. Symbols of the Old South and the Confederate Lost Cause continue to persist in the southern cultural landscape. Flying the Confederate battle flag or playing the song “Dixie” in the context of high school, university, and even government spaces are some of the most visible areas of conflict. These conflicts continue decades after the appearance of what Wilson terms the “myth of the biracial South.” According to Wilson, the myth of the biracial South is the ideological imagining of equitable race relations that came into prominence in the 1970s, in the wake of the federal government’s abolishment of Jim Crow laws with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Put to use in this sense, “myth” here does not point to

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65 Ray, 3.
66 Wilson traces the formation of the University of Mississippi’s Center for the Study of Southern Culture (original institutional home to the Home Movie Collection) in 1977 as arising out of this myth. Instead of framing southern culture as white culture of a bygone era (like the antebellum “Old South”), the center had “a pronounced interracial theme.” Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Myth of the Biracial South,” in The Southern State of Mind, ed. Jan Norby Gretlund (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 9.
a belief that is actually false. Instead, it is a publicly accepted position or ideal, whether or not it is actually put into play. In the post-segregation South, legislation, ideology, and, finally, behavior interacted with each other to slowly transform daily life. As Reagan contends, “The frustrations of black efforts have been a cultural setback to the goal of redefining the Southern identity in order to make it feasible for black Southerners to fully embrace the region and the myth of the biracial South.” Ultimately, the myth of the biracial South is not only a way to restructure society for the future but also as a way to refashion the reading of the sticky topic of southern heritage in a way that includes all members of society. As Wilson points out, “Southerners do indeed have a biracial heritage, seen in the music, language, foodways, religion, and many other cultural features of the traditional South. The ideology of the biracial South says this should be acknowledge, the kinship between blacks and whites…should be embraced.”

Adhering to the “myth of the Lost Cause,” publications like Southern Heritage and the Journal of Confederate History or groups such as the Southern Heritage Association and the Culture of the South Association participate in what Svetlana Boym refers to as “restorative nostalgia.” As Boym points out, “Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition.” These entities, according to Wilson:

[...] represent a new organizational structure pushing for an older ideological perspective on the South. Their significance comes from their active role in Republican politics in the South and their tapping into the frustrations of white Southerners who do not see a need to redefine the Southern identity from its historic meanings associated with a white-dominated South.

As contemporary outbursts of restorative nostalgia, the Confederate battle flag has sparked vigorous debate even into the twenty-first century. Seen alternately as a symbol or heritage or a symbol of hate, in the summer of 2015, the flag was finally removed from the grounds of the South Carolina capital building. In Mississippi, the Confederate battle cross is incorporated into the top left corner of the official state flag. In 2001, 65% of the active voters in the state chose to keep the flag. In these cases, heritage is fused into discourses that exalt the traditional values of the dominant culture. The concept of heritage can be used to close off a culture to certain groups, however, it can also be used in ways to pluralize that culture.

67 Wilson, 17.
68 Wilson, 18.
69 Wilson, 17-18.
70 Boym, XVIII.
71 Wilson, 18.
Mid-twentieth century perspectives on heritage studies claimed that the local historian’s duty should be to chart the community’s downfall. Jerome de Groot traces conservative tendencies in English historians such as W. G. Hoskins and H. P. R. Finberg. De Groot goes on to cite Finberg’s 1952 claim that the job of the local historian is “to portray for his readers, the Origin, Growth, Decline and Fall of a Local Community.” Hoskin’s and Finberg’s readings fall into what Robert Shannan Peckham refers to as the “myth of the golden age” where one opposes “a tumultuous, heterogeneous present against a homogenous, stable past.” A narrative of downfall or degradation echoes the narrative of loss associated with restorative nostalgia.

Rather than reduce nostalgia to a romantization of or desire to return to the past, sociologists Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, like Boym, acknowledge nostalgia’s capacity to work as a form of meditation on the nature of change. If nostalgia’s key characteristic is “loss” of that which is no longer present then it can be seen as a way to establish “continuity” and “durability” in the wake of the upheavals of modernity. Robert Shannan Peckham notes that both nostalgia and heritage are most often linked to conservative forces: in longing for a long-ago golden age in the case of nostalgia or in employing heritage in order to project a unified vision of the nation’s past. However, Peckham does argue for a more progressive reading of heritage, one that has the capacity to reflect a multiplicity of pasts often left out of the national narrative.

In *Reconstructing Dixie*, Tara McPhereson questions what “feeling southern” means in light of a multi-racial South. In doing this, she does, however, fall into the trap of conflating southern feeling with specifically white southern feeling. W. Fitzhugh Brundage’s *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* highlights this common slippage in writing about the history of the South where “white heritage and southern identity are synony-

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73 de Groot, 279.
76 Peckham, 4.
77 Peckham, 6.
mous” to the point that southern heritage is the “exclusive property of whites.” Throughout this dissertation I aim to discuss “heritage”—and specifically southern heritage—in such a way that highlights the tension between conservative emplotments of heritage and conceptions of heritage that allow for polyvocal representation.

An Auto-ethnographic Inquiry

This dissertation takes a meta-level approach to the process of research within a moving-image archive. My aim is that a reflexive investigation into the process of research in an archive of home movies will strengthen textual readings of the films under consideration (through an “ethnographic” reading as Blouin and Rosenberg suggest) and will add to the growing body of research on how to work with amateur film held in these archives.

In some ways, I employ elements of autoethnographic methods in research execution and its presentation in this dissertation. As a research method, autoethnography is used in studies that seek to deepen cultural understanding by fixing the self as the primary source for research material. The process of autoethnography acknowledges and uses as a strength the way the individual is intertwined with the culture or a culture. According to Heewon Chang, autoethnography “should reflect the interconnectivity of self and others.” As such, autoethnographic goals overlap with many of the goals of ethnography, memory studies, and cultural studies. While I do not use myself as the sole object of study in this dissertation, I do use self-observational and self-reflective elements from autoethnography as a means to connect the process of research with the objects studied. In this way, autoethnography is appropriate as both method and theme for the study of archival home movies. First, these methods are instrumental in understanding how the films are culturally meaningful to outside spectators in the present day. Second, these methods also point to the way contemporary spectators (including researchers like myself) engage with the films. Because of the evocative nature of the films, the gaps and spaces left to be filled in, the self can be used as a tool in meaning making, both on the level of basic un-

81 Self-observation is the act of detailing the research process itself, while self-reflection is the presentation of the researcher’s thoughts and perspectives on the process of research. Chang, 89-90.
derstanding and on the level of cultural signification. As I weave between
the home movies and the archive, the documentary reuses and the public
screenings, I practice “audible authorship” in order to account for the effects
of these movements on meaning making.\(^\text{82}\) Each chapter in this dissertation
is presented as building on the previous, also marking the trajectory of my
own research process as I both traced and instigated instances of reuse of the
Home Movie Collection.

Research methods used in the dissertation include archival research in au-
diovisual and paper archives, close readings of a selection of archival home
movies, historicizing and narrativizing how these films fit into their contem-
porary cultural landscape, textual analysis of a selection of documentaries
that make use of home-movie material, and participant observation of live
home movie screenings, including arranging the events for the live screen-
ings. An auto-ethnographic approach is especially relevant in the final chap-
ther where I perform the role of both researcher and organizer in a series of
Home Movie Day events.

The Home Movie Collection as Research Material

The primary material for the dissertation is the Home Movie Collection held
at the University of Mississippi’s Department of Libraries and Special Col-
lections (the Home Movie Collection was originally part of the University of
Mississippi’s Southern Media Archive).\(^\text{83}\) By some accounts, the Home
Movie Collections contains 100,000 feet of film and is divided among 47
collections. However, simply stating the number of collections or reels of
film that make up the Home Movie Collection is not possible. The reason
why no easily interpreted number is available has to do with the nature of the
home movie material and the way it fits into—or resists fitting into—
traditional archival cataloguing practices. This problem will be a recurring
topic of this dissertation.

At the same time, I consider the Home Movie Collection to be more than
just the amassed selection of films. I regard the institution itself (that is, the
University of Mississippi’s Department of Archives and Special Collections
as well as the earlier Southern Media Archive), the shot list that describes


\(^{83}\) While the Home Movie Collection in its entirety has informed this dissertation, I cite ex-
amples from the following collections: the *Alvis Collection*, the *Buckley Collection*, the *Cohen
Collection*, the *Fancher Collection*, the *Gary Collection*, the *Grantham Collection*, the
*Grubbs Collection*, the *Hammond Collection*, the *Jones Collection*, the *Lamb Collection*, the
*Lott Collection*, the *Lotterhos Collection*, the *Lytle Collection*, the *Therrell Collection*, the
*Thomas Collection*, the *Treas Collection*, and the *Walker Collection*. Specific details pertinent
to each collection will be specified throughout the dissertation.
the films in the collection, and the internal documentation regarding the collection to be part of what makes up the Home Movie Collection. Of the archive’s collections, 47 have been transferred to VHS or DVD and are available for viewing. Each collection is supported by varying amounts of contextual information in a detailed shot list—a 151-page document prepared by the archive around the time of the films’ donations. As such, these materials, and the archival institution make up parts of my research materials. The shot list structures the archive user’s encounter with the collection. It is the only contextualizing information provided for users of the collection. Further, the archive’s aim for the material—and point of view towards the material—is implicit in the shot list. As will be elaborated on in the next chapter, I used the document itself to determine how the films are perceived by the archive based on how they are described in the shot list. The amount of information known about a given collection is specified in its entry in the shot list, and the amount and type of information often varies from one collection to another. How much or how little is know about the people who shot the films or the events depicted in their films depends on the circumstances surrounding donation. Very often, donation occurs sometime following a family member’s death, in which case the notes written on each individual reel may be the only identifying material available. For example, the shot list cites that the Fancher Collection was donated by Mrs. Paulette Bogart Fancher “in memory of” Julius Abram Bogart and Forrest C. Bogart. Each reel is identified with only a date and a few descriptive words, for example: “1939-1942 Bogart History #1, Grandad, Juju & Mary Lynne, Mom & Dad.” This is indicative of a general challenge in dealing with amateur material in an archival context where, even if information can be collected by the donor or the person who shot the films, as archivists at the Wales Film and Television Archive explain, “a failing memory may not provide the accuracy of information required for effective documentation.” As such, many of the films in the Home Movie Collection are essentially “orphaned.” This particular type of orphanage speaks more to a type of cultural neglect rather than a legal status. It points directly to those collections that are donated to the

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84 Home Movie Collection Shot List (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries). The shot list can be obtained from the Department of Archives and Special Collections upon request.

85 The Fancher Collection is made up of 14 reels of black-and-white and color 8mm film shot in Greenwood, Mississippi between 1938 and 1968. Home Movie Collection Shot List (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).

86 Reel 6, Fancher Collection, Home Movie Collection Shot List (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).


archive as essentially obsolete media, where family members have inherited the films and no longer have the capability to watch them.

Perhaps the most significant challenge to this study has to do with the makeup of the archive’s collection itself. Based on information in the shot list, it is clear that all of the films in the Home Movie Collection were made by white members of the middle and upper-middle classes. According to William Uricchio, “Scholars draw upon various archival holdings to construct representations of the past, as telling for their limitations as for their ‘completeness.’”89 Here, Uricchio addresses the structural absences that can happen with the archiving of film where, at least until the mid-1990s, the “film-as-art” vs. “film-as-culture” divide could leave significant material not actively collected and preserved.90 This was especially true for the likes of amateur films that fall out of established taste hierarchies. This also relates, though, to the ways in which we must read the archive in terms of its limitations to whose films are preserved. However, as this dissertation will demonstrate, merely pointing out the absences is not sufficient.

In addition to the limited amount of social representation the act of filming allows, the home movie, as it is encountered in the context of the archive, has been passed through yet another filter—one that is both internally and externally constructed. First, the internal politics of the archival institution itself determine what material they will keep and preserve, and, therefore, what material will be available to researchers and the general public alike. Second, just as to shoot home movies is a socio-economically coded act, so is the act of donating. The fact that the Home Movie Collection is under the umbrella of a university infrastructure codes it not only as culturally significant but also, to some extent, as culturally elite. Additionally, as reports from various recent years’ worth of Home Movie Day events in cities around the world point out, most people are surprised to learn that their family films are of interest to anyone else. Whereas the Department of Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi now practices passive acquisition with regard to their intake of home movie material, events such as Home Movie Day can raise awareness about the preservation value of home movies and direct interested parties to regionally based archives that would accept their donations. However, despite the years since its inception in 2002, Home Movie Day is still a relatively small event that is primarily limited to major U.S. cities and some international metropolises. Additionally, as it is a once-a-year and one-day-long event, it can easily slip under the radar of those not actively involved in small-gauge issues. For these reasons, the material presents a strong representational bias. While the *Picturing Home: Family Movies as Local History* project attempts to equate the filmic representation of African Americans in the home movies of white Americans.

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90 Uricchio, 262.

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Mississippians as a “visual record” of their lives, in the sections that follow I will discuss the problems of such a position, as well as some possibilities for it to be realized.91 Two collections from the university’s archive are featured as primary focuses in the chapters to come.

A Geographical Plotting of the Home Movie Collection

Throughout the dissertation I cite examples from the Home Movie Collection that were shot over different periods and in various geographical places throughout the state of Mississippi and beyond. This strategy for the overall project uses the archive itself—the material it has chosen for intake—as the main delimitating factor. Within this body of material, I made choices based on recurring themes. These themes are not the same as some of the recurring visual tropes and subject matter that is common to home movies. Instead, these themes are research strands that became evident to me throughout my encounters with the Home Movie Collection, that is, watching the films and reading the shot list.

Jasmijn Van Gorp reflexively examines scholarly searches, in this case in an online interface. She discusses “how archival finding by media researchers can be understood as the more processual archival looking or ‘exploratory search.’”92 Similarly, she describes researchers’ strategies to navigate massive archival holdings as mixing “searching and undirected browsing, jumping to related items so as to explore an entity, theme or event. They depend heavily on serendipity—stumbling upon ‘lucky accidents’ they were not necessarily looking for.”93 Perhaps the most influential factor in successful searching is the researcher’s own prior knowledge and memories. As Van Gorp point out, “[t]he user’s personal memory not only plays a role in defining keywords, but also in the mental linking process during the search.”94 Van Gorp outlines how the researcher’s ability to conjure relevant keywords often determines the success or failure of a database search. I would add that this is the case whether or not the researcher is searching in a digital database or a paper document. In the case of a paper document, the searcher must still be able to identify relevant keywords and notice their repetition. Since the Home Movie Collection’s shot list exists as a digital file, indocument word searches require the creation of relevant keywords, a feat

91 “The collections come from white families who employed black workers and servants, so that ‘woven through the white, Southern home movie footage is a visual record of African American life in the South.’” Hetrick, 79.
93 Van Gorp, 45-46.
94 Van Gorp, 50.
that is usually dependent on contextual knowledge about the subject of the archive.

While the process of initial, exploratory research may seem utterly obvious at first, I think it is important to break down the process further in order to see how it impacts actual work, including this study. From Van Gorp’s account, we can extrapolate how the physicality of the archival materials affects the kinds of searches that can be done and how they can be performed. Further, the form and shape of a collection’s supporting materials—database, list, narrative descriptions, keywords, etc.—greatly influence how the researcher interacts with the archive. At the same time, many pursuits into research take off with only a vague point of origin and are dependent on first uncovering what the archival collection holds. In “Cruising the Archive” Simon Ofield draws on Roland Barthes’s desexualized concept of “cruising” as a research method. According to Ofield:

[O]ne attraction of cruising as an approach to research is you can never be quite sure if you will find what you are looking for, or if you will come across something you never knew you wanted, or even knew existed. In this way, cruising is a productive rather than reductive process, and has an in-built potential for diversion, irregular connections and disorderly encounters.95

When starting my archival research, I attempted to break up the collection into manageable parts. The shot list of film descriptions was organized alphabetically by family name. I wanted to get an overview of the collection as a whole that would be more meaningful than this. One strategy would be to organize the collections by date. The problem with this is that many of the individual collections spanned years, if not decades, and often with long gaps of time in between filming. Organizing by the starting date of each collection gave only a rudimentary picture of what kind of material was amassed. Instead, I turned to geography as an organizing principle and research strategy for the collections. Using the donor addresses listed in the shot list, I mapped out all of the collections onto the state of Mississippi to see how they were distributed.

This approach, too, has its flaws. Naturally, the imagery in the films is from multiple places since families often travelled with their cameras and perhaps even moved to a new city or town over time. Even more problematic, though, is that the first insight I have into location is based on the donor’s address, which is listed in the shot list. This address is simply the location where the donor lived at the time of donation, that is, the 1990s. This may or may not correlate with where they lived during the time of filming. In fact, the donor might not have shot the films at all. It is very likely that the donor is a child of the home moviemaking parents. Once I organized the collec-

tions by donor address, I could then cross-reference this with any location information that was present in the descriptions from the shot list. This includes transcriptions of the notes written on the individual film boxes, as well as places identified by the archive that reoccur in the imagery.

The first thing that I noticed when I arranged the collections geographically was that the largest cluster was around the greater Jackson area (figure 3). Sixteen of the collections were from Jackson and its surrounding suburbs. This is not surprising since the archive placed their call for donations in The Clarion-Ledger, which is published in Jackson but has distribution throughout the state. As the capital of Mississippi, Jackson is also the state’s largest city.

The next cluster of eleven collections was in the area known as the Mississippi Delta. Located in the northwest portion of the state, this region includes the towns of Greenwood, Perthshire/Gunnison, Vicksburg, Greenville, Clarksdale, and Walls. Donations also came from North Carrollton and Southaven, on the edge of the Delta and from Memphis, Tennessee just across the border. Since Lytle’s films served as a spark for the archive’s creation, articles about her films were published in newspapers from the Delta and its surrounding areas in conjunction with appeals for donations.

Only three collections came from the Oxford area, home of the University of Mississippi. The remaining collections came from scattered communities throughout the state, with very little representation of its southern half.

These constellations of collections provided a way to compare localized collections across different time periods. The sub-region of the Delta became a point of focus for this study since the number of films from that area provided adequate material for research. Additionally, I used the greater Jackson metropolitan area as a kind of cross check. It functioned as a way to compare the rural imagery from the Delta to something more urban and suburban. I do, however, center the majority of my focus to two collections, the Lytle Collection and the Thomas Collection, introduced below.

The Lytle Collection

Chapters 2, 4, and 5 predominantly feature material from the Lytle Collection. This collection consists of Lytle’s amateur documentary Raisin Cotton’, finished around 1941, and numerous reels that feature work on Perthshire Plantation as well as domestic images from Lytle’s family life in Bolivar County, Mississippi. The collection becomes significant from a historical perspective in terms of its portrayal of Mississippi’s agricultural development and also as the work of a female amateur filmmaker in the early-to-mid 20th century American South. It is categorized both as part of the Home Movie Collection and separately as a distinct unit within the University of Mississippi’s Department of Archives and Special Collections. Lytle’s films contain domestic material such as shots of her family and friends, as well as
Figure 3: A mapping of the Home Movie Collection’s donors (Illustration by Josefine Hådell).
more formal compositions, ranging from general documentation of life on the plantation to *Raisin’ Cotton*. To the extent that her films are indexed in the Home Movie Collection, “Lytle” is a stamp of the family-bound collection. However, as her collection also maintains a self-sufficient category outside of the Home Movie Collection, “Lytle,” in this case, almost becomes an auteurist label. This represents how the *Lytle Collection* occupies both spaces, as well as the uneasy definition that characterized much film produced in the non-professional realm.

**The Thomas Collection**

In Chapter 3, I refer mainly to material from the *Thomas Collection*. This collection consists of 500 feet (5 reels at 100 feet each) of 16mm color footage (about 14 minutes) spanning from 1956 to 1959. James and Lucille Thomas owned and operated the Thomas Grocery & Gulf Station in the Delta town of Walls, Mississippi during this time. Their store functioned not only as a gas station and general store but also as a hub of the local community. Black and white members of the community frequented the store, the front lot served as a pick-up point for buses taking day laborers to local farms and plantations, and the store was the end point of the parade route of the local Delta Center School.

**Notes on Material Access**

The research for this doctoral dissertation grew out of a preliminary research trip to the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi in 2010 while pursuing my master’s degree at Stockholm University. This was my first contact with the films in the Home Movie Collection. During the spring of 2012, I spent three months at the University of Mississippi for the most extensive encounter with my primary research material. While at the archive, I consulted family-bound home movie collections that had been transferred to VHS viewing copies. At this time, I was also invited to the University of Georgia’s Walter J. Brown Media Archives in Athens, Georgia to consult their collection of home movies. Archivist Margaret A. Compton brought home movies from the *Ethridge Collection* to my attention after I discussed Lytle’s films with her. Like Lytle’s films, the home movies in the *Ethridge Collection* were filmed on a rural plantation, in this case during the 1940s and 1950s, making them roughly contemporaneous with each other. I decided to use the University of Georgia’s collection of home movies as a point of reference in the dissertation that I could compare and contrast with some

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elements of the University of Mississippi’s collection. While I acknowledge that the comparison of only two collections does not create an accurate portrait of an entire field, my aim in doing so is to help underscore which themes (both in home movie content and in the archival administration of the films) resonate in both cases and which themes might be more isolated examples.

In 2014, I returned to the University of Mississippi. During this research visit, I was granted access to documents pertaining to the establishment of the Home Movie Collection and its administration during the early days of its formation. Additionally, I was provided with materials that outlined the places where home movies from the collection had been reused, such as in documentary films, museum installations, and Internet sites. At this point, I decided to use Lytle’s home movies as a focal point of my dissertation. Of all the collections at the University of Mississippi’s archive, this one had been reused most frequently in documentary projects and could serve as a basis for the exploration of reuse presented in Chapter 4. Since Lytle’s was one of the first collections acquired, it was also discussed in newspaper articles from the mid 1990s that promoted the archive’s creation. This provided me with insight into the way the archive presented the collection to the public and how they positioned it as culturally significant material.

In 2015, I travelled to Cleveland, Mississippi to consult the Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers held at the Delta State University Archives. This collection of family documents included Lytle’s personal and artistic correspondence, records of her paintings and poetry, her own early scrapbooks and photo albums, as well as newspaper clippings and articles referencing screenings of her home movies (including Raisin’ Cotton) in the mid-1990s.

In October 2015, I organized and participated in Home Movie Day events at Delta State University and in my adopted hometown of St. Francisville, Louisiana, as well as a special screening at the University of Mississippi’s Center for the Study of Southern Culture. These events informed Chapter 5 of this dissertation. While onsite at the University of Mississippi, I took the opportunity to conduct a final consultation of the archive. At this point, I was granted access to a collection of home movies shot by Lytle that were donated to the archive in 2000 following her death. These films are not formally processed into the archive’s collection in that the 60 reels of films are not catalogued and there is no description of their content in the Home Movie Collection’s shot list. Similarly, there are no viewing copies of these films.

97 The following materials from these events are cited in Chapter 5: Alberstadt Home Movies (Private Collection), Daniel Home Movies (Private Collection), Dreher Home Movies (Private Collection), the Fisher Collection (Delta State University Archives), Frisbee Home Movies (Private Collection), Savell Home Movies (Private Collection), and Traweek Home Movies (Private Collection).
My interaction with the material was, in this case, direct handling of the filmstrips.

In May 2016, I was able to interview Karen Glynn, the founder of what was then known as the Southern Media Archive at the University of Mississippi, now part of the Department of Archives and Special Collections. Under her initiative, the archive began collecting the films that make up the Home Movie Collection.

Archivists and administrators at the University of Mississippi, the University of Georgia, and Delta State University deepened my understanding of how these institutions worked, the kinds of goals they had, and the kind of practical considerations these sorts of regional archives had to account for. Additionally, interviews with a selection of home movie donors helped me to gain in-depth information surrounding the shooting and donation of some collections that contained very little contextual information. Since these conversations with the donors (some of which were the actual home moviemakers and some of which were the subjects of filming) took place while we watched the films together, the process informed my understanding of how family members engage with their own home movies.

Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation investigates the kinds of questions we can ask of home movies as they make the transition from the private home to the public archive, from the then of their creation to the now of our encounters with them. In Chapter 1, I deepen the themes brought up in this introductory chapter. I present a survey of the field of home movie and amateur film research and situate this study in relation to existing work. Through a positioning of the home movie as archival object, I discuss the implications of curation on the collections of films. Further, I lay out some strategies for working with archival home movies that draw from areas such as the study of family photography and photo albums, as well as the study of diaries.

The following chapters each chapter move further away from the familial point of origin of the home movie and toward regional re-readings and archival reuses. Using “home” as a starting point, in Chapter 2 I engage with the domestic elements in a selection of home movies. Through the Lytle Collection’s home movies shot on a Delta cotton plantation in the late 1930s and early 1940s, I present an expanded notion of home in order to account for the ways that work and free time, public and private, family and non-

family members are intertwined—both onscreen and off. Based on Tamara K. Hareven’s historical investigation into the concept of home, I argue for an augmented definition of home that accounts for rural farming households in the early-to-mid twentieth century as counterpoints to the iconic suburban nuclear families that often dominate home movies of the same period.

In Chapter 3 I draw the films further from their points of origin, that is their original donating families, and seek to use them in a different way from—and sometimes directly against—their original register. Through the notion of mediated witnessing, I position films from the Thomas Collection as witnessing images that speak to the ever-presence and—at times—invisibility of institutionalized racism in the mid-century South. Using Georges Didi-Huberman’s concept of the “visual event,” I outline the ways contemporary reusers ask either too much or too little of witnessing images. Essentially, we ask images to do things that they cannot do. Asking too much is asking for a complete story (“the whole truth”) from what might be an anonymous, fragmented, or even unidentifiable photograph that may picture only a tiny segment of what we retrospectively understand as the broader historical picture. Conversely, in asking too little, the images become vague traces of a larger history, severed “from their phenomenology, from their specificity, and from their very substance.” 100 Instead, reading images as “visual events” is a way to address what we see in the image beyond a reading of their formalist qualities and beyond a reading that seeks pure documentary transparency, that is, direct access to “the real.” 101

Chapter 4 looks to the creative emplotment of archival home movies in documentaries and installations. This chapter investigates the way segments from the Lytle Collection have been integrated into other moving images as visual citation or textual support. For the most part, these conventional contemporary projects operate in the expository documentary mode where archival images serve to support the arguments formulated by the auditory track. 102 These types of films do not have the reflexive sensibility of experimental works like Michelle Citron’s Daughter Rite (1980), Péter Forgács’s Private Hungary series (Privát Magyarország, 1988-2002), Robert A. Nakamura’s Something Strong Within (1994), or Richard Fung’s Sea in the Blood (2000), however, as mainstream productions, they do have the opportunity to reach wide spectatorship. These emplotments of archival film work within the language of cinema to put forth new meanings for the home-movie images. 103 Using Jamie Baron’s notion of the “archive effect,” I ana-

101 Didi-Huberman, 36.
103 As Michael Renov points out, “it is not that documentary consists of the structures of filmic fiction (and is, thus, parasitic of its cinematic ‘other’) as it is that ‘fictive’ elements
lyze examples of sections from the Lytle Collection that have been incorporated into recent documentary projects. Baron describes the “experience of pastness” that occurs when we encounter archival audio-visual documents through the mediation of another film. This experience of reception is what she calls the “archive effect.” Baron’s definition of “archival” is very inclusive and allows for a wide array of images. Based on her definition, archival images are those that the viewer experiences as “coming from another time or from another context of use or intended use.” I expand Baron’s rather limited context for the archive effect for the purposes of working with home movies in archives—and outside of them—in ways that were not within Baron’s explicit aims but are nonetheless appropriate extensions. I argue that home movies do not necessarily have to be remediated into a film in order for the archive effect to take place for spectators.

Chapter 5 focuses on the activation of home movies as constructed regional reflections in live screenings. The chapter sees the Lytle Collection, along with a number of private home movie collections, screened for contemporary audiences in conjunction with Home Movie Day. Here, I stage a second (or third, in light of the original screening context of the family) run for the Lytle Collection, echoing its public screening in the 1990s as part of the Home Movie Collection’s initiation. Zimmermann’s concept of “live” performances of home movies acts as a theoretical jumping-off point. In an effort to breathe new life into archival collections of home movies, Zimmermann proposes a critical shift from home movies as frozen artifacts to “dynamic vectors” that circulate back into the publics from which they came. By deprioritizing the image, this approach tries to engage with the films beyond analyzing their content.

In the final discussion I evaluate the limits of archival home movies as constructed regional reflections and look to new possibilities. I then open out to new areas for future research.


105 Baron, 9.

106 This may be true for other types of images as well, but that point is beyond the scope of this study.


1. Framing the Family Film: From Reel to Archive Memory

“…nothing starts in the Archive, nothing ever at all, though things certainly end up there. You find nothing in the Archive but stories caught in the middle of things; discontinuities.” – Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*¹

From Home Movies to Amateur Film and Back Again

Roger Odin’s seemingly quipped remark, “[n]othing resembles a home movie as much as another one,” points to a theoretical and methodological problem within the study of home movies.² His intention here is not to demean the home movie but to theorize it as a form of cultural production. In finding similarities between the films and identifying the modes of address within the home movie, Odin laid the groundwork for the academic study of home movies.

I do employ Odin’s words here in order to examine their provocative repercussions. What empirically grounded investigations into archival home movie collections over the past two decades has shown is that while many home movies do share general traits, their content is also, at the same time, incredibly diverse. This is supported by the ways in which public and private archives have turned to home movies as cultural source material worth saving.

What I aim to demonstrate in this dissertation is the way this seemingly paradoxical element of home movies—that they are all essentially the same, yet they also tell regionally specific stories that can be mobilized for cultural commemoration projects. Exactly how these kinds of films can be activated to tell regional stories—or act as constructed regional reflections, as I formulate it—is at the center of this study. When all home movies seem to look like each other, it is because the frame of reference is too broad and, therefore, too generalizing. However, a regional perspective can look beyond the

local and does not have to be constrained by, in the case of the Home Movie Collection, the political demarcations of the state of Mississippi. The region concept becomes useful in that it can take into account “geographically and historically inflected cultural patterns and priorities” without precluding “the great variety of alter/native narratives increasingly seen to cut across sectional lines.” In this case, instead of being simply a worn concept that triggers “exclusionary” and “conservative” tendencies, “the South” or the “Mississippi Delta” can allow for various angles of entry. The concept of the region is broad enough to introduce segments that may be too limited at the local level but too generalized and unspecific at the national.

In a 1998 presentation at the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) annual conference, archivist Glynn described the Southern Media Archive’s 1994 traveling program Picturing Home: Family Movies as Local History. The program’s aim, in addition to collecting film donations for the archive, was “to elevate the conception of the home movie film to that of an historic artifact requiring preservation.” At one point, it is explicitly written that the archive’s stance is to discuss works in their collection as amateur films as opposed to home movies: “The aim is to broaden the modest concept of ‘home movies’. The photographer will be recast as an ‘amateur filmmaker’ purposely shooting his/her environment—creating a visual record of a business, farm, town, community event, craft, sport etc.” While this was a necessary step in order to gain respectability within the academic institution that funded the archive, as well as with the general public in terms of whether or not they considered donating their family films to regional archives, it is time now, twenty years later, to rethink that strategy. Much has happened during this time, thanks mostly to those who fought for home movies’ recognition through the strategy of re-casting home movies as amateur film. At our current moment, home movies and amateur film in general as a field of study is expanding in many exciting directions. The annual Northeast Historic Film Summer Symposium, the biannual Orphan Film Symposium, the yearly Home Movie Day events in cities around the globe,

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3 Lyons, 117.
4 Lyons, 105.
5 A post-structuralist perspective on cultural geography criticizes the region concept as yet another geometry of existing power structures, though in a scaled-down version. In trying to reconcile this with the fact of the region concept’s persistence, Ulf Strohmayer questions whether a lack of structures is actually possible. According to Strohmayer, “Given that any approach to social and cultural realities can escape neither from its constructed nature nor from the desire to communicate..., readers may well wonder whether the search for boundlessness is (1) avoidable and (2) suspect per se.” Ulf Strohmayer, “Post-structuralism” in Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Ideas, ed. David Atkinson et al (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 9.
7 This information is taken from a document titled “Articles” also filed with other internal documentation relating to the Home Movie Collection.
the 2010 Saving Private Reels Symposium and the follow-up publication of *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web*, as well as the many archives, libraries, and museums of all sizes around the world that hold home movie collections are just a selection of examples. Given this scholarly and institutional infrastructure, let us now look to emphasize the “home” in home movies, to use the domestic traces as a method to finding further useful ways to interact with these films in the present day.8 The private or domestic elements of the home movies are the keys to unlocking the cultural, the public, the regional, and the historical within the films.

As the chapters in this dissertation will demonstrate, designations such as “home movies,” “amateur film,” “minor cinemas,” and “nonprofessional film,” refer to more than simply a matter of naming. They point to the difficulty in drawing lines of separation and making strict distinctions among amateur practices. Amateur film is a multi-faceted and notoriously unwieldy term. It can encompass anything from ethnographic or travel films, non-professional documentaries, avant-garde works, and even home movies. At its heart, it is set up as the contrast to professional filmmaking.

There are benefits and drawbacks to maintaining the distinctions among amateur filmmaking practices versus—given the overlap—collapsing them into a more generalizing whole. The benefit of retaining these distinctions is in the way “home movie” as a descriptor infers a familial framework. Neither home movies’ claims to transparency and authenticity, nor their isolation in the so-called diffused setting of the domestic can be taken for granted. It is problematic, though, that what emerges is a hierarchical distinction among non-professional practices that regards “amateur film” as formally superior and coolly detached—and therefore more publicly relevant—as compared to the sloppy, predictable, and too-subjective-to-be-taken-seriously “home movie.” This hierarchy emerges, in part, because of the difficulty of working with the more domestic nature of the material. But it also emerges because of the difficulty of working with the material that is less produced, less polished, less organized, and that when watched—at least initially—makes less sense.

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8 In a similar vein, Ryan Shand argues that the same broad “amateur film” moniker has done a disservice to the study of amateur fiction film. He argues, “[r]ather than relegating the ‘amateur film’ to a mere genre of production, we can thereby increasingly see it as a sector composed of multiple genres and sub-genres, both non-fiction and fiction.” Ryan Shand, “Introduction: Ambitions and Arguments – Exploring Amateur Cinema through Fiction,” in *Small-Gauge Storytelling: Discovering the Amateur Fiction Film*, ed. Ryan Shand and Ian Craven (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 15.
Thematic Strands in Predominant Work on the Home Movie As Film Culture, Representation, and Archival Object

The study of home movies falls broadly into a part of cinema studies that focuses on films made and shown outside of the norm of theatrical distribution. As such, “non-theatrical film” became a topic of interest in the mid-1980s when research into then-defunct small gauge productions began to develop. Dan Streible, founder of the Orphan Film Symposium, notes how the “historical turn” in cinema studies meant “a vast body of works long ignored—nontheatrical, ephemeral, and orphan films—has become the subject of historical examination.” Known as “New Film History,” this orientation was represented by a turn towards empirical studies using archival research and alternative sources outside of commercially distributed, finished film products. Diverging paths of research streamed out from this initial area and, though their focuses differed, they shared many aspects of research, such as critical viewpoints, interdisciplinary associations, and methodological choices.

Early studies of home movies focused on family media as a system of social communication. In *Snapshot Versions of Life*, Richard Chalfen examines home movies and snapshot photographs from an anthropological perspective. What he dubs the “home mode of pictorial communication” is a form of small-group communication that revolves around the domestic space. As opposed to mass modes of communication, the home mode circulates among known persons—family members and friends—and, thus, fulfills a ritualistic social function. Chalfen’s home mode is not limited to any one medium; instead, various media such as still photography, moving images, drawings, and letters can all operate in this register.

Odin further outlined the operation of the social institution of family filmmaking, stressing that formal deficiencies—at least, in comparison to feature films—are what opened up spaces for familial communication and

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remembering. 13 Arguing, “the home movie works well when it is badly made,” Odin points out how the fragmented nature of the home movie is what allows for multiple points of entry for family members. 14 In his later works, Odin develops a way to conceive of familial interaction with home movie images that offers more nuance than Chalfen’s single-focus “home mode.” Instead, Odin posits the existence of two related ways of watching: the “private mode” and the “intimate mode.” The private mode consists of the family-as-group’s collective, verbalized engagement with home movie images, while the intimate mode functions as an individual’s singular memories and associations by means of inner thoughts. 15

Several studies build on the earlier work of Odin that theorizes the meaning and function of the home movie within the family. Susan Aasman’s Ritual van huiselijk geluk: een cultuurhistorische verkenning van de familiefilm, Martina Roepeke’s Privat-Vorstellung: Heimkino in Deutschland vor 1945, as well as Alexandra Schneider’s Die Stars sind wir: Heimkino als filmische Praxis plot out the ways in which the making of home movies operate as a ritualistic performative practice within the family. 16 Schneider puts focus on home moviemaking as a cultural practice, linking home moviemaking to the middle classes who could afford equipment, film, and processing fees. However, as she points out, it was not only one’s economic status that influenced the purchase of home movie equipment. According to Schneider, “One of the requirements was a sense of belonging to a particular family, linked with a need to assert one’s own social status.” 17 Thus, the decision for a family to purchase a camera and begin filming itself is linked to a network of circulating discourses regarding how a modern family should spend their leisure time, how they should present themselves on film, and to whom they should show this footage.

Zimmermann’s aforementioned Reel Families demonstrates how discourse in film manuals, how-to books, magazine articles, and advertisements aimed at situating amateur film practices as a leisure activity that focused on

15 Odin, “Space of Communication.”
17 Schneider, “Swiss Expatriate Identities,” 166.
capturing the highlights of family life. According to Zimmermann, overtime, “[a]mateur film progressed from an economic definition to an aesthetic deviation to a social function.”18 Whereas Chalfen’s notion of “home” is a metaphor—neither a specific nor physical place, Zimmermann’s construct of “home” in *Reel Families* is shaped by ideals of nuclear family life (persisting from the post-war years to the late 60s in the United States) and bound to heteronormative conceptions.19 In many home movies, especially in those from the 1950s, documentation begins when the family unit begins—with the introduction of children.20

As amateur film became the subject of archival interest in the 1990s, the study of home movies has grappled with the historiographic possibilities of private film. The 2008 collection, *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* argues for a latent potential in amateur film and home movies. Essays by scholars, archivists, and artists demonstrate that archival home movies do not function as “inert documentary evidence” but are instead traces that must be activated for present-day reuse in historiographic endeavors.21 Here, Zimmermann argues, “Rather than inert and mythologized national imaginaries, amateur film is always forming.”22 This perspective acknowledges the transformation of amateur film and home movies as they move to new contexts and are activated for new uses.

*Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web* is based on 2010’s “Saving Private Reels” symposium in Cork, Ireland.23 The collection firmly places the question of amateur film into our current viewing situation. This includes positioning the films as archival, and it also takes into account the way many people—researchers and non-researchers alike—encounter amateur film: via the internet.

Recently, a turn towards the technological aspects of amateur filmmaking is characterized by studies that investigate the way cameras, accessories, and projectors shaped the experience of shooting and watching home movies throughout different historical periods. This can be seen in the collection *Exposing the Film Apparatus*, which takes a media archaeological approach to the study of media practices from the inception of film to contemporary digital practices.24 In particular, Schneider’s investigation of the tripod

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20 Zimmermann, *Reel Families*, 123.
22 Zimmermann, “Morphing History into Histories,” 276.
24 Giovanna Fossati and Annie van den Oever, eds., *Exposing the Film Apparatus: The Film Archive as a Research Laboratory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).
speaks to the ways that the study of amateur film can be conducted through the cinematic devices rather than texts or contexts. Further, the Changing Platform of Ritualized Memory Practices research project adopts a method called “thinkering”—or, thinking through tinkering—in order to understand the way historically situated amateur technologies impacted familial interactions with home movies over time. This was staged in an experimental performance at the 9th Orphan Film Symposium in 2014, where the changing modes of screening home movies was dramatized. The study connects home moviemaking on film, video, and digital formats by focusing on the way technology shapes the processes of shooting, screening, and sharing.

The study of amateur film has also seen a turn towards what Charles Tepperman refers to as “serious” or “advanced amateurs.” In many ways, this is a necessary step in specialization and definition within the field. As Ryan Shand claims, research into fictional forms of amateur film has been lacking, though a handful of studies has begun to emerge. In Amateur Cinema: The Rise of American Filmmaking, 1923-1960, Tepperman criticizes Zimmermann’s Reel Families, claiming that it “focuses primarily on unedited home movies and rough travel footage and tends to reduce all amateur work to the aesthetic simplicity of ‘home movies.’” Tepperman’s modifiers like “serious” and “advanced” when discussing amateur filmmakers function in a similar way to “professional” when setting up a binary between professional ability and amateur incompetence, only this time the dividing lines are within the amateur world itself. For sure, Tepperman’s study is a much-needed

25 Alexandra Schneider, “The Tripod or ‘When Professionals Turn Amateur’: A Plea for an Amateur Film Archaeology,” in Exposing the Film Apparatus: The Film Archive as a Research Laboratory, ed. Giovanna Fossati and Annie van den Oever (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 166-176.  
investigation into filmmaking practices that flourished but never appeared as even tiny blips on the mainstream cinematic radar, blips that he refers to as “nonmainstream filmmaking” that take place “beyond the domestic sphere.” But formal dexterity is not the only measure for value. Sometimes sloppy and often incomplete, the domestic imagery so typical of home movies is also a necessary chapter in the history of amateur film, as well as a vital area for research in this area. I prefer to categorize home movies and Tepperman’s films by “serious amateurs” based on their intended audience, that is, whether they are directed more inwardly (to the family or close friends) or outwardly (to the community or even beyond). This strategy separates the family oriented films from the crafted works of cine clubs, but it does not rule out the possibility for family films to be carefully crafted.

Again, I think Tepperman’s distinction should be read as one that delimitates and not one that evaluates.

Liz Czach’s “Home Movies and Amateur Film as National Cinema” articulates a primary tension in the study of amateur film that is pertinent to this dissertation. Czach uses a Canadian context as a way to test the theoretical and methodological implications of using amateur film and home movies as an alternative national cinema. Ultimately, Czach finds that the persistence of what she calls the auteur/aesthetic model makes it easier to fit amateur films into a national cinema format than home movies. This is because amateur films, which can usually be attributed to a single filmmaker who made intentional choices and strove for technical mastery of the medium,

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31 Tepperman, 6.
32 In a similar vein, Lars Gustaf Andersson and John Sundholm read amateur filmmaking practices of the 1950s in Sweden as a form of “minor cinema” that operates as an alternative public sphere. As such, filmmaking, subsequent public screening and discussion (and even, perhaps, evaluation) are established as defining features of this minor cinema. It was minor vis-à-vis the major, that is, professional filmmaking practices and its primary motivation was a love of cinema, literally the amator in amateur: “Here the activity was characterized by sheer commitment and freed from external constraints although the values and norms for filmmaking were often copied from the mainstream.” Lars Gustaf Andersson and John Sundholm, “Amateur and Avant-garde: Minor Cinemas and Public Sphere in 1950s Sweden,” Studies in European Cinema 5, no. 3 (2009): 216.
33 She contends that, despite its limitations, “the national” remains a valid interpretive framework for amateur film based on the kinds of claims bestowed upon it. According to Czach, “amateur film and home movies are increasingly collected, examined, and valorized...as reaffirming the nation through a cinematic presence.” The discourse surrounding amateur film (in the archival world, in artistic spheres, and in scholarship) poises it as a ready source for cinematic heritage, though, I believe that the nation is not the sole frame through which this heritage is presented. Depending on the country, its size, and the political agenda of the history writer, regional readings might be just as valid as national ones. Liz Czach, “Home Movies and Amateur Film as National Cinema,” in Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web, ed. Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young, and Barry Monahan (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 29.
34 Czach, 32-33.
more closely follow a structure of “great-filmmakers-making-great-films.” By Czach’s definition, home movies are potentially plot-less and genre-less creations that adhere more to a “point and shoot” aesthetic than a carefully crafted one. As a result, she sees amateur films as being claimed for their aesthetic significance, while the inferior (in terms of visual quality) home movies are claimed for their potential cultural or historical significance. But home movies are often encountered as orphaned material, sometimes even within the context of the archive. As Czach notes, “their historical value is contingent on their proper contextualization including indications of author, time, and places depicted.” When these pieces of the puzzle are missing, it becomes difficult to attribute the films to a specific creator (in the case of the auteur model) or to pin down the particularities of the social histories they show.

Czach’s argument echoes a tendency that is prominent in current scholarship concerning amateur film and home movies. Like Shand, Craven, and Tepperman who choose to work with the amateur output of established cine clubs as opposed to the millions of home moviemakers who shot family films, Czach expresses a frustration with making “domestic” home-movie material operate as an alternate national cinema. Unlike the amateur films that more closely mirror established narrative styles and conventions, home movies are more difficult to get a handle on. There is an insistence that the domestic, the poorly filmed, or the orphaned images of the home movie are valuable artifacts rescued from the sidelines of cinematic output. However, the amateur film’s technical aptitude (relatively speaking) and mirroring of professional genres means that it is the more obvious choice for constructing or expanding national cinemas.

First, Czach is concerned with amateur film and home movie’s relationship to specifically cinematic heritage. Her main focus is not to establish the usefulness of home movies outside of this context. But her argument is telling in that it participates in the further sharpening of the definition of amateur film, and it establishes how home movies relate to this category. Second, Czach presents nonprofessional film as a continuum “that traverses a spectrum from amateur film on one end to the home movie on the other.” This categorization stresses a hierarchy of images—in terms of usefulness or value—based on technical competence. In this way, it accounts for neither the “well made” home movie nor the “poorly made” amateur film. The hierarchy is a further division of the amateur versus professional dichotomy that

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35 Czach, 30-31.
36 Czach, 30.
37 Czach, 30.
38 Czach, 36.
40 Czach, 30.
Schneider criticizes. According to Schneider, amateur film history need “not be about the amateur versus the professional but rather about the engagement with the complex entanglement of the amateur in the professional and vice versa—intersected and crossed by respective contemporary discourses.” A dichotomy that sets up “serious” amateur film versus “domestic” home movies is not as useful as seeing the ways these forms of filmmaking often cross into each other’s territory.

I point out these cases not to criticize Czach’s, Tepperman’s, or others’ work but to emphasize the rhetoric circling the study of amateur film and the way scholars attempt to position the intended object of study. “Amateur film” is framed as works that strive for professional standards and conventions but sometimes fall short of that ambition. As I will argue in the chapters that follow, these distinctions are useful in staking out the territory of non-theatrical filmmaking practices, but they are far from clear-cut. “Domestic” content is not a fixed concept and is problematized throughout this dissertation. Further, I find judgments of image quality and the technical ability of the filmmakers to be less helpful points of entry than questions of intended audience or screening history.

The question of the space for the study of archival home movies as amateur film opens up to issues concerning how they should be approached as objects of study. The online database of amateur cinema introduced at the 2017 Society of Cinema and Media Studies conference, for example, excludes home movies from the platform on the grounds that they do not display intentionality as the works of cine club members do. As a counter to this claim, workshop member Karan Sheldon (also one of the project’s collaborators) showed a reel of 8mm home movie film held at Northeast Historic Film as part of the Anna B. Harris Collection. Referred to as “Fishing in High Heels – Ha!” (based on the description written on the reel), the home movie featured scenes filmed by an African American woman living in a predominantly white Vermont in 1949. Significantly, the films in the Harris Collection were not donated to the archive. Instead, the archive actively sought out material shot in New England by people of color and purchased the films on eBay. Sheldon’s paper highlights the problems of moving-image repositories that collect amateur films and home movies that “don’t conform

42 According to the website’s definition, amateur films are “[d]istinct from rough home movies, but produced outside the commercial system,” and “include dramas, portrayals of everyday life, travel and nature film, comedies, and many other subjects and genres.” The website is part of a project sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. “Amateur Cinema,” Amateur Cinema website, accessed January 3, 2018, http://www.amateurcinema.org/.
to canonical categories at their time or now” and questions the limitations of
the histories we write when these films are overlooked. As a final remark,
Sheldon challenged Charles Tepperman (the project’s director), arguing that
the home movie example from the Harris Collection is, in fact, “a titled film,
a complete film, and manifests the creator. Why might we suppose no inten-
tional there?”

Intentionality is a sticky concept, and it carries with it a number of as-
sumptions, particularly those involving the type of intentionality at work.
Sheldon’s comment hints at this, insinuating that intentionality lies not only
in works that demonstrate artistic aspirations or technical aptitude. While
this may seem like a petty discrepancy, it points to a deeper issue that char-
acterizes the widening divide present in the study of amateur film and home
movies. The kind of intentionality that the amateur cinema database uses as a
defining criterion presumes a singular creator with an outwardly oriented
vision to communicate. While poststructuralist theories, most notably Ro-
land Barthes’ “Death of the Author,” question a focus on creators and their
presumed artistic intentionality and focus instead on the point of reception,
an intentionality of a different order is at work in home movies. As Schnei-
der points out, the act of home moviemaking is a ritualistic performance of
the family for the family, but it is at the same time a performance “for and
with the camera.” As such the act of making home movies is both a social
activity and a media event. The implications of this dual nature of the home
movie performance affect how we are to understand archival home movies
as outside spectators. What we see onscreen has been filtered through the
codes of family filmmaking as well as the technological filmmaking conven-
tions (both amateur and professional) of the time. Despite an often crude or
elementary technical execution, “people also try to make ‘cinema.’” The
‘cinema’ that home moviemakers are creating can be understood as a pas-
tiche of contemporary mainstream filmmaking codes, of a cultural under-
standing of home movies, and of a recreation of techniques and tropes from
still photography. All of these factors inform the way home movies were
made and how we should understand them.

What I present in this dissertation as archival home movies cross the bor-
ders between ritualistic practice, family media event, documentation, and
tool for regional historiography and cultural memory. Rather than arguing

44 “Researching Amateur Film History: Archives, Publics, Digital Platforms,” Society for
Cinema and Media Studies workshop, Chicago, 23 March 2017.
45 According to the amateur cinema website, amateur films are defined as “short works aimed
at an audience of fellow amateurs and members of the public.” “Amateur Cinema,” Amateur
46 Roland Barthes, Image-Music-Text, translated by Stephen Heath, (Farrar, Straus and
for archival home movies’ significance despite their domestic point of view, I demonstrate how the domestic in these films is a part of their significance. The word “domestic” here requires some unpacking. When it is used to describe archival home movie content, it is often regarded as limited in scope and cultural relevance but also as formally inferior to amateur projects that are more outwardly oriented.

What the scholars discussed above have done is to further nuance the way we refer to our objects of study so that marginal and undocumented practices are included in accounts of cinematic heritage. Their studies demand that we refine our research language and acknowledge the multifaceted and dynamic body of amateur production that has not just paralleled but also often overlapped with professional filmmaking throughout the history of moving images.

The Origins of the Home Movie Collection

The University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection grew organically out of its founder, Glynn’s, interest in amateur film and southern culture. From 1993 to 1995, Glynn pursued a master’s degree at the university’s Center for the Study of Southern Culture. Historian Pete Daniel had made her aware of the existence of amateur films of mule racing, an eccentric southern spectacle where African-American sharecroppers ride mules in the intervals between horse races.49 What began as hearsay then became a reality. Through Thomas Rankin, then a professor at the University of Mississippi, she was put into contact with Lytle, an octogenarian artist working primarily in painting and sculpture. However, Lytle also had a personal archive of home movies that she shot starting in the late-1930s where she filmed, among other things, the very mule races that Glynn had heard about. Rankin’s own connection to Lytle traced back to his position as Chair of the Art Department at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi. In 1986, the university’s Field Wright Art Center hosted an exhibition of artworks spanning Lytle’s career as a painter and sculptor.50 Rankin later gathered an oral history of Lytle’s memories from life on Perthshire Plantation, in which they referenced her home movies.51 After Rankin’s move to the University of Mississippi, he and Glynn joined forces to initiate the Picturing Home project. Along with Lytle, in August 1994 they screened selections of Lytle’s films (including *Raisin’ Cotton*) at the Cottonlandia Museum in Greenwood.

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49 Karen Glynn, interview by the author, April 22, 2016, Stockholm, Sweden.
50 Exhibition Catalogue, 1986 (Series 8, box 2, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
51 Emma Knowlton Lytle, interview by Thomas Rankin, 1991 (Series 10, box 31, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
Figure 4: E. P. Leftwich's cue sheet for the screening of Lytle's home movies in Gunnison, Mississippi in 1994. The names of the people featured in the films are listed so they can be identified when they appear onscreen (Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
Mississippi, as well as in the Delta towns of Yazoo City, Clarksdale, Indianola, and Gunnison. The Gunnison screening, just three miles (approximately five kilometers) from Perthshire was hosted by amateur historian E. P. Leftwich. At this screening and others, Lytle provided oral commentary while the films played and Glynn spoke to the audience about the archival preservation of home movies afterward (figure 4). These public screenings, along with contemporaneous calls for submission advertised in local newspapers, functioned to elicit the majority of the material that makes up the Home Movie Collection today.

A User in the University of Mississippi’s Archive

This chapter opens with a quote from Carolyn Steedman’s investigation of the archive titled Dust: The Archive and Cultural History. However, “Dust” in modern-day archives is an improper image to invoke. While Steedman’s invocation of the dusty archive harkens to the 19th century, contemporary archives are clean, dry, and almost sterile places. This is the case with both traditional paper archives and repositories that hold audio-visual materials. When I visited the archive at the University of Mississippi, my experience was not one of shuffling through dusty files, hidden away from light and lost to use. Instead, I worked in a pristine environment, with carpeted floors and neatly cataloged shelves. The home movies themselves were stored in a climate-controlled off-site annex in the shadow of the Vaught-Hemingway stadium where the university’s team plays American football. Each family-bound collection was protected in two layers of plastic bags and kept in below freezing temperatures in an industrial-grade meat freezer (figure 5). Even the VHS viewing copies were shelved cold storage to slow the fragile magnetic tape’s process of degradation. For film and sound relics, dust is the enemy. Dust, moisture, light, heat, and contact with human skin are all things that must be controlled and regulated. The minimization of these elements characterizes not only standard archival preservation tactics but also an even further assertion of order and control over the materials the archive holds. These home movies are no longer reels carelessly tossed in a shoebox and stored in the back of a closet. Instead, by virtue of entering a public institution, they are handled and stored with professional care.

53 E. P. Leftwich cue sheet (Series 10, box 31, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
When I watched the home movies from the University of Mississippi’s holdings, it was not with the aid of a swirling projector, its ticking sound and romantic, flickering light. Neither was it through ultra-modern touch screens or even non-linear digital technology. Instead, I found myself in some kind of technological purgatory, a nearly forgotten world of VHS tapes and thick 3:4 ratio TV monitors that were rolled into a tiny viewing room where the use of ink pens was strictly prohibited. Along the side of the room were CD players and turntables for visitors who wished to listen to selections from the

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54 For example, the lobby of the Walter J. Brown Media Archives at the University of Georgia is arranged as a museum of the archive’s collections. Selections from their holdings of home movies are presented on touch-screen monitors, complete with brief contextual information. Weekly tours are held for schoolchildren and the general public.
archive’s extensive catalogue of blues music. Everything about the situation
spoke of the in-between state of the films themselves, their status as salvaged
but not streamable, collected but hidden away in cold storage, saved yet not
fully “accessible” in any 21st century sense of the word.

I bring up this brief contextual interlude describing how I first accessed
these films in order to highlight several recurring themes that will act as a
rhyme between archival home movies as cultural documents and the institu-
tional situation that they currently find themselves in. This positioning of the
home movie as archival object should not, however, imply that it is ever a
stable, fixed entity. Instead, as this chapter will demonstrate, it is a curated
text whose curation begins before it enters the walls and the cataloging
strategies of the archival institution. Similarly, the archive’s imprint on the
material is not only a physical one but also an ideological one. Describing
images, indexing content, and cataloguing collections are all actions per-
formed on the archival home movie that function to bring order to the unruly
or excessive. These actions are also acts of interpretation that direct the way
these materials re-enter our contemporary landscape as cultural documents.

The remainder of this chapter outlines how the family home movie be-
comes transformed into an archival object and the implications this has on
research in the archive. It is a discussion of research strategies and working
with archival home movies and the ways in which the archival politics of
home movie collection and preservation influence the act of research itself.
In the Introduction, I touched on the idea that, as archival objects, homemade
media has moved from a domestic setting where it fulfills one kind of pur-
pose—commemoration within the family, the development and perseverance
of a family mythology, memory making, and personal archiving, for exam-
ple. Once it moves to an official archive, it is asked to fulfill a very different,
though related, kind of purpose—as regional history, cultural commemora-
tion, and visual evidence of the past.

Archival Strategies for the Collecting, Preservation, and
Access to Home Movies

Most feature-length and professionally produced films intended for theatrical
distribution enter the archive with their production credits intact. Archivists
and users are able to identify the people onscreen and behind the camera, as
well as details like musical credits and even possibly locations.55 These
kinds of details are available for home movie collections only in extraordi-
nary cases. When large amounts of metadata do exist for a collection of ar-
chival home movies, it is often thanks to the investigative work done by

55 Becker, 93.
archivists to piece together a rich contextual history for the collection and not simply that the donating family presented the information when turning over the films to the archive.

The fragmentary and unruly nature of private home movie collections can function as strengths for establishing their cultural value when they enter archival contexts. As opposed to cataloging on an item level (such as film title), home movies, as well as other materials that serve a different kind of cultural function than narrative films, benefit from collection level organization within the archive. As Andrea Leigh points out, in these cases, “the relationships that exist between items convey meaning in addition to the content of the items themselves.”

Further, since home movie collections enter the archive without a coded set of production information and without the narrative structure typical of films produced for public screening, they demand description on the level of individual shots. Whereas professional productions are catalogued and described in archives as distinct item entries, home movies require shot-by-shot indexing since one reel of the collection lasting less than five minutes might cover a number of different topics depending on the whim of the home moviemaker. According to archivist Snowden Becker, “as long as they can be accurately identified, home movies can be described—shot for shot—with a level of detail that could make them far more accessible than longer, commercial films that address the same content.”

This level of detail, in the form of keywords and content description, is what makes the content understandable—and perhaps more importantly, findable—for archival researchers and users.

When a collection of home movies enters the archive, there is often very little contextual information present. Archive staff use hand-written notes on the film boxes to determine the activity portrayed, an approximate date of the filming, and sometimes even the names of those who appear onscreen, though this information might still be as vague as the descriptor “Aunt Sue” or “the Logans.” Boxes that lack any markings by the donor carry other identifying traces. Since the box itself often served as the shipping packaging from the lab that developed the film, a mailing address and postmark give clues to a general geographic area where the films might have been shot and the time when they were processed. Additionally, the type of film stock itself can be cross-referenced with the film company’s records to see when a particular brand was available on the amateur market. The donor is usually asked to provide any information they can, and in best-case scenarios, they will watch the films with the archive’s staff in order to identify on-screen content. Either as a written compliment to the film material or as an oral commentary over the images, the donor’s comments should become an inte-

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56 Leigh, 37.
57 Becker, 93.
The lack of any donor information does not mean that the collection must linger in obscurity. Through shot-level description, archival staff can make generalized notations of the people, places, practices, and time periods that appear onscreen. This might be as vague as “kids roller skating and eating watermelon” as in a 1972 reel from the *Grubbs Collection* shot in the suburbs of Jackson, Mississippi. But as Becker points out, “[w]hat is certain is that anything not described at all will not be consulted at all.”

The problem with archival description that is lacking donor input, as Cecilia Mörner points out, is that such viewing leaves us vulnerable to what might be severe interpretive mistakes, both in the cataloging of the films and in researchers’ subsequent viewings. Mörner gives the example where, in her earlier study of home movies from Västmanland in Sweden, she assumed the footage she was watching was a celebration of the atomic family unit at a backyard barbecue. Several years later, when she interviewed the family members from the film, it became apparent that the young girl she saw onscreen was not the family’s daughter at all. In fact, the girl was a neighbor and daughter to negligent parents. The family in the film always tried to include her in their gatherings because her own home life was so difficult. In this way, the film was a document of, on one hand, a fractured family, and on the other, an alternative “family” configuration.

There are, however, complications associated with this type of ethnographic act. Donor input can take a range of forms, from their having hardly ever seen the films before to having extensively reviewed a DVD or VHS transfer of the films. Donors are not always (and I would go on to claim that they usually are not) the actual makers of the home movies. It is much more common for a child or grandchild of the home moviemaker(s) to donate the collection to an archive at the time of their relative’s death. The term “home moviemaker” becomes less and less useful in the context of archival home movies. From the perspective of archival home movie collections, “donor” is most often the best entry angle. Further, pinpointing any one home moviemaker can be difficult when the process of filming was sometimes a shared endeavor. Finally, to rely so heavily on donor interpretations is, firstly, often impossible and, further, unnecessarily limits the kind of interpretations that

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58 Becker, 95 and 98.
59 The *Grubbs Collection* is made up of nine reels of color Super-8 film shot around Jackson, Mississippi between 1972 and 1986. Reel 2, *Grubbs Collection, Home Movie Collection Shot List*, (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).
60 Becker, 95
63 Mörner, 35.
can be made. It contracts the home movies to texts with authors, whereas the point of view of constructed regional reflection relies on the meanings and associations that come from the images onscreen—some of which were unintentional, even accidental.

Most significantly, even when it is possible to perform interviews with home movie donors, the researcher’s initial contact with the material happens prior to this. Even Mörner advises that the ethnographic research performed with donors should be used as a “cross-check” rather than a substitution for textual analysis.64 The home movies in a family’s collection were never meant to make sense in the same way narrative fiction or nonfiction films are meant to make sense. However, as contemporary spectators, we understand the collections in archives as “closed.” We expect that no new material will be shot and subsequently added to the collection. Because of this, we are able to retrospectively read them as films with beginnings, middles, and ends—chronologically speaking—even if these points are rather arbitrary from the perspective of any classical Western narrative structures. This will be addressed in greater detail at the end of this chapter.

Spelling Out Difference: The Home Movie Collection Shot List

As discussed in the Introduction, I used the shot list for the Home Movie Collection as a principle tool for my understanding of the films. Much like the archive, Andrea Phillips describes lists as “homogenizing and powerful devices” that perform a “contradiction between boundlessness and stricture.”65 Boundlessness, here, would be describing everything visible on the screen. Stricture, on the other hand, is represented by the kind of imagery the archive thinks is significant or could be of interest to a potential user. On one hand, I first encountered the films through their description in the shot list. On the other hand, I used the shot list to retroactively see how the archive discusses and presents the films and their contents. The way archival employees watched the films and identified specific imagery gives us information about what they deemed important in these films and, therefore, why they thought these films were important. In this case, the archival employees were four graduate students under the direction of Glynn. In my interview with Glynn, who is now retired, she discussed the difficulty in developing a uniform language for the descriptions in the shot list.66 For a newly formed archive with one full-time employee and no real operating budget to speak

64 Mörner, 40.
of, having graduate-student interns screen and identify over 100,000 feet of film is a necessary tactic. Asking these students to describe, in bullet point form, what they see on the screen seems like a fairly direct imperative. However, as is the case in many types of archives, the vagaries and discrepancies within the written description attest that the task is far from simple.

Reading the shot list, I got the impression that the annotations were made on the fly, while the projector was rolling, perhaps in conjunction with their original transfer to VHS tape in the mid-1990s. The length of time taken to think through what is seen and write down notes is the same as the film’s running time, which, in the case of a 50-foot reel of 8mm film is about four minutes. Whether or not the note taker recognized and mentioned a location with cultural or historical reference is solely based on their own personal knowledge unless the information is written in the notes accompanying the film, for example, “’76 Vicksburg” and “5/77 Disneyworld” from the Hammond Collection.

Some descriptions are indicative of a present-day—or what was present day in the mid-1990s—fascination with particular time periods. For example, in the Alvis Collection, the note taker pointed out specific details that highlight a difference in white, middle class appearance (dress, hairstyles, and level of formality) that might be actually have been remembered or was familiar through pop cultural reference points (figure 6). Examples include such descriptions as “woman washing dishes in housecoat,” “dad looking sharp,” or “women have ‘big hair’” [emphasis original], pointing to the former popularity of large, “beehive” hairstyles. Sometimes, even the actual language of description is colored by the cultural context at the time of note taking. A segment with the Alvis children wearing the fashionable bellbottom style of the early 1970s is referred to as, “kids in ‘Brady’ clothes doing jumping jacks.” Even the seemingly slight details that the note taker decided to include can be a telling, though subjective, positioning. The offhand comment, “dad having a Pabst Blue Ribbon” points to the prominence of a

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67 The Hammond Collection is made up of 2 reels of color 8mm film and 10 reels of color Super-8 film shot throughout Mississippi between 1961 and 1985.
68 The Alvis Collection is made up of 5 reels of color 8mm film and 25 reels of color Super-8 film shot in central Mississippi between 1960 and 1975.
69 Reels 1, 3, and 6, Alvis Collection, Home Movie Collection Shot List (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).
70 Reel 6, Alvis Collection, Home Movie Collection Shot List (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries). The Brady Bunch (Sherwood Schwartz) was an American sitcom that ran from 1969 to 1974, however, its popularity was solidified with members of Generation X through its heavy syndication on Ted Turner’s TBS during the 1980s and 1990s. Additionally, in 1995, The Brady Bunch Movie (Betty Thomas) was released theatrically, with the premise that the Brady family (played by new actors) was transported from the 1970s to the 1990s.
mass-produced beer brand before it became an ironic signifier linked to hipster culture.\textsuperscript{71}

The primary strategy behind the archive’s shot list seems to be one of pointing out difference. And one of the most fundamental forms of difference that is visible onscreen in the Home Movie Collection is race. In the shot list, differences in race are literally spelled out. Sideline questions of race—especially when those questions have to do with the white race—is potentially dangerous. It too easily allows for slippages that set up non-white persons as the racial “Other.” As Grace Elizabeth Hale points out, “The denial of white as a racial identity, the denial that whiteness has a history, allows the quiet, the blankness, to stand as the norm.”

The creators of the Home Movie Collection shot list rather haphazardly assign the modifier “white” to Caucasian persons onscreen. The times when they do identify the person or persons onscreen as white usually happens in conjunction with identifying another person as African American.

A document called “Footage Report” created in the late 1990s specifies which of the family-bound collections of home movies contain footage fea-

\textsuperscript{71} Even in 1984’s Blue Velvet (David Lynch), Pabst Blue Ribbon was used to signal the unpretentious working class, as opposed to the elitist, imported Heinekin.

\textsuperscript{72} Grace Elizabeth Hale, Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940 (New York: Vintage, 1999), xi.
uring African Americans. Each collection is listed by family name, and the reel and roll number is listed to the side. Here, “reel” refers to the 400-foot reel where the individual 50-, 100-, or 200-foot reels were spliced together and collected when preparing for transfer to VHS. Significantly, other than pointing out which films featured African Americans, the only other thing pointed out in the document is which collections showed signs of vinegar syndrome or had issues with mold.

The Home Movie Collection is made up of those 47 collections that are available on viewing copies and described in the shot list. Beyond this, however, the archive holds other materials in the collection that are not yet transferred, have not yet been described—or at least one of the two conditions.

Additionally, the Lytle Collection is made up of much more material than is listed in the shot list. Some of this is preservation masters and 16mm negatives and duplications that were created in 1997 and 2000 with the support of grants from the Women’s Film Preservation Fund and the National Film Preservation Fund. Further still are the boxes of mostly unedited and totally undescribed 8mm films donated to the archive after Lytle’s death in 2000. Unlike the other family-bound collections, these films have not been spliced together onto 400-foot reels and placed, plastic encased, into the freezer unit. Instead, they remain in the original Kodak boxes with Lytle’s hand-written notes on the outside. The sub collection is kept in the cold storage area with the VHS viewing copies.

This second wave of Lytle’s donated films remain obscured from researchers and reusers because they are, as of yet, undescribed. Similarly, other uncategorized home movies that have been transferred to VHS viewing copies are not findable unless the researcher or potential reuser requests that any and all VHS tapes from the annex are brought to the main building to acclimate to room temperature. If the collections are simply requested based on the family names listed in the shot list, then these other materials will be missed.

The Familial Gaze

Shooting family film is a constructive act and functions as a framing device in a number of ways. It delineates who is to be considered part of the group, and what series of relationships they have. As Marianne Hirsch argues, the “familial gaze” shapes the way snapshots and portraits are composed and

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73 The document titled “Footage Report” is filed with other internal documentation relating to the Home Movie Collection.
“‘frames’ the family in both senses of the term.”

Extending this perspective to include home movies as another kind of family photography, we can see how the domestic photographic act is a particular type of documentary act: “The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness; it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals.”

As family films, many collections in the Home Move Collection feature seemingly endless cycles of Christmases, birthdays, Easters, trips to the coast along the Gulf of Mexico, vacations to the Six Flags over Texas amusement park, visits to Vicksburg’s Civil War battlefield, and, of course, a staple of the genre: parades. The parades feature drum majorettes, marching bands, baton twirlers, occasional Civil War re-enactors on horseback wearing Confederate uniforms and carrying Confederate battle flags, beauty queens riding in convertibles, and children riding in hay-filled trailers pulled by pickup trucks or ordinary farm tractors. What also becomes apparent through the images of parades is that even after 1954’s Brown v. Board of Education decision, many the schools that the marching bands represented remained segregated. This signals the South’s decade-long lag time in implementing the United States Supreme Court’s ruling that outlawed racial segregation in public schools and the general resistance of much of white Mississippi to integration practices. In the footage from the 1960s, some integration becomes visible in parades and sporting events. However, this time period is followed by the influx of “segregation academies” in the 1970s, identifiable in the home-movie footage by the schools’ crests on their banners and uniforms. Segregation academies were all-white private—and often Christian—schools that were founded across the South in the mid-1970s in reaction to the government-ordered integration of public schools in the United States.

While these images of public events, on the surface, transcend the private, their tie to the family is still very strong. Throughout footage of various families, it becomes clear that the parade was filmed because, for instance, their daughter or son was in the marching band. Similarly, sporting events such as high-school football games, basketball games, baseball games, and track meets were recorded as a backdrop for the child’s participation. In some cases, the parent took the camera along to their child’s classroom to document a “typical” day at school. While this and other examples function to break the domesticity of the images depicted by showing scenes of public life, it is still working as a part of that system. As the previously mentioned discussion of school segregation visible through parade footage demon-

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75 Hirsch, Family Frames, 7.
76 Sokol, 171-172.
strates, home moviemakers very often used their cameras outside of the physical boundaries of the family home. As a result, what they filmed can be framed as having wider cultural significance. However, to select the “public” portion and discard the rest threatens to bestow a value-free ideology on the images. Repackaging the public material back into the family-bound collection allows for a reading of the family frame that can also be crossed with a regional frame of reference. Additionally, as will be exemplified throughout this chapter, considering the collection as a whole helps to contextualize the images and is often the only information available.

As is evident in the parade and sports footage, familial interactions are played out in private and public spaces. This is not necessarily unusual since home movies often function to capture familial performances of togetherness outside of the boundaries of the home, the most notable example being vacations. However, very often in these cases, just as with the parade sequences, the frame is not limited to just capturing the family. Other people and places are also included, sometimes intentionally and sometimes by accident. The camera captures non-family subjects even while replicating familiar home-movie tropes. What requires examining is the ways in which the “familial gaze” is at work in these tangled sets of images. To film a parade with a home movie camera is not only an act of documentation of the event but also a narrative of the home moviemaker’s likes and interests, their sports team allegiances, and perhaps even their family relations. It is important for future spectators to account for this.

As discussed above, Hirsch’s familial gaze is a shaping device. Familial relations and ideologies construct identity within the frame. In this way, the camera is a metaphor for the gaze, however, there is not usually a clean line where the familial gaze ends and other gazes begin. An example of this comes from the Cohen Collection, one of the collections of home movies held at the University of Mississippi. As a construction contractor, Cohen’s footage contains images of bridges and levees being built during the 1950s in addition to images of family and community life. In his documentation of

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77 Zimmermann, Reel Families, 135.
79 The Cohen Collection is made up of 12 reels of color 16mm film, shot between 1951 and 1959. Cohen’s work in the construction business brought him (and his camera) to build levees and bridges on both sides of the Mississippi River as part of the highway development policies precluding and extending into the Eisenhower Era. He lived in Arkansas, in fact, but the University of Mississippi accepted his collection of home movies because they contained so much footage on the Mississippi side of the river. Additionally, the Cohen Collection represents footage shot by a Jewish family. Their home movies then become material traces of an almost vanishing Jewish presence in small southern towns. While cosmopolitan areas like New Orleans, Louisiana continued to have a presence of a Jewish community after a general decline across the South starting around the 1920s, this was less frequently the case in smaller communities. Through the Cohen Collection we see shots of their local temple and shots of the local rabbi’s house that Cohen was commissioned to build.
the 1951 Water Valley bridge-building project, his wife is visible watching the construction at the edge of the water. Cohen then pans to her and offers a close-up of her face as she smiles at him and, therefore, at the camera. Much of the footage in the Home Movie Collection has this complex entangling of the familial gaze with other gazes. Hirsch advocates for breaking this shaping “familial gaze” in order to interrogate photographic representations of the family. This is done by working with the media in question and upsetting its representational conventions. The framework for this process is what Hirsch calls “metaphotographic texts” (with reference to W. J. T. Mitchell’s “imagetext”), where the images are mediated by “narrative contexts, either by reproducing them or by describing them.” Hirsch’s method of working aims to subvert the ideological markings that color so much of family media: “Only in the context of this meta-photographic textuality and in this self-conscious contextuality can photographs disrupt a familiar narrative about family life and its representations, breaking the hold of a conventional and monolithic familial gaze.”

Hirsch’s methodology, though aimed at still photography, is useful—even necessary—when studying archival home movies, particularly when attempting to put them into a regional context. However, an interrogation of home movies that only focuses on breaking through the familial gaze misses some of the diversity that actually exists, even within what is known as a highly repetitive form of filmmaking.

Re-reading home movies with an eye towards their possible contemporary significance requires what Odin describes as “shifting from the familial to the cultural frame.” He claims, “Every old home movie that operates within a different spatial, cultural, ethnic, or social framework will benefit from de-framed readings.” Because of the ambiguity of so much of this material—ambiguity of hard “facts” within the material as well as, very often, the ambiguity of the provenance of the material itself—it becomes dangerous to shift entirely to a cultural frame. While Odin’s concept of shifting frames is a valuable approach, the shifting itself is not a satisfactory end result. Perhaps a different way to think about de-framed readings would be the concept of cross-framed readings where both the original familial frame as well as the cultural frame can be employed simultaneously.

81 Of course, Hirsch recognizes the historical and geographic situations that complicate what any one “ideology of the family” might be. What she argues as a thematic constant in family photography, which I believe also applies to family films like home movies, is the idea of a “family mythology” that shapes the content of what is captured on film and how it is presented to the inner circle of family and friends (in photo albums or on composite reels, for example). Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 8.
Strategies for the Scholarly Study of Archival Home Movies

Home movies can be ideal site for exploring the intersection of private history with issues of wider cultural significance. For example, Zimmermann’s analysis of Gladys Steputis’s 8mm reel from 1961 titled Doing the Twist represents the way the arbitrary unity of a given home-movie reel highlights the inside/outside or private/public overlap in home movies. As Zimmermann explains, “Doing the Twist’s two-part structure migrates from public space to private space,” from a snowy scene outside surrounding the family’s suburban home to an interior in their living room where the group reassembles as a family unit.84 According to Zimmermann, this individual reel demonstrates “how amateur film’s performativity functions as a node for the overlapping discourses of the family, youth subcultures, weather, domestic space, and region.”85 Zimmerman’s reading of this reel is useful for thinking about home movies as they are encountered in the archive. First, this reading accounts for the ways in which archival home movies are more than the sum total of their images. A sequence shot inside the home also relates to the sequence that comes before and the one that comes after it. Zimmerman makes connections between sequences that are visually, thematically, temporally, or even spatially disparate (though, in this particular example, those differences are not so exaggerated). In fact, this becomes part of her methodology. Further, this perspective acknowledges the familial frame and makes an interpretive leap beyond its confining borders, thereby creating meaning beyond what was originally intended by the home-moviemaking family.

Ultimately, Zimmerman’s reading points to the ways in which we can negotiate the relationship between both the private and the public material many home movies present. In Zimmerman’s example, the interior scenes are just as valuable as the exterior scenes. The family’s actions point to national and regional signifiers beyond the limited scope of the Steputis family. But, most significantly, it is through an interpretation of the content as a family film that these other inferences can come to the fore.

Home movies’ characteristic fragmentary nature can be attributed to two things—one physical and one more metaphoric in nature. The first is that the typical length of 16mm, 8mm, and super-8 spools or cartridges allowed only between three-to-five minutes of shooting time before it was necessary to reload the film. Where home video makers might shoot an entire event—such as a graduation ceremony—on a single extended-play tape, home

84 Zimmermann, “Morphing History into Histories,” 285.
85 Zimmermann, “Morphing History into Histories,” 286.
moviemakers must limit their filming to the “highlights.” 86 Fred Camper identifies this as one of the determining stylistic factors between home movies shot on film and home videos shot on tape, which were just emerging as a popular alternative when Camper wrote his article in 1986. The second factor that shapes home movies as fragmentary collections of images has to do with what they leave out. As Hirsch’s familial gaze demonstrates, the practice of shooting a home movie privileges certain moments over others. Sequences of moving images in home movies, therefore, perform an important role in the shaping of family memory. A section several seconds to several minutes in length becomes memorialized within the family mythos to the exclusion of the contextualizing moments directly before or after.

Home movies can appear to be highly repetitive and consisting of no real storyline other than a basic chronology of holidays, high points, vacations and sporting events. While unstructured in the conventional sense, narratives begin to emerge among the fragments. Here, I turn to work done in the fields of diary studies and family photography to discuss some strategies for approaching archival home movies as researchers and as spectators, or what I refer to as the researcher/spectator. 87 While the material properties and imaginative functions of home movies, family photographs, and personal diaries are all quite different from one another, I approach work in these fields as a way to establish chronology and a sense of narrative in order to make meaning when researching such films.

Annette Kuhn, working with family photography, demonstrates how the selection and ordering of still photographs, often in the form of a family album, functions to construct a type of chronological narrative. As with home movies, the imagery of the photographs tends to create “cyclical repetitions of climactic moments,” be they children’s birthdays and family holidays, as Kuhn contends, or more idiosyncratic family obsessions, as further research into this type of media has uncovered. 88 Regardless of the content itself, Kuhn’s point is significant: what emerges through the photographic images “is more characteristic of the open-ended narrative form of the soap opera than of the closure of classical narrative.” 89 This may be true with the making of family photographs and even home movies, but a different type of narrative becomes visible in the reading, especially from a remove. What becomes clear is that home movies in archives appear as closed collections. The narrative has seemingly come to an end, even if this ending is rather

87 I prefer this term because, even as a researcher, one first encounters the home movie material as a spectator seeking to make sense of the films.
89 Kuhn, 19.
arbitrary. This has an important effect on how we read them as a researcher/spectator.

Using the idea of the epic narrative as a methodological tool for initial understanding, I suggest a way of studying archival home movie collections. This is a holistic approach to textual analysis. It does not preclude a focus on short, individual sequences, but it requires that an account of the whole inform understanding of the home movie’s parts. This approach feeds into and reinforces the archive’s own collection-based categorization. There is certainly a risk in imparting a sense of any wholeness or completeness on a collection of home movies, which, as established in the Introduction, is merely a semi-random assemblage of sequences and reels shot over a series of time. A family’s home movie collection begins when they decide to start filming and ends when they stop. This period of time might begin when a child is born and end once they enter adulthood, but just as often a collection might end when the novelty of hobby filmmaking has worn off—or a new form of home media, such as videotape, has replaced the older one. However, using the whole to understand the parts does provide a substantial advantage when a collection of home movies lacks a clear cultural context. And, as will be established below and in the chapters to come, it is a method that aids in making the personal films publicly relevant. Against the backdrop of seemingly generic and repetitive scenes, regionally distinct indicators begin to emerge.

Diary and photo album research emphasizes the value in looking for and paying close attention to repetition and rhythm, rather than waiting for something “different” to happen. According to Philippe Lejeune, the two things we, as outside readers, are able to see in diaries is repetition and variation. While diaries have no “avant-texts,” such as draft versions, they do have previous entries. Similarly, home movies lack scripts for comparison or production clues. Each entry in the context of the diary, like each filmed “entry” or segment of a home movie within a larger collection, can function like the missing avant-text that researchers can refer to with regard to subsequent entries.

Lejeune’s approach attempts to develop an ontology not of the diary itself but of our experience of the diary from an impersonal remove. This is also a methodological question that relates to the way home movies can be read at such a remove. In many ways, this must precede other possible avenues of research concerning the historical or cultural value of the films. It is not ade-

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92 While some parts of Lejeune’s research involve a historical investigation into diary writing as a cultural (in his case, specifically French) practice, I want to draw attention to those times when he explores strategies for reading other people’s diaries.
quate to simply replace the word “diary” with the word “home movies” when discussing Lejeune’s work, but it does create a suitable space for discussion.

Lejeune asserts that a key element in reading and understanding the diaries of others is the very thing that helps us to not get bogged down by their non-literary (i.e. “inferior”) elements such as repetition, fragmentation, or even apparent blandness. He identifies this element as the presumed experience of “touching time.” According to Lejeune, this type of trace status is based not so much on indexicality as on sincerity and a firm placement in time. This sincerity depends on our “sense that the diary author was recording his or her real experiences and thoughts.” While the concept of sincerity is complicated and even troubling, in this case it does not require that we believe the writer is presenting an unmediated truth, just that they are presenting a subjective version of their life. The question of rootedness in time depends on the diarist’s act of dating the entry: “if writers do not date their entries, they are not keeping diaries,” according to Lejeune.

Again, diaries are the private production of a single person and home movies function, like photographs, as collaborative texts for the whole family, regardless of who is holding the camera. Dating a reel or section of a home movie, usually noted on film’s box with a brief summary of the contents, is an after-the-fact descriptor and does not possess the same “sincerity effect” as dating an entry at the time of writing as is commonly practiced in diary keeping. It does, however, work on the home movie researcher/spectator in the same way as Lejeune supposes in diaries: “In the diary, the date is not so much to inform an addressee as to make the gaps between entries detectable: in short, the rhythm.” The effect for the researcher/spectator of home movies is that it helps make intelligible the strings of discontinuities appearing onscreen: it makes change make sense. When archival home movies in a collection have been labeled with the dates on which they were shot, the individual reels can be assembled and viewed chronologically. It is at this point when the researcher/spectator is able to experience the sensation of touching time. Beyond establishing a rough chronology, repetitive strings of birthday parties, Christmases, and vacations are interpreted not in terms of being “more of the same” but instead as being variations on a theme where stability or change over time is made perceivable.

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95 Popkin, 6.
Ultimately, Lejeune’s process of approaching the diary begins in an objective mode, involving historical inquiry surrounding the text itself, and moves in ever closer to the work. His textual analysis does not deny his own subjectivity, and the way he is able to make sense of the diaries of others is acknowledged as part and parcel of the reading. The resulting interpretation is, according to Lejeune, “a history book and a book of tenderness” combined into one.98 It is certainly possible that Lejeune’s method is more poetic than practical. But in between these two poles of impossible objective readings and questionable subjective interpretations, between history and tenderness, lies a stable foothold for work with private documents that are now part of public collections.

Chronology influences interpretation of archival materials be they home movies, collections of photographs, or even diaries. More specifically, the order of home movie reels within a collection, like the arrangement of family photographs within an album, affects the kind of narratives we, as outside researchers/spectators, see. Just as what we see versus what is left out obviously shapes our perception of what the material means—or even what it is about on a very basic level—so does the order in which it is presented. Within the field of family photography studies, Martha Langford emphasizes the performative act on the part of the album maker to arrange photographs, often taken from different periods or places, or even from a number of photographers as the printed-paper photograph is traded as a physical gift among friends and family members, both close and distant. Langford argues that the album composition is an act of self-performance to a greater extent than a collective family narrative strategy. Langford was working with an anonymous album consisting of photographs that were taken between 1920-1940 and most likely composed by a young girl in her early 20s. Since each page of the album was arranged thematically or based around a specific event or particular person, Langford was only able to establish the chronological order of the photographs by taking apart a copy of the album and sorting the prints based on their formats. This way she was able to establish a narrative strategy that was different from the girl’s version in which, as creator of the album, she performed three separate yet interlinking roles: that of subject, of narrator, and significantly, of curator.99

The practice of the University of Mississippi’s archive is to arrange the home movie reels in chronological order and then transfer them to VHS. However, any reels without a date explicitly written on the box or accompanying the film is placed at the end of the collection, both in the shot list and

on the transfer to a viewing copy. As a result, early undated reels might appear at the end of the collection after much more recent material. Additionally, color films are transferred together with other color films, as black-and-white films are also processed together. In the case of the Lytle Collection, they appear on separate VHS tapes and DVDs from one another. Finally, many home moviemakers edited their individual 50-foot reels onto 200- or 400-foot reels, regardless of their chronology. This further disrupts the archive’s cataloguing system. These transfers were done in the mid-1990s when the donations to the Home Movie Collection where taken in. The films were projected onto a white screen and captured using a video camera. Each reel was preceded by a piece of paper that listed the collection name (usually the donor’s last name), the reel number, and any identifying information with which the reel was originally labeled, including the date (for example: Walker, reel 18, November 1959, David’s Birthday). The Walker Collection is one of the 16 collections that were shot in or around Jackson, the capital city of Mississippi. The collection consists of 4050 feet of 8mm film (almost three hours of runtime on VHS). The reels range in date from 1958 to 1965. My initial reading of the collection was that it documented the first few years of the lives of the Walkers’ three children, starting with the birth of their daughter, Melissa. The first reel on the VHS tape, dated August 1958, begins with a baby shower and immediately cuts to shots of a newborn baby Melissa and her mother being rolled out of the hospital in a wheelchair and getting into the car to go home. I took this as fairly indicative of a common tradition where a couple buys their first camera to coincide with the birth of their first child.

In one sense, this reading was fairly accurate, however, the problem was that I was unable to read the text of the collection in any way other than fairly nondescript generic shots of family celebrations. It seemed like a textbook example to illustrate Odin’s comment (cited in the Introduction), “Nothing resembles a home movie as much as another one.” However, when I returned to the Walker material, I began to map out the 63 reels that make up the collection. The large majority (57 of them) are standard 50 foot reels of 8mm film that have not been edited in any way after they were developed. The first six reels were 200 foot each, suggesting that they consist of four smaller reels spliced together onto a larger one for ease of viewing. It is possible that more detailed editing took place, however the flashes of light approximately every five minutes indicate that these are most probably four consecutive reels.

First, after my re-organization of the reels, I noticed that reels 7 through 13, all 50 feet in length, were actually shot before or throughout the period

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100 The Walker Collection is made up of 63 reels of color 8mm film shot near Jackson, Mississippi between 1957 and 1965.
that the first six 200 foot reels were shot. This made it clear that the Walker’s oldest child was actually their son, David, who was six years old when the first reel was made. Once a more accurate timeline was established, a clear rhythm among the reels emerged that marked “highpoints” for the family as a whole, as well as for each individual child. Based on the date of the actual first reel, reel 7, the family camera was probably purchased at Christmas the year before Melissa’s birth later that August. Each 200-foot reel, ranging in date from 1958 to 1961, seems more like a thematic keepsake than just a timesaving strategy. The first of the six is dedicated to highlights of baby Melissa’s first few months of life: first bath, first spoon feeding, and first trip to the zoo. Reel 4 from August 1959 is allotted to the family’s vacation to Florida’s Okefenokee Swamp. The point of this brief discussion of the Walker Collection is not to prove one starting point as more accurate than another, nor is it to establish the actual date of birth of each of the family’s three children. However, in a collection that is made up of a large number of individual reels shot over the period of less than ten years, the strategies used in the study of family photographs and private, unpublished diaries helps to give form to anonymous, seemingly undifferentiated home movie footage.

In this chapter, I presented a survey of research on amateur film where I outlined the major areas of study and contemporary debates within the field. In an ethnographic reading of the archive itself, I traced the movement of family films from private keepsakes to curated archival collections. Further, I questioned the relationship between “public” and “private” material in archival home movie collections. In doing so, I exemplified the ways in which the private portions of home-movie material influences how the public material is understood, both in terms of the baseline meaning of the content in the films and in terms of the broader cultural relevance of the material. In the next chapter, I put some of the above methods to use when analyzing one collection of archival home movies. In doing so, I connect the Lytle Collection to a wider cultural context while also engaging with it as a form of domestic filmmaking.
An African-American man kneels close to the ground and tightly holds the shoulders of a Jack Russell Terrier that is straining to get away. The man and dog are positioned outside of a small plantation building made of unpainted, rough-hewn wood. As soon as the man lifts his hands, the dog springs forward and catches a rat that was hiding in the bottom left corner of the frame. This sequence, as well as the entire 50-foot reel, shot on black-and-white 8mm film by Emma Knowlton Lytle in 1938 or 1939 shows the minute, yet necessary, tasks that make up work life on a New South cotton plantation. The reel begins with shots of tractors collecting hay in a large field, and, immediately following the rat-catching episode, it shows a sharecropper using a file to sharpen each individual blade of a double-handled saw. The saw is then pulled back and forth by four men—two on each side—to cut through a stump of wood. When the camera changes position, two men in the background saw a new stump while, in the foreground of the image, a man with an ax begins chopping a small stump into firewood.

Lytle’s portrait-in-miniature of plantation maintenance and work, likely taken over a short period of time, consists of another feature that is significant in the context of home movies. In addition to her camera, Lytle also brought along her daughter. As she travelled around various locations of the plantation grounds, Lytle shot sequences that feature two-year-old Eleanor. Just before the Jack Russell Terrier is released for a second time to catch another rat, Eleanor walks into the shot and gently pets the dog while looking up at the camera. Several minutes later on the same reel, Eleanor walks across the porch of a sharecropper dwelling and gives a bouquet of wildflowers to a group of women sitting there (figure 7). To the side, an African-American boy about five years old fills a bucket with water from a spigot in the yard. He stops to stare at the camera and then walks away.

These rural southern home movies demonstrate the ways that, on the plantation, the business of cotton production involved the entire family. The line between home and place of work is blurred. This is not only the case for Lytle and her family. As exemplified by the young boy fetching water, this is also true for the sharecropper families whose homes were also on the plantation grounds. Rather than being strictly family oriented, these rural home movies display a vision of home that is not a retreat from the public life of work and sociability but instead feature cotton fanning as an integral part of family life. These planter families use amateur technologies characteristic of modern families, yet many aspects of their daily lives feature pre-industrial household patterns. Following Hareven’s emphasis of the changing nature of the family and its relationship to the place of residence throughout history, I discuss how plantations in rural Mississippi display a more expanded notion of “home” and “household” than urban or suburban examples that are often cited as the norm.

Through a historicization of the idea of “home,” I trace the ways that amateur film technologies, which had by the late 1930s and early 1940s been directed into the realm of capturing family imagery, performed in a transi-

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tional space in the homes of rural families. Building on the previous chapter, I discuss how home movies’ unique domestic perspective questions divisions of public and private and helps to articulate the complex, unequal, yet incredibly intimate relations between African-American sharecroppers and white planters during a high time of racial segregation in the Jim Crow South. While Lytle’s films can be understood as portraits of her family’s lives and work, I also propose a complementary reading. Taking into account not only the images of sharecropper work but also the scenes of leisure, I argue that these films can additionally be understood as a type of home movie of the sharecropper families who lived and worked there, for whom Perthshire Plantation was a place called home.

Building Narratives within Collections

According to Odin, it is most commonly the father, or the family patriarch, who held the camera during the high time of the bourgeois patriarchal family, namely 1945-75. However, beyond the memory-shaping familial self-censorship imposed by the camera-wielding father, there is also another memory at work. This memory is activated when the film is shown and works as a counterbalance to the creatively sculpting memory of choosing what to film. Odin sees a schism between the collectively agreed up familial memory and an individual within the family’s own personal memory.

Odin famously claims here, as well as in previous publications, “the home movie works well when it is badly made.” By this, he means that a home movie with a strong narrative structure—imposed by the camera operator—would leave less room for other members of the family to find their own story or their own part in the family’s history as spectators. Essentially, the more fragmented the brief, filmic extracts, the more possibilities for others to construct their own version of the past in the intimate mode. Odin dubs the home movie as “much less a vehicle for, than a stimulator of, memory.” In addition to the fragmented formal and thematic nature of most home movies, Odin also likens home movies to photography rather than cinema, saying:

\[1\] Odin, “Space of Communication,” 16.
\[4\] Odin goes on to discuss how medium-specific changes in home moviemaking technology has changed the modes of enunciation, the level of intimacy, and the need for familial consensus. These changes are medium specific in terms of the possible length of takes, the availability of zoom lenses, or the addition of synched sound, but they also relate to economics: less expensive recording media lead to new styles of shooting and a re-evaluation of priorities; cheaper equipment leads to individual cameras and multiple perspectives within a single family. Odin, “Space of Communication,” 18-21.
[...] the home movie presents a succession of life moments separated by gaps in time of varying sized (from a few minutes to several days, even several months); these moments are frequently unconnected, apart from the fact that they belong to the history of the family; we are caught in a chronological sequence, but not in the narrative. This is precisely the structure of the family photo album.7

This lack of narrative, as discussed in the previous chapter, is debatable. In one sense, it is the narrative of how the family presents itself and what events they choose to film. This is a performative narrative, but can be read as a narrative nonetheless.

But there is a different kind of narrative also at work. It is activated, for example when present-day spectators removed from the family situation approach these films with varying levels of context and try to make sense of them. A certain level of narrative imagination is required for any historical enactment of archival home movies. This is a reading of the collection as a whole in order to come up with possible truths or likely scenarios grounded in historical contextualization. The family material functions to build the narrative bridge across all of the images—those traditionally considered either “public,” “private,” or somewhere in between the two—and bring the material into relevant discourse with cultural history. Essentially, the family material, or domestic images, is necessary for this process.

For example, on the second reel of the Hammond Collection there is a child playing in the family yard with a puppy.8 The information written on the reel identifies this as Christmas 1973 where Doug, the child, plays with Snuffy, the dog. It is relevant to ask whether or not this imagery is significant. On one hand, it is not significant in the way we would think of home movie material as being culturally or historically significant from a regional perspective. On the other hand, these sorts of banal shots can be used as contextualizing elements within the film. They help outsiders to fill in the story—that is, the epic, open-ended, sprawling, soap opera-like narrative, as Kuhn suggests and discussed in the previous chapter. Without these bits, the other images that are historically significant, on the surface, might be hard to figure out. The Hammond Collection is interesting, because the speculative narrative we can fix on it is one of a man and a woman in the early 1970s living in a trailer on or near a military base in Mississippi (whether Keesler or Columbus Air Force Base). Later they have a child, buy a house, the husband joins the Shriner’s Club (a men’s fraternity and social outreach organization), and they go on vacations to regional amusement parks and historical monuments (Six Flags, Vicksburg, Disneyworld, and Stone Mountain, Georgia). Life in and around the trailer gives an alternative view of the fami-

7 Odin, “Space of Communication,” 18
8 The Hammond Collection is made up of 10 reels of color Super-8 film shot throughout southern Mississippi between 1973 and 1985.
ly home as something impermanent and transposable. In a sense, it unfixes “home” from “house” and takes account of household mobility. Without the overtly banal material, like the child playing with a dog in the back yard, it would be difficult to reconstruct this narrative that includes a trajectory of domestic military life in the 1970s.

Cracks in the Facade: Seeing Through the Family Film

Many sociological perspectives on the study of home feature an understanding of “home as haven.”9 This perspective paints stark lines of division between inside and outside the home, as well as what is considered public or private. However, there are notable critics to this binary form of thinking who see such divisions as privileging an idealized home that does not exist in historical reality.10 While I tend to align myself with such thinking (in terms of what actually exists), I find it dangerous to simply dismiss such divisions as irrelevant given their holding power in popular imagination. For example, Sanders and Williams highlight the triad of “privacy” (retreat from public/government surveillance), “privatism” (retreat into home life and away from communal life), and “privatization” (shift from government-owned housing to occupant-owned) as helping to create the pervasive idea of home as a cordoned-off space from the outside world of work and sociability.11

It is useful, therefore, to examine when these types of fantasies are played out, for example, onscreen in home movies, and when those fantasies are challenged within the same visual realm. As Saunders and Williams argue, part of the mythology surrounding home-as-haven is based on a perhaps erroneous conflation of the physical house and the idea of home. However, according to Mallett, the idea of home-as-haven should be criticized based on the ways in which the home has, in various different ways, also been a place of work. Mallett cites how women have had various working roles within the domestic setting (an idea that is linked to second-wave feminism), but even more pertinent to southern home movies are the so-called “domestic workers,” like the African-American maids and nannies who worked within the homes of white families. For example, in the Home Movie Collection, images across multiple collections show female African-American domestic workers in white, middle-class families, which Laura Wexler refers

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10 Mallett, 71.
to as the “outsider within.” In this way, public-sphere issues concerning the widespread economic divide between whites and blacks in Mississippi make their way into the “depoliticized” private sphere of family life. Hirsch describes how familial looking, which is typically “so powerfully inclusive and identifactory,” in some cases “can also draw its lines of exclusion and disidentification.” In this case, Hirsch is specifically referencing “nanny and child” portraits—antebellum-age photographs featuring female black nursemaids, nannies, servants or slaves holding white children or babies. Here, traditional imagery of Madonna and Child is both signaled and, through the racial difference between the subjects (given the historical time period), denied. Just as with the images of uniformed African-American women who appear in the home movies of the white middle class, Hirsch describes how the “nanny and child” portraits “uncompromisingly and bluntly point to the family’s embeddedness in a larger political and economic framework, as well as photography’s power to reproduce and naturalize it.”

Unlike the portraits that Wexler and Hirsch discuss, the home movie examples are not frozen moments in time. Instead, as a string of moments, there is the possibility for something—perhaps even something disruptive—to happen onscreen. A returned gaze or merely showing displeasure with being filmed can function to subvert the perspective of the person holding the camera. A segment from the Lott Collection from 1957 features a Christmas dinner with the all-white family members dressed in suits and dresses. The sequence begins with the family seated around the dinner table and praying before the meal. Two African-American women are wearing white uniforms and watching from the doorway as plates are passed around and the family begins to eat. The uniformed women then serve biscuits and other food to the family members at the table. At another family dinner later in the collection, an African-American woman in a uniform serves coffee from a silver kettle. On a reel dated 1973, we see yet another Christmas dinner. Once again, the family is seated around the table in the same dining room, but everyone is older now. Some of the men in the room even have sideburns marking popular changes in styles over the years. As the camera

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13 This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.
15 Wexler, 252.
18 The Lott Collection consists of 15 reels of color 8mm film and 2 reels of color Super-8 film shot in North Carrollton, Mississippi between 1953 and 1973.
pans across the room and shoots into a mirror, the reflection reveals that it is a woman who is filming. The camera then rests on an African-American woman in a blue uniform who serves food to members of the family. At one point she looks directly into the camera. She is present at the event, but she does not participate in it the same way as those who are eating do. As a result, her participation in the ritual filmmaking that goes along with the event is also altered. Her returned gaze is startling as it is not like the smiling, often humorous, interactions with the camera/camera operator that are characteristic of home movies. This moment upsets home movies’ general illusion of inclusiveness, wholeness, and happiness that marks off the territory of the family.

Similarly, on a reel from the Jones Collection labeled “Sherry’s Wedding” from October 1957, shots of the wedding cake and members from the crowd of all-white guests gathered around it include two African-American women in white uniforms serving in the background. A woman from the crowd is being filmed in a medium shot. She clearly has a familiar relationship with the person operating the camera. While she is filmed, she attempts to pull the two African-American women into the frame. At first they resist, but she gestures off-screen, waving her hand and, based on the movement of her lips, insisting, “Come on!” Finally, she succeeds in pulling the two women into the frame, and they reluctantly stare at the camera. These visible cracks in the façade of the family film are useful points of entry in order to identify the ways in which the films, as family documents, are inherently constructed. Of course, in these cases, the lines denoting inclusion and exclusion are stark. Typical of social segregation in private spaces in Mississippi during these time periods, the women serving are black and the rest of the family members and close friends are white. Further, the women are wearing uniforms that mark their presence as “hired” rather than “invited.” While the women’s visible unwillingness to participate in the filming practices (at least in a direct way, such as interacting with the camera) marks their defined status of outsider in the family unit, it contrarily points to their uncertain status within the family film itself.

19 As Odin has noted, “No other type of films evidence as much direct address as the home movie.” Odin, “Family Home Movie as Document,” 257.
20 The Jones Collection consists of 18 reels of color 8mm film and 1 reel of color 16mm film shot in Jackson, Mississippi between 1956 and 1961.
21 Numerous instances such as these followed similar patterns in other films in the Home Movie Collection. In the Lamb Collection, a reel from 1965 shows shots of a Christmas morning. While the family wears pajamas and opens presents, an African-American woman in a uniform moves around in the background. The sequence concludes with the family’s son showing her his newly opened toy rifle. Not only are the white family members marked as enjoying leisure time (in their sleepwear) and the African-American woman marked as working (in her uniform), but it is also evident that the woman is working for this particular family instead of enjoying Christmas morning with her own. The Lamb Collection consists of 35
ies as constructions opens them up for readings beyond their familial representation without denying their status as domestic filmmaking.

Each everyday encounter between whites and blacks "was ripe with political meaning and energy." As Stephen A. Berrey attests, "Attention to these interactions…demonstrates that Jim Crow in the South was manifested not only in overt and violent moments but also in insidious and hidden ones." Specifically, the dominant order is challenged within everyday, mundane occurrences through what James C. Scott calls "hidden transcripts." These hidden transcripts can come in the form of, for example, songs, jokes, and stories. More relevant in the case of home movies is the ways these transcripts can be expressed in what Berrey refers to as "physical performances," for example gestures and actions that can be read against the ruling racial order. Here, home movies function as largely unexplored sources for finding these moments of disruption. The home movie image is working within the politics of the family, but in the moments of onscreen interactions between blacks and whites, it is also working within the politics of the established racial system. The use of the amateur camera is dictated by the composition of onscreen spaces. Public, private, and semi-private spaces must also be complimented with an examination of the degree of racial separation in the given space. Berrey makes distinctions of the power dynamics within the white home. Areas intended for leisure were meant to be enjoyed only by white family members (like the parlor or dining room). African American domestic workers had access to these rooms, but only in the service of the white families. However, Berrey points out that the kitchen was the one area of the house where the African American domestic worker could "exercise some authority over what happened in that space."

Archival home movies such as those mentioned above exhibit the contradictions of Jim Crow's fictionalized vision racial harmony. African American domestic workers were, in the eyes of whites, considered part of the extended family. However, as Berrey notes, domestic workers' navigation of the white home was expected "to carry out two complicated, almost contradictory tasks in expressing a familial closeness while also maintaining racial

reels of color and black-and-white 16mm film, 14 reels of color 8mm film, and 8 reels of color 8mm film shot in Greenwood, Mississippi between 1948 and 1973.


23 Berry, 5.

24 Berry, 14.

25 Berry, 9-10 and 14.

difference."27 There is a visual rhyme to the ideal of familial harmony and the specifically white ideal of racial harmony that is presented onscreen in southern home movies shot during Jim Crow. White southerners saw themselves as superior to their black counterparts while also imagining African Americans as “loyal servants who loved white people and preferred segregation.”28 These roles are performed before the amateur camera similar to the way family roles are performed. And just as the family frame has points of rupture, so does the racial frame.

A Conflation of House and Home

We might question how much of the family house-as-home we actually see in home movies. In many ways, the house itself is implicitly broken down into areas that are more or less likely to appear onscreen. Interior scenes usually take place in a main living room (or “family room”), in the kitchen, or in the dining room. Perhaps most typical of the home movie are the scenes shot in natural light in the area outside the house. These are areas where the family can convene as a group. Conversely, other rooms in the house, like bedrooms and bathrooms, are rarely seen on screen. This taps into the way domestic space is divided, ideas of personal space and privacy, and the performativity of the family-as-role.

Peter Saudners and Peter Williams complicate a simplistic inside/outside or public/private division that conflates house with home.29 According to them, the home “is a socio-spatial system. It is not reducible either to the social unit of the household or to the physical unit of the house, for it is the active and reproduced fusion of the two.”30 Drawing on Anthony Giddens’ concept of “locale” as a physical space that enables or disables specific actions, they subdivide the house—and areas beyond the physical boundaries of the house—into areas that function with various degrees of publicity or privacy.31 In this way, certain rooms of the house—like the bathroom or a child’s bedroom, for example—might function as theatrical backstage area, while other areas, like the living room or the front yard, can operate as on-stage for a certain type of familial performativity. According to Giddens, it is

27 Berry 49.
28 Berrey, 23.
29 Saunders and Williams, 81-93.
31 Saunders and Williams, 81-82.
the division of social life into such “settings” that makes familial interactions in the home “meaningful and to some extent predictable.”32

How does this less limited concept of “home”—freed from the constraints of a particular three-dimensional structure—affect our re-reading of a particular family’s home movies? In addition to being a theme, a discursive concept, and a subject of many home movies, the family is also a potential spectator. Is the family frame so strong that these films have no other relevance outside of the narrow bloodline of their creators and subjects? Can the films that set out to uphold family ideals actually subvert that concept and destabilize past representations? The family frame can also be pliable, yet constractive, like a rubber band that holds the material together as a cohesive whole. Yet this band can be stretched to include other perspectives than were originally intended, or it can even be warped and twisted as potential conflicts over interpretations arise.

Whose Home (Movie) Is It?

When first watching films from the Lytle Collection, it is easy to align the home movie, and even the designation of “home” to those who were doing the filming—in this case the white planter families. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that for many African-American sharecroppers home was on a white-owned plantation.33 And as such, this common home—the plantation grounds as a whole, if not a common house—results in shared documentation of life, including some highpoints and events.34 In these cases, “home” is a place that can be symbolically possessed by virtue of living there, regardless of whether or not one has legal ownership of the property. This is a way to reinterpret space and place at least in the communal imaginary, if not in any legal sense. My aim with this discussion is not to determine how the people in the films or the people who made the films define home. Instead, I am trying to find perspectives on home that help to make this home-movie footage shot on southern cotton plantations useful in the

32 Saunders and Williams, 82.
34 For an example of how documenting the filmmaker’s and the subject’s shared lives can help to create a critical re-reading of an amateur film otherwise limited to an ethnographic portrait of a nameless “Other” see: Janna Jones, “Starring Sally Peshlakai: Rewriting the Script for Tad Nichols’s 1939 Navajo Rug Weaving,” in Rascaroli, Young, and Monahan, Amateur Filmmaking, 123-136.
present day to spectators outside of the family and friends of the participants in the film.

While “family” and “home” sometimes overlap as concepts throughout history, their seemingly identical semblance is pinpointed in Hareven’s study as emerging in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. This timeframe, however, is limited to the urban middle class, and excludes, notably, urban working class and rural families:

> When discussing these trends, it is important to remember that the separation of the home from the outside world occurred initially in the lives of a small segment of the population, namely, the urban middle classes. In rural families, and in urban working-class families, the home was viewed less as a specialized retreat, and was open to a multiplicity of functions and activities as it had been in preindustrial society.

Hareven points out that in pre-industrial societies, the concept of the “household” consisted of the family’s dwelling and living place, however, it differed fundamentally from later idealized notions of a “home.” The household often contained members who were not blood kin to the nuclear family; this could be a boarder or lodger in order to earn extra income for the family, or, in other cases, it could be a live-in domestic servant. Most significantly, in the case of the household, there was not such a strict line between “home” as a “private retreat” for leisure and inclusiveness versus the outside world of work and strangers. In this way, according to Hareven, “the family’s public and private activities were inseparable.”

The tangled public and private life of the pre-industrial family in, for example, Colonial America may seem like a far stretch from the situation that arises when middle class families pick up amateur film cameras in order to document home life. However, this discussion focuses on the way rural plantation life before the advent of full-blown farming mechanization functions as a parallel to the pre-industrialized household structure. In this case, while in urban, suburban, and middle class families house and home were thoroughly conflated (until deep into the 1960s in, at least, the United States and much of Western Europe) and co-opted amateur film technologies for the purpose of documenting and perpetuating the family ideal, rural families (wealthy and middle class) in, for example, an agricultural society like the Mississippi Delta operated in a transitional place where some pre-industrial ideas of family life and home were prevalent even if not thoroughly engrained in all aspects of everyday life. At the same time, those rural families

35 Hareven, 254.
36 Hareven, 272.
37 Hareven, 255.
38 Hareven, 258.
39 Hareven, 256.
that used amateur film technologies created unique portraits of this transition.

The notion of the “modern family” developed in tandem with the idea of the home as a “private retreat”: “a family that was child-centered, private, and in which the roles of husband and wife were segregated into public and domestic spheres, respectively.”40 At this time, according to Hareven, “family time became restricted primarily to the home, and leisure became an important aspect of domestic life.”41 Once the workplace was taken out of the household and thrust into the public sphere, then the separation between public and private, inside and outside, family and other could be complete. However, in rural farming households, this complete separation was not possible. While things like education was also transferred outside of the household and into public facilities, rural plantation often had plantation schools and plantation churches for inhabitants since public services, in many cases, had not yet been created in the area.

The Lytle Collection: At Home on the Plantation

I now depart from the ideas of home discussed above that spread throughout the United States and much of Western Europe in the 1930s through the 1960s, where domestic spaces where cordoned off as feminine or grounds for the blossoming of family life and the pursuit of leisure. This strict version can even be complicated during the peak of its existence, however, as a popular ideal, we can understand its ability to sustain in the cultural imagination of the time. Instead, I look at how seemingly outdated cultural constructions of home—that is the extent to which this conceptual signifier overlaps with the physical location of the house or the social composition of the household or the family—persisted in rural areas.42 Specifically, I will discuss pre-industrial conceptions of home as they, at some times, apply to life on cotton plantations in the Mississippi Delta in the 1930s and 1940s. Referencing examples from the Lytle Collection, I discuss the ways that amateur film technologies, which had by this time been directed into the realm of capturing family imagery, performed in a transitional space when filming the homes of rural families. The result is that wider picture of community life was recorded, however, this was done through a unique domestic perspective.

40 Hareven, 258.
41 Hareven, 259.
42 Hareven notes the irony that the “domestic ideal” was the product of urbanites who romanticized a certain image of the pastoral. In fact, there is another layer of irony when we consider how that ideal did not at first apply to actual rural households and families. Hareven, 262.
Lytle began filming in 1937, and, like many home moviemakers, she purchased her 8mm camera following the birth of her daughter. When her husband died in 1940 at the age of 38, Lytle and her three-year-old daughter moved back to her childhood home, Perthshire Plantation. Without any income of her own, she essentially lived under the care of her brother, who operated the plantation, and mother, who continued to reside there. At this time she began filming processes of cotton farming in addition to shots of family life. Here, Perthshire Plantation as both “home” and “business” intersect, and footage in the Lytle Collection is representative of this overlap.

In her footage, Lytle was shooting from the perspective of plantation owners—the white planter class—and this does two things. First, it sets her up on a different social status than most of the people she filmed, that is, the predominantly black sharecroppers. On the other hand, her point of view from the plantation put her in a position to capture episodes of the daily lives of the sharecroppers, most of whom lived on the plantation and whose lives revolved around the cotton crop and its seasons. As Pete Daniel explains, southern cotton farmers’ adherence to the crop cycle was all encompassing so that “their family structure, recreation, and vocabulary—that is, the entire society—reflected the commodity that dictated their lives and once a year paid them a cash settlement.”43 The types of sharecropper activities featured in the Lytle Collection include work in the fields, town life and scenes at the commissary, life around their homes, baptisms, and mule racing. She filmed the majority of her footage beyond the confines of her class, but the wholeness of that representation can and should be critiqued.

In contrast to other types of farms, plantations are characterized by a centralized management that controls a large amount of land and a large labor force.44 Whereas antebellum plantations were powered by slave labor, after emancipation, plantations of the New South era operated on the tenant farming and sharecropping system.45 In exchange for modest housing, the use of tools, and a share of the final crop, the sharecropping farmer would tend the planter’s land. Medical expenses, for example, were then subtracted from the farmer’s share. Additionally, once a sharecropper was too old to work, the planter was responsible for their care until death.46 In essence, the paternalistic plantation system kept black farmers dependent on white support.

In many ways, Lytle’s footage does make her a chronicler, whether intentional or not, of the practice of cotton farming at the time of transition from

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43 Daniel, xii.
44 A 1936 government study specifies that a plantation must consist of a minimum of 260 contiguous acres. According to a 1940 census, Mississippi had 7,485 plantations out of 24,199 in the entire United States. Aiken, 37.
45 The era of the New South spans from roughly 1880-1940. Most cotton plantations in the Mississippi Delta were not holdovers from before the Civil War but were products of the New South’s agricultural development of the area. Aiken, 10 and 59.
46 Aiken, 27.
mule-powered labor to tractors. Federal programs aimed at upgrading farming practices that essentially had not changed in over 100 years were making their way into the deepest recesses of the South. The mechanization of the cotton farm signaled the decline of the paternalistic sharecropping system, however, southern farmers traditionally rejected government intervention and initially resisted these changes. As a result, it took decades for the consistent and complete implementation of federal modernization and aid programs.47

Lytle’s footage shows the use of John Deere tractors to break the ground, as well as some mule-powered plows and mule-driven planters. In the oral commentary to Raisin’ Cotton, recorded in 1997 for the Voices of Perthshire project, Lytle described her self-proclaimed aesthetic favoritism toward filming mules as opposed to tractors. She also tells that, around the time of her filming, her brother had just started using tractors on Perthshire. 48 Despite this, he still preferred to use mule-drawn planters for dropping seeds in the ground because he believed the tractors moved too fast for this process. In some ways, then, the presence of mules in Lytle’s footage speaks to her personal aesthetic preferences of what to film, but it also is indicative of southern farmers’ initial reluctance to adhere to governmental mandates to rationalize the cotton industry.49 Further, since cotton production consists of three distinct phases throughout the year, it did not make sense for planters to invest in expensive equipment that only reduced labor in one phase of cotton production. Mechanical cotton harvesters were developed in the 1930s, but it was not until the mid-1940s before they were mass-produced.50 As a result, southern cotton plantations lagged behind the rest of the United States’ agricultural systems in terms of technological modernization.51

Most of the interviews with Lytle that are included as part of her collection of films center on her memories of living on Perthshire Plantation in the northwest section of the Mississippi Delta during her childhood and around the time she was filming.52 Discussions of the material she shot are almost exclusively limited to Raisin’ Cotton and the scenes it depicts. In addition to Raisin’ Cotton (with a running time of approximately one hour), the Lytle Collection also consists of an additional two and a half hours of 8mm black-and-white and color film shot between 1938 and 1950. The archive holds but

47 Daniel, 6 and 65.
48 Voices of Perthshire (Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 1999). The Center for the Study of Study of Southern Culture, a department within the University of Mississippi, and Karen Glynn produced Voices of Perthshire. This work will be discussed in Chapter 4.
49 Daniel, xiv.
50 Aiken, 104.
51 Aiken, 99.
52 These interviews are included on Voices of Perthshire and a VHS tape labeled simply “Emma Lytle” that was probably shot between 1995 and 1997. Both are part of the Home Movie Collection, though the tape labeled “Emma Lytle” does not appear in any finding aids.
does not have viewing copies or written descriptions of almost five more hours of film shot by Lytle between 1937 and 1966 that was donated after her death in 2000. Lytle’s hand-written notes on the 8mm film boxes indicate that the films’ topics deal with family life. This seems to indicate that Lytle’s first impulse, like others who contributed to the Home Movie Collection, was to donate material that she considered to be explicitly historically relevant. After her death, her family then sent the additional material to complete the collection.

The archive’s focus on *Raisin’ Cotton* is understandable. It has a narrative focus, including several intertitles that superficially reference the actions onscreen. In many ways, it is easier to work with *Raisin’ Cotton* than with the rest of the material in the collection that has formal and thematic variations and only vague references to time and place. The remaining two and a half hours of film in the “processed” collection features similar scenes of cotton farming as seen in *Raisin’ Cotton* (including extensive scenes of wheat farming that are not discussed during interviews with Lytle) and most of it was shot simultaneously (1938-1940) with the portions that were later edited into film. My aim is not to undermine the archive’s portrait of Lytle as a focused amateur filmmaker who demonstrated a technical awareness of the 8mm camera that she used and an artistic appreciation of storytelling and image making. Instead, I want to question the archive’s version of Lytle as a filmmaker who consciously and intentionally documented Delta cotton-production processes at the very moment when century-old techniques—and the sharecropping culture that was necessary to sustain them—were being replaced by mechanical innovations that would eventually lead to the establishment of commercialized farming practices across the South. In a videotaped interview made by the archive in the late 1990s, when asked why she made *Raisin’ Cotton*, Lytle responds, “Well, it was there.” Along these lines, I want to position Lytle as a home moviemaker who filmed what “was there” because it was part of her home, here expanded to include the entire grounds of the family’s plantation.

*Raisin’ Cotton* is made up of four reels of 200-foot 8mm color film. The first three reels roughly match the three phases of cotton production—planting, thinning and weeding, and harvesting—lasting from spring until

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53 Topics include, for example, “3rd Birthday, Feb. 23, 1940,” “Sailing 1946,” and “Miami 1-1-47.”

54 For example, the 50-foot reel designated as number 8 from the black-and-white footage is labeled “Miscellaneous Moments 1938, 1939, June 1940.”

55 Throughout her life, Lytle experimented with various creative media. She focused primarily on painting and sculpture, achieving a professional status in these formats. She demonstrated professional desires with her poetry, though she never succeeded in getting them published in book format. Contrarily, she did not seem to possess these ambitions with her filmmaking.

56 *Voices of Perthshire* (Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 1999).
autumn. The fourth and final reel represents the transformation of cotton fiber to textiles at a factory in North Carolina. During the planting phase, male sharecroppers drive tractors through the fields to break the rough soil. They fill mule-drawn planters with seed. In the next phase, women with hoes carefully cut the weeds away from the fledgling plants in a process known as “chopping cotton,” and a crop duster flies over the field spraying herbicides.

Work on the cotton plantation was not only performed by the head of the sharecropper household. According to historian Charles S. Aiken, cotton farming involved the whole family:

The intensive character of cotton culture, together with the relatively simple nature of part of the tasks, meant that all members of a black tenant household, including children from the time they were old enough to wield hoes and pull cotton from open bolls, were part of the production system. Men and older boys normally performed the plowing, but thinning, weeding, and harvesting involved women and younger children.

As a result, the scenes of work life in Lytle’s film depict sharecropper family members of all ages. While Lytle’s images of cotton production are historically significant, I want to also highlight the images of leisure activities that have the potential to perform an important role as community home movies.

Leisure and the Divine

_Raisin’ Cotton_’s running time of 57 minutes is divided among the cyclical stages of the cotton season. While activities such as plowing and planting, chopping and thinning, and picking and ginning are certainly points of focus, Lytle also devotes portions of the film to the leisure activities of the sharecroppers. A four-minute sequence from _Raisin’ Cotton_ filmed on a Saturday afternoon at the plantation commissary shows this locale as a hub for sharecropper social life. The commissary is owned by the plantation and

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57 First, plowing the land and planting the seed takes place in the spring. Next, thinning the plant and weeding takes place from May to July. After several weeks of layby where the crop is left to mature, harvesting of the cotton bolls takes place from August to late autumn. Aiken, 99.

58 Aiken, 100.

59 This idea of community home movies will be developed further in a discussion of _Voices of Perthshire_ in Chapter 4.

60 The opening section on plowing and planting lasts seventeen minutes. The section on chopping and thinning lasts six minutes. Picking and ginning consists of six and a half minutes, while the final section shot at a textile factory in North Carolina takes up sixteen minutes of running time. The leisure activities—Saturday at the commissary and baptisms during the layby—last four minutes and seven and a half minutes respectively.
functions as the local store for tenants to purchase food, clothing, and supplies. The scene depicts a day of rest from the grueling work of cotton production. Women walk along the dirt road from the store carrying their children and their bags of goods in their arms. Mule-drawn wagons, automobiles, and tractors are all parked on the lot surrounding the commissary building. Children with bicycles eat newly purchased snacks. A group of three elderly African-American women in floral dresses and wide-brimmed hats sit on a bench on the building’s front porch. The woman in the middle, not wanting her picture taken, turns away from the camera so that her hat hides her face. Lytle continues filming after a pause, and, once again, the woman in the middle refuses to be filmed.

This small gesture—turning away from the camera—highlights the tension that characterizes the sequence as a whole. Lytle knew many of the people she filmed, as they had lived and worked on the plantation for many years and, in some cases, over multiple generations. Regardless, Lytle’s camera only achieves an approximation of closeness. In front of the commissary building, sharecropper men exit one car and enter another, sitting inside the automobiles to socialize with the drivers. To the side of the building, a group of four men are huddled together with their backs to Lytle (figure 8). In each instance, spaces of privacy are carved out in a public setting. Ultimately, no matter how close she approaches with her camera, she is clearly marked as an outsider. Rather than a participant, she is merely an observer to the events taking place. Thus, the property that is owned by Lytle and her family in a legal sense is symbolically possessed by the sharecroppers. Further, Lytle’s own footage becomes a distanced home movie by proxy for the people that she films.

The African-American church held both practical and symbolic importance on post-bellum cotton plantations. Instead of functioning as institutions of segregation, they were seen by sharecroppers as symbols of black independence. Prior to the Civil War, slaves often joined their masters at white churches. The establishment of independent churches and congregations provided an alternative community meeting place for the dissemination of knowledge and faith. Church buildings on plantation property also doubled as schoolhouses in an effort to combat illiteracy. According Aiken, the significance of churches and schools persisted: “from Reconstruction through the civil rights movement, most of the black leadership and most of

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61 In the early days of the sharecropping system, farmers were paid for their cotton harvest in a plantation’s own “scrip.” This scrip was a form of currency that could only be used to buy goods from the plantation commissary.

62 This does not, of course, account for the day workers coming in from other local towns or the seasonal wage hands who travelled around from plantation to plantation, and it is often difficult for outside spectators to distinguish what kind of relationship Lytle had to her filmed subjects.
the social interaction among blacks in the plantation regions were within these two institutions.\textsuperscript{63}

During \textit{Raisin' Cotton}'s baptismal sequence, Lytle is once again established as an outsider to the events happening onscreen. However, in this situation, her position at the sidelines appears to be intentional or at least pragmatic. As a whole, the seven-and-a-half-minute sequence tells a story, and the staging of the ceremony before Lytle's camera implies cooperation with the participants. Lytle's portrait begins with shots of the congregation walking from the church building towards the camera and to the lake. As a crowd watches from the banks, the baptismal candidates, dressed in white gowns and cloth hats, wade into the water and are submerged by Reverend Thomas Bronner. One by one, each candidate returns to the shore and is taken into the arms of family and friends. Finally, the congregation walks back to the church, marking the ceremony's close.

\textsuperscript{63} Aiken, 22.
The Delta in Home Movies: Alternative Perspectives

The Grantham Collection is made up of two generations of films from the Pepper family of Yazoo City, Mississippi, a mid-sized Delta town in the midst of cotton country. The collection was donated by Margaret Pepper Grantham. The majority of the films were shot by her mother, Evy Pepper, who purchased her first Kodak 8mm camera in 1936 at the age of 37 when Margaret, her youngest daughter, was three years old. Contrasting Pepper's films to Lytle's highlights the ways that the rural home movie differs from those shot in a city setting during the same time period and just 100 miles apart (160 kilometers). The family home is pictured differently than on the plantation. In fact, in the case of the Grantham Collection, the conflation of house and home is seen more clearly, whether it is in their residence in the city or at their leisure cabin on Five Mile Lake where the family spent much of their free time fishing. There are, of course, similar scenes in both collections. Pepper filmed shots at a friend's nearby cotton farm in 1939, but they are more like the touristic shots she took on the way to visit her son stationed at Camp Davis near Washington DC than the material Lytle filmed, despite the similar subject matter.

The Gary Collection has an ambiguous status within the Home Movie Collection. All of the color 8mm film that was shot on Wildwood Plantation in the Delta town of Greenwood, Mississippi (about halfway between Yazoo City and Perthshire) during the 1940s remains in the archive's cold storage facility in an “unprocessed” status. However, in 1983, Tom Gary used a commercial video transfer service to copy sections of the films to VHS, which he then edited together and provided voice-over commentary for a project of amateur reuse titled Wildwood Plantation: The Way It Was. A VHS dub of this production was donated with the original film reels in 1999 and is the only viewing copy the archive currently has of material from the Gary Collection.

64 The Grantham Collection consists of 13 reels of black-and-white and 25 reels of color 8mm film shot around Yazoo City, Mississippi between 1938 and 1970.
65 Additional films in the collection actually belong to Margaret Grantham or her older sister. Grantham also notes that many of the films shot by her mother disintegrated due to poor storage conditions before they could be donated to the archive. This information was provided in an oral commentary by Grantham that is included in the VHS screening copy of the films.
66 Again, “unprocessed” here refers to the film’s status as untransferred and uncatalogued rather than its status as developed or not.
67 The collection is accompanied with three pages of hand-written notes describing the on-screen imagery of the VHS tape and correspondence between Tom Gary and Glynn, the archivist at the time the films were donated. The collection is listed with the Lytle Collection, as well as the Shiver Collection and the Dockery-McClean Collection in the “Unprocessed Films” document, which is filed with other documentation relating to the Home Movie Collection.
Wildwood Plantation: The Way It Was presents a singular interpretation of the images of cotton production and life on the plantation. The original home movies from which the imagery was taken were shot by Memory, Rebecca, and Jane Gary while they were growing up on Wildwood Plantation. The edited video opens with shots of four mules pulling a wagon of fertilizer while “Tara’s Theme” from the 1939 feature film Gone with the Wind plays over the images. When we see shots of sharecroppers working in the cotton fields, an instrumental saxophone version of “Dixie” begins to play. The use of these songs, along with Gary’s name for his amateur reuse project, signal outspoken instances of restorative nostalgia. As Boym contends, restorative nostalgia operates an unseen ideological orientation toward the past masked as “truth and tradition.” Gary’s positioning of the visual material, his voice-over descriptions, and his editorial commentary through choice of music work together to insist that this version of the past was “the way it,” in fact, really “was.”

While the images in Lytle’s Raisin’ Cotton are temporally, geographically, and thematically similar to the images in Wildwood Plantation: The Way It Was, the key difference in their affective registers has to do with when and by whom they were complied. Both feature detailed documentation of the processes of cotton farming in addition to sharecropper baptisms at a river on the plantation and mule races. However, Gary, removed by one generation from the time of filming, based his commentary on family mythos rather than lived experience. At this remove, he is only able to attest to the processes shown onscreen and, unlike Lytle, not the people. Shots of tractors and shots of African-Americans at work are handled nearly the same. Gary’s voiceover states, “This is an International F20 tractor, and this is an International M tractor, which became our standard workhorse tractor for many years” and “This is a tenant or sharecropper. He was assigned a certain plot of land, and he provided all the labor to make the crop. When he picked his cotton, he stored it in this cotton house until he had accumulated a bale, and then it was hauled to the gin and ginned in his name and he got one-half the proceeds of the sale of the cotton and seed.” In this version, man and machine are identified as mere tools in the plantation’s operation.

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68 Gone with the Wind (Victor Fleming, 1939) was based on Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 novel of the same name. The film has been criticized for its glorification of life on the antebellum plantation. Rather than portraying historical accuracies, the film is said to depict “lost Cause plantation myths.” McPherson, 63.
69 The song “Dixie” originated in 19th century minstrel shows and was adopted as the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy during the American Civil War. The song is now considered controversial due to its strong connotations with the Old South’s legacy of slavery and racist Jim Crow laws.
70 Boym, XVIII.
71 Wildwood Plantation: The Way It Was (Tom Gary, 1983).
Significantly, Gary’s compilation of his family’s home movies shot on Wildwood plantation is made to be seen by spectators in the 1980s, not the 1940s. In contrast, Lytle’s editing of her films into the product known as *Raisin’ Cotton* was done shortly after the filming took place.\(^{72}\) Whereas Gary’s actual voice structures *Wildwood Plantation: The Way It Was*, Lytle made use of five intertitles to give form and a voice of sorts to *Raisin’ Cotton*. But these intertitles give very little in the way of actual information. The first intertitle, which appears after ten minutes, announces, “Planter worries over sprouting seed.” The fourth intertitle simply states, “Picking and ginning.” In this way, *Raisin’ Cotton* functions as a home movie for an intended audience of people who already understand what they are seeing onscreen. Through a more open narrative construction, Lytle’s home movies, as well as the semi-structured *Raisin’ Cotton*, leave spaces for readings that break and then restructure the family frame.

Multiple generations of the Knowlton planter family as well as multiple generations of sharecropper families have lived there together on Perthshire Plantation. For example, Every Lee Jackson, who was interviewed for the soundtrack of the *Voices of Perthshire* project in 1999 grew up as part of a sharecropper family and lived on Perthshire from 1914 until 1970. She was the third generation to live on the plantation and was raised contemporaneously with Lytle and her brother, Maury Knowlton. Jackson performed various jobs over the years, including working in cotton production and working in the plantation house as a nanny for the Knowlton family.\(^{73}\) This tension between physical proximity and socially-coded distance is what characterizes much of the relationship between the African-American sharecroppers and the white planter families, both of whom consider the shared grounds of Perthshire Plantation to be their “home.”

Through an expanded definition of “home,” this chapter has plotted a strategic re-reading of rural home movies. In the case of Lytle’s films, this was possible by orienting *Raisin’ Cotton* as part and parcel of her collection of home movies as a whole. This was further defined by the differences shown in a nearby non-rural contemporaneous collection and a remediated version of a contemporaneous rural collection with similar imagery. This re-reading of the *Lytle Collection* maintained a tie to the particularities of Perthshire Plantation while also connecting to broader themes related to the region of the Mississippi Delta. In the next chapter, the tie to the region is further elaborated through the films of the *Thomas Collection*.

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\(^{72}\) While Lytle shot the films that were edited together to form *Raisin’ Cotton* 1938 and 1941, the archive credits 1941 as the year of its production.

\(^{73}\) *Voices of Perthshire* (Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 1999).
3. Jim Crow from the Periphery: Southern Home Movies as Uneventful Witness

“If the ordinary constitutes a world where most of the time ‘there is nothing to write home about’ it is partly because of the messy saturation of affects of energies and their dissipation that would make it so hard to know where to start.” – Ben Highmore, *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*¹

A new house is being constructed in a subdivision. Students from an African-American school march in a parade. A group of white children perform in a school play and attend a dance. Hired hands are picked up outside of a gas station for a day’s work in cotton fields. Customers shop in a general store. A white pre-teen opens presents on Christmas morning. These scenes from the home movies of the *Thomas Collection* take place during a four-year period between 1956 and 1959. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which home-movie representations of African Americans in this collection can be activated as a type of witness to life under Jim Crow. Looking to the agency of images to bear witness even when that is not necessarily the intention of the photographer or those photographed, I explore the possibilities of witnessing from the periphery of “events,” through images that might be seen as everyday, as ordinary, or as utterly *un*-eventful.

While the films in the *Thomas Collection* where shot by a white family, they provide a view from the sidelines of the Jim Crow South in their portrayal of African American community members. Drawing on a discussion of Didi-Huberman’s “visual event,” I argue that we are asking the wrong kinds of questions of archival home movies as witnessing images.² I present a segment from a home movie as a “visual event” and then, through close reading and narrative contextualization, attempt to unpack the various frames and gazes intertwined in and around it. My aim in doing this is to draw out some possible ways these kinds of films can act as a form of mediated witness when present-day viewers, removed from the images in time and space—as well as context—watch the films. Ultimately, I hope this will aid in our understanding of how these sorts of fragmented, flawed, and

² Didi-Huberman, 36.
(seemingly) very personal films can have significant witnessing potential that is unlike other more explicit or immediately recognizable imagery from the same time period. In this chapter, I shift focus away from the idea of site-specific events and focus instead on a view that takes into account deep structural and social factors that lead up to and persist after said “event.” An event is one manifestation of these factors, and while witnessing an event in-person holds great weight, in this chapter I want to explore modes of witnessing that happen at different spatiotemporal points. The chapter ends with a discussion of the role of parades in home movies. I identify the parade sequence in the *Thomas Collection* as an act of African-American cultural memory. Specifically, I argue for the capacity of this home-movie trope to break what McPherson refers to as the “lenticular logic” of southern memorialization.

### Witnessing As Medium, Witnessing Through Media

John Durham Peters presents the noun “witness” as any one of the points of a communication triangle of sender, message, and receiver. As a verb, he defines “to witness” as the act of seeing or hearing an event unmediated, thus as an in-the-flesh experience facilitated by the human sensorium.³ As such, Peters’s model of the four types of relations of an event exclude recording as an adequate subject for witnessing:

Of four basic types of relations to an event, three can sustain the attitude of a witness. To be there, present at the event in space and time is the paradigm case. To be present in time but removed in space is the condition of liveness, simultaneity across space. To be present in space but removed in time is the condition of historical representation: here is the possibility of a simultaneity across time, a witness that laps the ages. To be absent in both space and time but still have access to an event via its traces is the condition of recording: the profane zone in which the attitude of witnessing is hardest to sustain.⁴

If, as Peters suggests, spectators cannot witness through recorded events such as photographs or recorded moving images, then these media representations cannot bear witness. According to Peters, “The copy, like hearsay, is indefinitely repeatable; the event is singular, and its witnesses are forever irreplaceable in their privileged relation to it.”⁵ The concept of “being there” is not irrelevant. However, Peters puts so much credence on the body, and, despite the fact that his afterword concedes that the physicality of presence

in time and space is not the “only” possibility for the witness, he still insists that witnessing is necessarily linked to the human sensorium. Hearsay is not, by definition, false, and the potential for copies to exist does not necessarily diminish the value of the thing in question. Overt reverence to the “singular” or the “original” seems reductive and unnecessarily limiting when trying to understand our relationship to media texts that hold a connection, however tenuous, to the past.

As a verb, “to witness” also means the relaying of that experience to someone who was not present at the event. What is interesting about this grammatical unpacking of “witness” is that although the penultimate case of witnessing—that is, the agent-witness (noun) who passively witnesses (verb) an event in person—is seen as most authentic since it is non-mediated (other than by the senses that enable perception). In this situation, pure experience is not sullied by discourse. However, that experience or information can never be activated in the form of testimony (or active witnessing) until it enters the realm of discourse. If that is the case, then witnessing in its purest form, free from noise, misunderstanding, or false information, cannot travel beyond the individual, that is, the passive witnessing agent.

I align myself with Paul Frosh in that bracketing Peters’ “veracity gap” allows us to move on from ontological and epistemological questions and tackle questions of how mediated witnessing actually works. As Frosh points out, “...the ‘veracity gap’ is about the problem of mediation. It designates that chasm of fallibility and potential misunderstanding across which the experience of a person present at an event is transmuted into discourse about that experience for others who were not present.” As Peters himself goes on to argue, “A witness is the paradigm case of a medium.”

Departing from Peters’ model, the way witnessing works as a mode of communication is not that it can be either the act of seeing or the act of telling, but that it is both. The “witnessing act” is defined by all the desires and demands that we funnel into and ask of witnessing. The “witnessing act,” is completed not just by seeing, but also by telling, by relaying information. In this way, it must have a receiver. And in its completed form, the witnessing

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9 Frosh, 51-52.
act is mediated, whether the input and output is limited by the human sens- 
rium and the translation of experience into discourse, or by the mechanical 
apparatus and the translation of three-dimensional reality into two-
dimensional static or truncated images. As in Shannon and Weaver’s model 
of communication, “noise” is an inbuilt part of the process. Instead of seeing 
the “veracity gap” as a problem that has to be bracketed, it should be under-
stood as an implicit part of witnessing—or even a defining characteristic.

According to Peters’s take on the way a witness relays information: 
“Events are jagged and stories are smooth, and witnessing always involves 
some translation between the two.” If the witness functions as a connective 
tissue between the event witnessed and the story that is told about it, then it 
seems as if no act of witnessing (seeing and the subsequent telling) can stand 
on its own. Susan Sontag frames the specific conditions under which a pho-
tographic text (as medium) can witness. In terms of images of war or war-
borne atrocity, she claims “photographs supply no evidence, none at all, for 
renouncing war – except to those for whom the notions of valor and sacrifice 
have been emptied of meaning and credibility.” As a result, a contextual-
ization (inherently a narrativization) is necessary for photographs to make 
sense, to do something (to us). Again, this points to the moment of reception, 
the moment when we are “regarding” the image in question. For Sharon 
Sliwinski, even the recipient of witnessed information or images, the spec-
tator, is “just as mired ‘in the thick of things’ as the political actor.” This 
进一步 disrupts Peters’ imagined model of witnessing as an act of communi-
cation, though, it is not so troubling given contemporary positions within 
media studies on active spectatorship. Susie Linfield further signals a shift to 
reception as a means to deal with the question of images of suffering. She 
calls for an “ethics of seeing,” but her explanation of this does not go much 
further than saying that the spectator’s relationship to the image should be 
one of “creativity and collaboration.”

Departing from Peters’ notion of witnessing as a sort of communication 
triangle, Tamar Ashuri and Amit Pinchevski situate these into the “always ad 
hoc and case-specific” conditions of witnessing. Here, they emphasize 
“zones of contention” where bearing witness, utterance, and audience are 
instead presented as obtaining agency, obtaining a voice, and getting the

12 Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 
11.
13 Sharon Sliwinski, Human Rights in Camera (Chicago and London: University of Chicago 
14 Susie Linfield, The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence (Chicago: Univer-
sity of Chicago Press, 2010), 60.
15 Tamar Ashuri and Amit Pinchevski, “Witnessing as a Field,” in Media Witnessing: Testi-
mony in the Age of Mass Communication, ed. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (Houndmills: 

100
The process of bearing witness becomes something that must be actively achieved. As Ulrich Baer puts it, “…for seeing to become an act of testimony, it must break the frames of mere description.”

This theme of a performative aspect to witnessing—both by people and by images—forces us as contemporary spectators to question what we ask of witnessing images.

**Media As Witness: *Eyes on the Prize* and the *Thomas Collection***

In this section, I discuss a collection of home movies from the mid-1950s that was donated to the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection and compare this to a brief segment from a conventional documentary that uses archival news footage from around the same time. Both of the filmic examples took place in what is known as the Jim Crow period of the American South, during which mandated legal segregation of black and whites was practiced and enforced. I compare these two different forms of visual imagery and discuss the kinds of witnessing they perform. As viewers distanced by space and time from the Jim Crow South, our expectations, shaped by written histories and mediated visual images, influence what we demand that images witness to us. Along the lines of Didi-Huberman, I argue we are asking the wrong questions of witnessing images, demanding either too much or too little.

The first example comes from the now-classic 1987 PBS documentary, *Eyes on the Prize*. Using black- and-white archival imagery and present-day (at the time of its making) voice over, it narrates key moments in the 13-month-long Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1955-1956. Images of empty bus stop benches are juxtaposed with Ku Klux Klan rallies where members vow never to give in to demands for integration. A shot of the front page of the November 13th 1956 newspaper shows that the U. S. Supreme Court ruled segregation in the Montgomery buses as unconstitutional, implying that the passing of the law would in itself solve the problem. In privileging the dramatic events or shocking instances, we get a picture that highlights images of public protest and the violence that surrounded it. However, these types images represent only one way to visually portray the civil oppression of a large portion of the population. I argue for the need to compliment these images with those that speak to the ways in which this broad...
system of injustice was and is often mundane and naturalized, and sometimes even invisible.

In the case of home movies shot by white southerners under Jim Crow and during the years broadly defined as the Civil Rights Era, it is relatively rare to see African Americans onscreen at all. Most home movies shot by white southerners portray harmonious, if limited, onscreen mixing between white and blacks. Sokol’s study of white southerners between the years of 1945 and 1975 notes, “[w]hites interpreted black veneers of deference as actual friendship.” Even though the reality of the situation, at least for the African Americans, was much more complicated than it appears on the surface, this does not invalidate the films as sources for constructed regional reflections. Instead of merely being suspicious of such films, it is necessary to create an appropriate frame of reference. This framing should encompass the socially coded forms of role-playing, including alternating performances of acceptance, resistance, and farce.

The Thomas Collection consists of about 14 minutes of 16mm color footage spanning from 1956 to 1959. The film was shot by James Thomas in the Delta town of Walls, Mississippi near the Tennessee border. Thomas and his wife, Lucille, owned the general store that served as a meeting point for the town. Thomas filmed family life with his wife and son, as well as scenes from his place of business.

The fifth reel of the Thomas Collection features a combination of a children’s party at a place called the Chicken House (figure 9), shots from inside the general store in December of 1959, and images of the Thomas family Christmas. The children’s party becomes an object of interest because Thomas’ son, identifiable by his blond crew cut, is in attendance. However, this semi-public space is presented as completely segregated since all of the children and the adults present are white. Similarly, the private realm of the Thomas home is segregated. As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the only instances when the private home is not shown as segregated in the Home Movie Collection is when a white family hires an African-American woman to perform domestic services, i.e. cooking, cleaning, serving food, or taking care of children. In these cases, the woman is always wearing a uniform and is, therefore, excluded from the familial unity of the images.

The public space of the Thomas Grocery & Gulf Station is presented visually as integrated, and I attempt to read this segment as a “visual event” as advocated by Didi-Huberman where formal characteristics of the images are linked to the conditions of their making.22

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20 Sokol, 59.
21 Farce is used here in the sense that actions are drained of their real meaning and their significance is no longer useful from a present-day context, only ridiculous.
22 Didi-Huberman, 36.
The in-store footage is like a collage of customer portraits (figure 10). Thomas films the people in his store sometimes in close-up, sometimes static, sometimes moving, and sometimes merely as fleeting glimpses. The sequence lasts for only 45 seconds, but during this time we see at least 38 people. What we experience is a roaming and possessive camera. Many of the white adults seemed less willing to be filmed unless they were a family member or worked at the store. Children always allowed themselves to be filmed, as did most African-American adults. But for the most part, white adults were filmed from afar, from behind, with their faces covered, or while turning away—both from the camera itself and the camera’s bright lights. African-American adults and children were filmed head-on—in small groupings, in pairs, or as individuals—almost as if taking still photographs. The effect is unsettling, as it seems to suggest that Thomas’ white male gaze has the authority to "take" pictures along racial lines—or, as Sontag puts it, to turn "people into objects that can be symbolically possessed."23 I do, however, want to sidestep questions of Thomas’ relationship to the African-American customers whom he filmed in his store. Instead, I want to try to

identify the framing devices that, according to Judith Butler, make the images themselves "a structuring scene of interpretation." 24

The gas-station scene is presented in the context of the Thomas's family-bound collection. It is book-ended by domestic images, and we can read these images not only in terms of their documentary content but also as a family film featuring insiders and outsiders. 25 Some of those outsiders could turn away from the camera's gaze. Other could not. In terms of proximity, distance, and duration, even though all of the takes are very short, the camera seems to stay longer on and to get closer to the African-American subjects. 26

These films, especially the gas station segments, are both literally and figuratively silent. They visualize a disconnect with written accounts of Amzie Moore's experience as an African-American gas station owner and local civil rights organizer in Jim Crow Mississippi. Moore opened his gas station in 1953 in nearby Cleveland, Mississippi (100 miles/160 kilometers away) during a time when white advocacy groups were running a "No Rest Room,

25 This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.
26 I acknowledge that one of the problems of reading this scene as a photographic event is that it opens up for some speculative thinking.
No Gas” campaign throughout the Delta. Essentially, this campaign required all gas stations to provide racially segregated restrooms and encouraged—and occasionally forced—the white community to boycott any businesses that did not comply. Further forms of segregation included separate spaces for eating for black and white patrons, and several city officials ordered Moore to uphold these. Ultimately, the “economic terrorism” of groups such as the White Citizens’ Council throughout the 1950s sabotaged Moore’s enterprise, from organizing boycotts to pressuring white-owned banks to deny him further business loans. However, in the *Thomas Collection*, this reality of Delta life is obscured. What we see seems, on the surface, to be a public meeting place where black and white members of the community pleasantly coexist. We do not see the segregated restrooms, and we do not see the separate service windows for black and white patrons who wanted to order food. These structures are in many ways invisible and unspoken, yet they are framing devices that shape what we see onscreen and how we see it.

To read the images from the *Thomas Collection* as traces of Jim Crow demands something of the viewer. In order to become a “witnessing public,” one must first know how to interpret the image fragments—asking neither too much nor too little. According to Didi-Huberman, this “difficult ethics of the image” requires rigor and imagination. One must consider the image as “neither the invisible par excellence (the laziness of the aesthetic), nor the icon of horror (the laziness of the believer), nor the mere document (the laziness of the learned).” Like Didi-Huberman’s visual event, Baer turns to the “poetics of absence” to point to the “missing pieces.” This framework provides a grammar for a present-day spectatorship that can read fragmented images against the grain. According to Baer, “the search for the slightest clue in otherwise unremarkable scenes carries significant moral weight.” His method of reading the visual traces from the past, then, also points toward viewers’ present-day responsibility of humanitarian vigilance. As will be discussed below, the subtleties of racialized space during Jim Crow was muddled and seemingly inconsistent. As such, we run the risk of

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28 As Driskell explains, “Though it would ultimately ruin him, Amzie Moore had no choice but to refuse. He could not serve only black patrons, since he relied on white commuters and travellers for the bulk of his business. And he could not decide to serve his black customers through the back door or the side window and retain his position within the black community.” Driskell, 141.
29 Driskell, 143.
31 Didi-Huberman, 39.
32 Baer, 126.
interpreting inter-racial images like in Thomas’s gas station scene as benign when, in fact, they fit into a larger regional context of racial repression.

The Contours of Racialized Space During Jim Crow

Despite the fact that Jim Crow laws legalized segregation of the races, their function in the society of the time was to codify how interracial contact was allowed to take place. The rules of this contact varied from state to state and changed over time. Whereas many of the Jim Crow laws forbid racial contact in areas such as restrooms, restaurants, water fountains, and hotels on the grounds of supposed “hygienic” reasons, they also explicitly stated how contact between black and whites should look when it did happen. For example, Berrey notes that in the state of Mississippi, an African American was expected to step to the side when meeting a white person on the sidewalk, allowing them to pass.33 In white homes, African Americans often performed duties as domestic workers, but custom dictated that they eat their meals in the kitchen and not at the dining room table. Berrey explains the deep tradition of interracial intimacy that was, and perhaps still is, pervasive throughout the South:

[At] its ideological core, Jim Crow was a world of intimacy, of blacks and whites living within the same society as (unequal) members of a larger family…Across the South in the late nineteenth century, even as white Southerners erected racial barriers, from Virginia to Tennessee to Mississippi, they also passed laws and enforced customs that preserved a great deal of interaction between the races. These interactions depended on performances and were tied to two idealized racial roles that emerged from a longer cultural tradition in the state and the region.34

As Berrey contends, the world of Jim Crow was one “in which blacks and whites regularly interacted in spaces where they were close enough to see, hear, and touch each other. Each entered these spaces expected to play a particular role, to adhere to a particular racial routine.”35 Berrey notes that while these roles were firmly in place, there were subversive instances for African Americans and even whites to alter these roles in acts of agency. Sometimes this agency was only temporary, but sometimes it fundamentally altered “the meanings of whiteness and blackness,” at least on an individual level.36 As Berrey puts it, “on a daily basis, Jim Crow and the meanings of

33 Berrey, 41.
34 Berrey, 11.
35 Berrey, 2.
36 Berrey, 2.
whiteness and blackness were ever in the process of being made, unmade, and remade in the racial interactions between blacks and whites.\textsuperscript{37}

As stated above, racial segregation in the South did not function as a total separation of whites and African Americans. Instead, segregation came in “hard” and “soft” forms that fluctuated based on the type of space. The spectrum of segregation ranged from almost complete racial separation to spaces where, instead of physical barriers, codes of conduct and customs dictated how inter-racial contact should look.\textsuperscript{38} What I refer to as “hard” segregation includes structures that are marked specifically for one race or the other. Berrey describes these as spaces of “near-complete racial separations, where blacks and whites encountered each other only sporadically.”\textsuperscript{39} He includes schools, churches, and African-American homes (where it would be culturally inappropriate, if not illegal, for a white person to enter) in this category.

Midway through the spectrum, we find what Berrey refers to as “spaces of separated togetherness.”\textsuperscript{40} In these instances, the physical dimensions of the space mark it as segregated. Specific, physical cues coded these kinds of spaces as distinctly “segregated,” however, a level of inter-racial contact persisted. As Berrey points out, black and whites might be required to use separate entrances to a building, but once inside, they could often see and hear each other. The interior line of separation might be a full wall, a partial wall, or even just an imaginary line.\textsuperscript{41} He includes buses, waiting rooms, and theaters in this category.

Finally, Berrey lists the most fluid types of segregated spaces. Places such as stores, white homes, and sidewalks feature a great degree of racial closeness.\textsuperscript{42} I refer to these spaces as a form of “soft” segregation. In the case of stores and sidewalks, blacks and whites share the spaces, however, a strict racial hierarchy is in place.

For Sokol a “revolution in a way of life” took place in the South over the course of the Civil Rights years, however this revolution did not take place in the high-profile cases where one might expect it. Instead, Sokol points to the way extraordinary examples of subversion led to their becoming ordinary and habitual. It is here, in the everyday South that substantial change occurred:

Most white southerners identified neither with the civil rights movement nor with its violent resisters...The prominent events of the era—the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, the 1960 student sit-ins, the Birmingham church bombing in 1963, the Selma-to-Montgomery march of 1965, for example— often

\textsuperscript{37} Berrey, 4.
\textsuperscript{38} Berrey, 24-26.
\textsuperscript{39} Berrey, 24.
\textsuperscript{40} Berrey, 25.
\textsuperscript{41} Berrey, 25.
\textsuperscript{42} Berrey, 25.
had less meaning than the changes in the texture of day-to-day life. Few white southerners ever forgot the day they first addressed a black person as ‘Mr.’ or ‘Mrs.;’ the time their maid showed up for work, suddenly shorn of her old deference; the day they dined in the same establishments as black people; the process by which their workplaces became integrated; the autumn a black man appeared on the ballot; or the morning white children attended a school with black pupils. Taken together, these changes amounted to a revolution in a way of life.43

This extreme restructuring of the social order and the contours of racialized space took place based on small, everyday acts—like a handshake or a day at school—that were in one moment extraordinary but gradually became ordinary, even habitual.44

Considering the kind of material that is typically shot as a home movie, it is less likely that a political demonstration for civil rights would be documented. For one, a demonstration would be disruptive of (or point to dissatisfaction with) the status quo. Further, such content is at first glance not so well suited for the private-sphere content of the home movie. But if, as Sokol argues, the most significant changes to the southern way of life—both white and black—during the Civil Rights years can be registered with a great deal of nuance through the changes to everyday life rather than the highly visible flash-point moments, then the same could be true for southern home movies that were shot by white families. This is methodological necessity (within the study of southern home movies, films shot by African-American families are rare, especially in archived collections45) and, for Sokol, a theoretical choice. By focusing on the way daily life was—and just as often, was not—altered by major political change in the region, the forces behind the 20th century South’s most defining issue can be better understood. Sokol challenges that the canonical literature on the Civil Rights movement “privileges the drama” of major protests, riots, or racially motivated murders and in turn “fails to probe their enduring effects or interracial impact.” 46

To revisit the points made earlier in this chapter, when we as contemporary viewers watch historical footage from a period of time such as the Civil

43 Sokol, 5. It was not until 1964 when a U.S. Supreme Court decision required lawyers to use “Mr.”, “Mrs.” and “Miss” when questioning African-American witnesses in a courtroom. Sokol, 109.
44 According to Highmore, “The process of something becoming habitual is often difficult and viscerally evident...yet once it has become habit it falls away into the peripheries of experience.” Highmore, Ordinary Lives, 170.
46 Sokol, 74.
Rights Era in the United States, we must consider the kinds of demands we place on the images. What do we expect to see in order to visualize the past? Is it the big, dramatic events as they unfold before the camera? Is it the aftermath? Is it the ways in which everyday life carries on afterwards? I want to suggest that it can also be the so-called everyday life during those events. This can even be images of life happening just on the periphery of the “action.” Highmore’s concept of the “ordinary” facilitates this kind of thinking. The ordinary is neither stable nor singular. Instead, it is a process that, like habit can move “from unusual to usual, from irregular to regular” in a slow eruption of change.47 Similarly, habit is a tool of change and not something that reinforces the conservative. It is habit that facilitates “the phenomenal ability of human life to be transformed.”48 This can be seen in the way that once a drastic change has become habitual, it no longer seems drastic anymore.49

The reality of integration—in schools, places of business, and modes of public transportation—changed the fabric of everyday southern life substantially. However, that reality had only a casual correspondence to the actual legislature that outlawed segregation in schools (in 1954) and businesses (in 1964). It took years and sometimes decades for adherence to these rulings to filter through the most isolated pockets of the rural South. These laws were federally mandated and often met with resistance by the white-controlled state governments. As a result, it took years of city-by-city or county-by-county organized desegregation initiatives by the central government, not to mention privately filed lawsuits and local activists, to change the social infrastructure. By the early 1970s, the Delta town of Indianola, Mississippi had yet to desegregate.50 For reasons like these, Sokol argues that the social changes in the South “are best measured not in weeks or months, but in generations.”51 It is also in such a scope that changes in habit become visible. The drastic changes in the routines of daily life at the intersections of the public and the private illustrate how, over generations, habit has more to do with change than with stability.

Sokol argues, “white southerners fought reality with myth” in the way they faced and resisted the changes that were set off in the post war years. For many white southerners, defense of Jim Crow laws had less to do with facing actual present-day questions of racial equality than with preserving the mythic past that was preserved in—and certainly created by—the white memorial institutions.52 The version of the past revered by white southerners

50 Sokol, 163.
51 Sokol, 147.
52 Sokol, 53.
rested on the acceptance of a racial order where southern blacks were locked into a paternalistic relationship with the whites in positions of power. Fights for black enfranchisement threatened the groundwork of the myth of the “happy Negro.” According to Sokol, “that fight—whose battlefields stretched from kitchens and living rooms to minds—revealed more about southern life than armies of attack dogs, fire hoses, and picket lines.”

Desegregation in the School System: Impacts on African-American Cultural Commemoration

By the 1950s, initiatives to address the desegregation of the public school system in the South were muddled together with a nation-wide communist paranoia, so that "[e]verywhere civil rights appeared, white southerners saw red." The fact that some southern whites did finally accept integration in the schools speaks more to their disavowal of the violent tactics of radical segregationists than their active acceptance of African Americans’ civil rights.

Significantly, Brundage highlights one major negative impact of the southern desegregation of the public school system on the dissemination of black memory: “with segregation and disfranchisement sharply circumscribing their access to public space, southern blacks created in their schools a quasi-public sphere in which they could collectively voice and pursue common goals.” While African-American schools remained severely under funded, the conflation of national black historical associations, the formation of black colleges and universities, and the subsequent growth in the number of black professional historians led to the formation of Negro History Week in 1926. Negro History Week was conceived with the pedagogic mission of creating a consolidated message of the history of African Americans to be spread throughout the region. The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History provided schools with classroom materials and suggestions for exercises. In this way, Negro History Week was able to bypass the regulations of all-white school boards who often thwarted early attempts to add black history to the official school curriculum and also tended to equip black schools with out-of-date, second-hand textbooks from white

53 Sokol, 53.
54 Sokol, 40.
55 Sokol, 137.
56 Brundage, 140.
57 Brundage cites black schools as receiving 90% less funding than white schools in Mississippi in 1940. Brundage, 144.
58 Negro History Week would become the federally recognized Black History Month in 1976. Brundage, 145-163.
As the desegregation of the public school system began to take place across the South, this African-American theatre of memory was not allowed to sustain in mixed classrooms: “Integration held out the promise of access to better facilities, but perhaps at the cost of the curriculum and traditions that Negro history activists had nurtured over decades.”

Two Sides of Southern Memorialization: Breaking the Lenticular

In the Introduction, I brought up the problem of southern heritage as being seen as synonymous for white southern heritage. This is not only a matter of which versions of the past are celebrated but also a problem of which social and cultural groups have preserved and accessible historical materials from which to create stories about the past. Formal archival institutions, museums, and memorials have, in the South, been the province of whites. However, African-American sites of cultural memory have often been unofficially collected or presented in ephemeral, non-tangible forms.

Whereas elite white women were predominantly in charge of erecting countless statues to Confederate soldiers in the years immediately following the Civil War, their role changed after World War I when individual states began to institutionalize the preservation of the region’s heritage. Mississippi’s state archive was formed as early as 1902 (the second state archive in the country) by University of Mississippi professor Franklin L. Riley, following the lead of Alabama shortly before. As historian notes, “[t]o the extent that the history of African Americans was preserved, it was through official documents and slaveholder’ records.” The professionalization of southern history, from an amateur activity or pastime for white women to the domain of educated white men, led to the formal inscription of the region’s past based on material from newly formed state archives. According to Brundage, “[t]his void in the collections of the South impeded opportunities to understand the southern racial order from any perspective other than that of its architects.”

Immediately following the Civil War, the primary form of cohesion and dissemination of black memory was in the form of public celebrations. In particular, ephemeral acts such as parades functioned as temporary reclamations of public spaces and acts of resistance against the backdrop of stone

59 Brundage, 166.
60 Brundage, 180.
61 Brundage, 51.
62 Brundage, 108.
63 Brundage, 121.
64 Brundage, 122.
and marble monuments dedicated to white memory. Of particular note were the Juneteenth celebrations, the 4th of July, Lincoln’s Birthday, and New Year’s Day. Brundage cites parades as one of the few modes of black self-expression in the Jim Crow South that traversed racial lines, saying “parades took on added significance in the age of segregation because they offered African Americans a unique opportunity to present complex self-portraits of their communities that were largely unmediated by white interference.”

The fact that such parades took place in public spaces such as city or town centers meant that they “interfered with the routines of everyday life,” including those of whites.

The problem persists of how to integrate white and black versions of the past and how to commemorate these versions in ways that are neither exclusionary nor merely additive. In Reconstructing Dixie, McPherson refutes a tendency for post-Civil Rights’ narratives to “deploy encounters with blackness as mere fuel for the emotional texturing of whiteness” as well as their “casting difference as a background that supports imagined white sensitivity and subjectivity.”

Most significant in her readings of these cultural products is what she calls the “lenticular logic of racial visibility.” She likens the concept to 3-D postcards where, even though two images exist on the card, the lenticular lens on the coating makes it only possible to view one of these images at a time. The lenticular logic at work in southern images or historical readings of the South is one that “represses connection, allowing whiteness to float free from blackness, denying the long historical imbrications of racial markers and racial meanings in the South.” McPherson reads even what she calls “additive” strategies of racial analysis as functioning within a lenticular logic, where images of difference, such as race, get “tacked onto” the prevailing image or version of history. Such practices offer not only a mere surface integration of perspectives, but in the case of southern histories, they also fail to adequately analyze the ways in which racial interactions actually did (and still do) take place.

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65 Juneteenth, also known as Emancipation Day, occurs annually on June 19th in recognition of the day Union soldiers took control of Texas and both proclaimed and enforced the emancipation of Texas slaves even though Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1st 1863. Independence Day was not celebrated by white southerners in the years following the Civil War until the Spanish-American War of 1898 rekindled their national patriotism. Abraham Lincoln’s birthday is February 12th. January 1st, traditionally associated with slave auctions was reappropriated by African Americans as a celebratory event post-emancipation. Brundage, 56-62.

66 Brundage, 71.
67 Brundage, 67.
68 McPherson, 6.
69 McPherson, 26.
70 McPherson, 7.
71 McPherson, 26-27.
A lenticular logic is perhaps most evident in contemporary Pilgrimage performances in Natchez, Mississippi. The annual Pilgrimage celebrations feature tours of plantations and are one of the greatest means of tourist revenue for many Southern cities. Here Steven Hoelscher compares the white performance of the Confederate Pageant with the African-American performance of “A Southern Road to Freedom.” The pageant glorifies a decidedly antebellum Natchez, with uniformed boys and girls in hoop skirts re-enacting a Confederate Farewell Ball on the eve of the Civil War. According to the pageant, the war’s start in 1861 marked the end of an age of “romance, grandeur, chivalry, and wealth” in Natchez and, by extension, the South as a whole. In contrast, the concert of slave songs, hymns, and biographical vignettes that make up “A Southern Road to Freedom” feature the year 1861 not as an end point but as a milestone in a process of black freedom and achievement in the city. Hoelscher contends that the inclusion of a performance from the perspectives of African Americans into the Natchez Pilgrimage celebration functions to “directly challenge the fundamental premise of the entire heritage display.” However, the lack of any degree of cross talk between the two heritage performances both denies the centuries of intimate (if unequal and often brutal) interaction between blacks and whites in Natchez and throughout the South, and it hardly approaches any kind of meaningful deconstruction of southern history.

Along the Parade Route: A Witness to Memorialization

In contrast to many of the images from the Lytle Collection (discussed in Chapter 2), which featured grueling work in the cotton fields, the Thomas Collection also includes an act of African-American celebration. Thomas’s store was the end point for the Delta Center School’s homecoming parade in 1956. From the vantage point of his gas station, Thomas’ film documents this ephemeral procession performed by a segregated, African-American school.

The parade sequence begins from a position just outside the shop door. Over a span of two minutes and fifteen seconds, we are offered multiple physical perspectives—from on the ground to the rooftop of the gas station. The camera moves past the gas pumps and films the store’s façade and the

72 Hoelscher attended the Confederate Pageant in 1999 and 2000. The same performance is now referred to as the “Historic Natchez Tableaux.”
74 Hoelscher, 225-226.
75 Hoelscher, 243.
people standing in front. For the most part, it is an African-American crowd gathered to watch the procession. Women in the crowd are clad in bright checked dresses and skirts or white dresses. The camera pans left to right and shows young children also dressed up in pressed shirts and fancy dresses. The camera then pans right to left and shows men in khakis, shirts and ties, and wide-brimmed hats. This is clearly an occasion that demands a certain formality of attire.

Next are shots of the oncoming parade from the small dirt lot in front of store. The procession approaches carrying three flags representing the United States of America, the state of Mississippi, and the Delta Center School (figure 11). African-American teenage girls in gold skirts and green jackets march and twirl batons. Younger girls in white shirts and green skirts do a dance routine behind the older girls. The camera crosses street to stand in front of crowd and films the procession of dancers, baton twirlers, and the marching band behind them. When the point of view is changed again, the camera shoots from the roof of the gas station. It pans across the far end of gas station parking lot where a group of African-American men watch from the back of pickup truck. A white woman in her forties wearing a light blue dress (perhaps Thomas’s wife) walks by behind the crowd. From the rooftop, the camera continues to pan back to the dancers and the crowd that encircles performance. A line of cars stretches out behind the crowd. Most of the cars are convertibles with teenage girls in formal dresses riding in them. Further along, some of the cars are simple sedans with the beauty queens sitting in pairs on the hoods.

![Figure 11: The Delta Center School parade (Thomas Collection, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).](image)

Parades, as a form of local celebration and commemoration, are more than performative acts. As Susan G. Davis contends, parades are not simplistic mirrors of society. Instead, they are shaped by both underlying social forces...
and “part of the very building and challenging of social relations.”

The act of performing in a parade is one part of this. But perhaps more significant is the negotiation of who is allowed to participate and who is left to watch from the sidelines. In this way, parades are an appropriate twin to the onscreen performances in home movies, as discussed in previous chapters. When parades are then captured in a home movie, we must approach them as a double exposure of social factors, both of which act on what we see onscreen. In the Delta Center School’s parade, we see the marching band and drum majorettes from a segregated African-American school. As such, the white citizenry of Walls, Mississippi is excluded from the performance, left to watch, or film, from the periphery.

According to Highmore, “When nothing much is going on then there is already too much to know where to begin.” This insight on the vitality of the ordinary fits with the kind of mundane material that often appears in collections of home movies. Highmore argues that the “movement of the daily” transverses traditionally gendered spheres of public and private. Similarly, the movement of the amateur or family film camera also crosses these borders, although in no way offering complete visions of either side. Instead, southern home movies offer traces of intersections between public and private, between black and white members of society. In order to make sense of these intersections, it is necessary to find a way to break the lenticular lens and hold multiple visions in focus at once. In the case of the parade sequence, discussed above, the performance of African-American cultural expression transverses white daily life. This is a significant ephemeral act, however, its impact does not stop there. The performance is able to break the lenticular because it is part of a white southerner’s home movie. In this way, the archival home movie artifact has the capacity to sustain multiple perspectives at once.

At the time of film donation, Thomas’s wife told the archive that local African-American teachers would often borrow Thomas’s home movies to show in black schools. According to the archive’s own documentation:

> teachers from the African American schools and the white schools also stopped by and borrowed the films to show in their classrooms. Mrs. Thomas said that the black teachers used them more often than the white teachers. She attributed this to the fact that the films were often of black residents at work in the fields and people enjoyed seeing themselves and people they knew on the screen.

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79 The document titled “Thomas” is filed with other internal documentation relating to the Home Movie Collection.
In this way, Thomas’s original white male gaze was subverted. In place is what I refer to as a substitutional gaze where the members of the community who appear in the film take control of the images for their own means. Thomas was of an economic standing that allowed him to purchase the expensive 16mm film equipment and film stock. He was also of the social position that he could shoot his films across racial lines (it is much less likely that, in the mid-1950s in Mississippi, an African-American man could have filmed a white man). In this way, black community members used Thomas’s films as a substitution for the lack of amateur films of local life that they shot themselves.

The scope of material in the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection, as is true with many archives that collect these types of films, is vast enough to open up opportunities to explore changes to the minutia of the ordinary, changes in habit. As Highmore insists, “There is a materialist actuality to habit that belies the sense of it as merely a tenacious continuity of the age-old: to develop new habits always alters concrete existence and relationships even when it appears to be business as usual.”80 While the scenes from the documentary’s archival news footage fit more neatly into possible avenues for witnessing in terms of its politically charged content, in this chapter, I argued that the home-movie segment also functions as witness-in-retrospect to life during Jim Crow. One example, the documentary, is neatly formed into a narrative. The other example, the home movie, has a seemingly haphazard organization. It requires more work from the spectator in order to be activated as witness. I dare to describe the home movie material as “raw,” but in doing so, I do not want to naively imply that this rawness means any direct access to a vision of the past. Instead, I maintain that the home movie example is also highly crafted, perhaps even manipulated. This level of crafting, however, is not the kind of formal crafting as in the documentary example, such as heavy editing, voice-over narration, and present-day interviews. Instead, the crafting that takes place in the home movie has to do with interpersonal and social relationships that existed at the time of filming.

The contours of invisible and unspoken structures come into relief at flash-point moments, such as the Montgomery bus boycott mentioned in the first example. However, trying to identify these structures in their invisible iterations, like in the home-movie segment, using Butler’s critical examination of the framing devices that make up images or Didi-Huberman’s concept of the visual event helps to uncover the ways in which these structures persist into the present day, therefore resisting writing these past events into “the realm of history.” As Elias Khoury writes, “Who can judge history?  

80 Highmore, Ordinary Lives, 170.
One can argue, we can take lesions from history, but judging it morally has no political implications.  

In the next chapter, I discuss sections of archival home movie material taken a step further from their original filming contexts. In the current chapter, I read the Thomas Collection as a trace of the pervasiveness of Jim Crow in ordinary life as well as a memorial to an ephemeral act of African-American commemoration. In Chapter 4, I examine the ways in which one collection of southern home movies has been used in documentary film projects that attempt to interpret aspects of the Civil Rights movement and life under Jim Crow. Once again, these new uses, while seemingly distinct from the original filming and screening contexts, should not be understood as fundamentally separate from those contexts. Instead, they should be seen as extensions of a system of production that has not ended and is still forming.

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4. Re-working the Home Movie Collection: Documentary Reuse

“How do you tell that story? When the place you’re from is so full of the burden of history? It’s the story of a family. And there is no real ending.” – April Grayson, Another Word for Family

There is a black screen, and then an image appears. A white man (probably Lytle’s brother, Maury Knowlton)—sleeves rolled up and notepad in hand—leans against a large piece of equipment while an African-American farmer cranks the tractor in the background. Next, the white man walks behind the slowly moving tractor as it thins the cotton crops in the field. This 8mm black-and-white sequence was shot by Lytle and, like much of the material that is not part of Raisin’ Cotton, it contains no external editing. It is a detailed portrait of the work on a cotton plantation that infiltrates all aspects of life both for Lytle’s family and those sharecropper families who also lived on the plantation. These fifteen seconds are followed by a brief, six-second shot probably filmed only minutes later. Here, the image cuts to the white man and the African-American man walking through the cotton fields on Perthshire Plantation. The shot is overtly symbolic: the planter in a crisp white button down and slacks, the sharecropper in dark overalls, they walk in straight lines that run in parallel tracks but never cross, the hot Mississippi sun shining down on the cotton field. This image of a white man and a black man in close proximity without coming into direct contact evokes the contemporaneous conditions of the Jim Crow era where a large portion of the population was systematically segregated. From the image alone, we know nothing about the attitudes or beliefs of the particular people onscreen. In fact, we can only presume to know who they are at all.

The image of the two men walking in the field, though short, is striking. Even within the context of the original sequence of which it is a part, it opens up to imaginative and poetic interpretations when reread from our contemporary position. This shot came to be one of the first keys to unlocking where and how portions of Lytle’s home movies had been reused. Im-

1 Another Word for Family (April Grayson, 2007).
mediately identifiable, it laid the groundwork for my understanding of the significance of the reuse of other segments of Lytle’s collection as well.

This chapter maps out how one collection of home movies have been incorporated into documentary projects after their archival donation. As with many historical endeavors, this process of excavation is incomplete. This is not an exhaustive list of every new iteration of one or any home movie collection. Instead, I work to draw inferences from the material that was documented, saved, and is now findable. This situation in itself says as much about working with amateur films and home movies as a complete list would. It points to the idiosyncratic and often ad hoc structures build up around the collections during the early days of their amassing, that is, the 1990s. It also points to the necessary ways of legitimizing these structures even within more established institutions, such as university administrative systems.

This chapter also questions how institutional framings and popular reuses highlight the new desires bestowed upon archival home movies. I have consulted works produced from 2007 to 2015 that have used moving images from the Lytle Collection, sometimes for only a few brief seconds. I pay very close attention to the reuse of even slivers of archival home movie material, no matter how brief, and evaluate the repercussion of its reuse in contemporary projects. Such projects include conventional documentaries aired on television, a series of web shorts for the Mississippi Blues Trail’s website, a video installation at the B. B. King Museum in Indianola, Mississippi, and two experimental short films. Additionally, I refer to Voices of Perthshire (1999), the archive’s own production that is centered on the material in Lytle's Raisin’ Cotton. The documentaries that license material from archival collections rely on the general recognizability of the home movie images at the same time they exploit the creative possibilities of using such ambiguous footage. In these instances of reuse, the tension between the vagueness and the specificity of home movie images is a defining factor.

Finding out where segments of the Lytle Collection have been reused tells a story more detailed than one of contemporary documentary practices. It is also a partial answer to how the remediated archival home movies have contemporary relevance, how they can mean more than the specifics of their imagery, and how they might function as constructed regional reflections. The instances of reuse discussed in this chapter operate as constructed regional reflections, to greater or less success. The degree to which any one

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2 No records exist for the reuse of material from the Home Movie Collection prior to 2007. After Glynn left the Southern Media Archive in the early 2000s, a number of archivists held the position. In this sense, institutional memory is also tied to specific individuals.

3 Voices of Perthshire, from 1999, is treated differently because it was essentially an in-house production when the Southern Media Archive was still a part of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture.
documentary achieves this has nothing to do with its success as a freestanding film, for this has to do with the aims of the filmmaker and production company. The signification of constructed regional reflection is an outside category, separate from the reusers’ own aims.

**Content Description and Ad Hoc Digitization**

The archive’s own signaling of how to use the home movies in their collection is evident in their cataloging practices and content description. This is the link to their perspectives on the way the material can be used—in a sense, how they see it as useful and meaningful. The archive’s practice of highlighting images of African Americans sends a message to potential filmmakers searching for B-roll footage for films that interrogate the disruptive race relations during and preceding the Civil Rights Era. *The Lott Collection*, with footage from the 1960s and 1970s has been flagged by a production company for use in the film *Freedom Summer* from 2013. The sections used include two shots where an African-American nanny is taking care of white children, one shot where an African-American woman in uniform serves coffee to the members of a white family seated around a table, and one sequence from the Civil War Centennial celebration parade from the mid-1960s. In this sequence, a beauty queen rides in a convertible, waving to the crowds, while a Confederate battle flag flies in the background.

Firelight Films interest in the *Lott Collection* resulted in a high-resolution digital transfer from the film originals for several of the reels. Instead of taking the opportunity to transfer the entire collection, the archive only transfers those fragments that the prospective user pays for. As a result, the bits and pieces of the Home Movie Collection that become digitized are those that have been earmarked by the archive, specifically, those whose content has been pointed out in the shot list as showing something “different” than the “average” home movie. There is good reason for those sections to be digitized, but the rarity of accessible viewing copies also means that filmmakers with miniscule budgets might not be willing to take a chance on paying for digitizing material sight unseen. Instead, they simply pick and choose from what has already been transferred, potentially creating a sort of echo chamber of moving images.

The question of access also brings with it the question of how the material is accessed. Most of the films from the Home Movie Collection can be viewed onsite as VHS copies. The VHS tapes were captured during projection at the university’s media center in the 1990s. My own research in the archive has resulted in a selection of very low-resolution digital viewing

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4 The *Lott Collection* consists of 15 reels of color 8mm film and 2 reels of color Super-8 film shot in North Carrollton, Mississippi between 1953 and 1973.
copies. These were made in house from the VHS viewing copies. In this sense, my own specific research interests have also intervened, influencing the material that can be seen offsite, though in a very crude form.

Archival Home Movies as Found Footage

In this chapter, I approach archival home movies as “found footage” of sorts. This perspective acknowledges archival home movies’ status as orphaned images and orphaned objects in a broader sense. It also allows for a discussion of some of the repercussions of the films’ absolute displacement, despite the fact that they have achieved a new placement in a formal institutional home. According to Baron, “foundness” is a defining characteristic of all archival material that is encountered by the spectator through the mediation of another film, “whether they were ‘found’ in an archive or ‘found’ on the street.”5 This “found footage,” in the case of the Home Movie Collection, is both found in the archive by the reusers and found by the archive itself. It is then remediated into contemporary documentaries, experimental films, museum installations, and online shorts.

What Baron dubs the “archive effect” is the “experience of pastness” that occurs when we are presented with archival film that has been used within a compilation film.6 Ultimately, she defines archival images based on their point of reception rather than whether or not they are housed in an institutional archive. Part of Baron’s effort, in fact, is to de-emphasize the material aspects of the archival images in question. To some extent, this is a matter of naming where, according to Baron, the term archival materials emphasizes physicality and location, but the term archival documents “offers a discursive space in which we may account for the different kinds of documents that circulate in both material and virtual form.”7 This approach can be used to account for the reality of how researchers like myself actually deal with family film. It takes into account the different formations of an archival home movie collection, and it allows for readings of remediated versions of

5 Baron, 17.
7 Baron, 10. It should be pointed out that highlighting the virtual-ness of “the virtual” has the tendency to overlook the physicality of digital iterations, as they exist on servers and storage media.

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these films in contemporary works. Unlike Baron, I see this accountability for the various types of material and virtual documents in circulation as emphasizing materiality and physicality instead of escaping it. Further, I do not think that the physical location should become irrelevant. It frames the film example in terms of how the object was re-released into the world, as a digitalized file on the Internet for example, even if at later stages that connection is impossible to trace. If nothing else, the fact that a home movie existed in an official archive may be one of the defining reasons why it could be found for reuse at all.

While I agree with Baron’s shift in emphasis from a place-based to experience-based definition (whether or not the defining term should be “archival”), I argue that experiencing what Baron dubs the “archive effect” does not have to be limited to watching found-footage films. What this limited definition overlooks is the ways in which the archive’s curatorial practices or an Internet repository’s database structure function as “meta-photographic texts.” In Hirsch’s use of this term, these cover a wide range of methods of reuse, including fictional as well as documentary films, autobiographical works, museum exhibits, and theoretical writing.

The Invisibility of Archival Home Movies

As the examples in this chapter demonstrate, reuse of the Lytle Collection is largely invisible—the most notable exception to this is the archive’s own reuse project, Voices of Perthshire. This invisibility extends to three levels: within the institution itself, within the sites of reuse, and as reused images (though this last category contains the most variation). First, within the archival institution, the records that document where and how any segments from the Home Movie Collection have been used are not part of the collection’s supporting materials that the public, or most researchers, have access to. These records are first and foremost legal contracts and receipts of payment. They are meant to quantify, in seconds, how much footage the reuser intends to use and from which family-bound collection this material comes from. These records do not specify in detail which particular sections have

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8 For example, some home movies from the Lytle Collection exist as 8mm originals, 16mm negatives, 16mm duplication prints, VHS dubs of both the 8mm films and the later, restored 16mm versions, DVD copies of the restored version, digitized versions of the 16mm film, as well as parts that have been remediated into a number of contemporary commercial films, videos, and installations.

9 Patrik Sjöberg points out that there is no system of annotation films that use archival moving images that would allow the viewer to trace which segments came from where. Sjöberg, 44-49.

10 Meta-photographic texts are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1. Hirsch, Family Frames, 8.
been chosen based on time code or dominant imagery, as is listed in the shot list. However, it is possible to trace some of these specifics through the documentation of the requests for viewing copies where a more detailed vocabulary is sometimes used.

Second, the invisibility of the Lytle Collection extends to the way the filmmakers treat the home movie material within the new production. It is common practice for archival materials to be used in new productions without using a detailed method for citing sources, as is the case in print. End credits do name the Lytle Collection from the University of Mississippi as a source of visual imagery (along with any other archival collections used), but the casual viewer has no way of distinguishing which segments are from the Lytle Collection and no way of knowing that these were from a collection of private films.

Finally, the invisibility extends to the way certain productions treat the actual images that they source from the archive. This is primarily achieved through the degree to which the new productions either announce the images’ status as home movies or attempt to camouflage the private films so that they are indistinguishable from other imagery that is used—either professionally produced archival material or film shot in the present day explicitly for the new production. As stated above, it is on this level that the most variation occurs from production to production.

Intentional Disparity and the Construction of Regional Reflections: *American Denial* and *Let Freedom Sing*

Many of these instances of documentary reuse focus on life in the South under Jim Crow or during the Civil Rights movement and draw from the Lytle Collection in order to illustrate that time period. Two such examples are *Let Freedom Sing: How Music Inspired the Civil Rights Movement* co-produced by Time Life Video in 2009 and *American Denial* by Vital Pictures released in early 2015. Productions like these struggle with the task of trying to visualize the invisible. Instead of employing footage where a specific historical event was captured on film, many of these instances of reuse turn to home movies as a means of suggestion—to imply that some of the most significant tensions in a society are working just beneath the visible surface. The particular strategies for achieving this vary from project to project.

Where *American Denial* recasts Lytle footage as if it were original

\[11\] Sjöberg, 44-47.

\[12\] Of course, a cynical view would be to point out that using images from university archives is relatively inexpensive as opposed to licensing material from larger commercial broadcasting archives.
footage shot by/featuring a different person (in this case, the Swede, Gunnar Myrdal), Let Freedom Sing uses Lytle’s home movies to conjure up the everyday lives of ordinary—white—southerners during a tempestuous time in American history.

The documentary American Denial focuses on Myrdal’s research in the South during the late 1930s. His 1940 report, An American Dilemma examined the historical and sociological meaning of race in the United States at that time. Early in the film, a voice-over narrator says, “In 1938, a Swedish economist began one of the strangest journeys of his life.”13 This plays over black-and-white shots of Lytle’s brother, Maury Knowlton, standing by a car in Biloxi, Mississippi while an African-American man puts his bags in the trunk. This is followed by shots taken from the passenger window while the car drives down the highway. They pass a sign that says “Arkansas State Line”. Here, Lytle’s footage stands in for Myrdal’s own travels.

In this way, Lytle’s home movies are set up to function as the imagined home movies of Myrdal himself, had he or someone with him brought along an amateur camera. The documentary makers specifically chose segments from Lytle’s collection that featured not only indicators of a similar time and place as Myrdal’s own milieu but also distinct tropes of the home movie as a type of familiar cultural production. The would-be Myrdal smiles awkwardly at the camera as his bags are loaded into his car, a form of direct address that is common to home moviemaking where the camera functions as a go-between for those in front of the camera and those behind it. As it typical for parts of home movie footage shot on vacations, scenery is shot through a moving car window.

The voiceover continues, saying, “It wasn’t his first time in America, but it was his first visit to the Deep South.”14 The image now cuts to the six-second shot described in the introduction to this chapter. Now, it is supposedly Myrdal (dressed in white) who walks side by side with the African-American sharecropper through the fields of cotton (figure 12). This repurposed sequence continues to hint at the social and economic disparity between blacks and whites in the South—both through the imagery and the overdubbed soundtrack—but it also manages to revise the meaning of the original footage so that the white man onscreen is now the observer of inequality and no longer a part of its proliferation. The fact that the same person appears repeatedly in these shots—Lytle’s brother cast as Myrdal’s stand-in—only strengthens the impression that these portions of archival footage are, in fact, private film.

This very same sequence of the two men walking in the field also appears in Let Freedom Sing: How Music Inspired the Civil Rights Movement. This time, protest singer Phil Ochs’ “Here’s to the State of Mississippi” plays

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13 American Denial (Llewellyn M. Smith, 2015).
14 American Denial (Llewellyn M. Smith, 2015).
over Lytle's images from the late 1930s. While Ochs' song was written in 1965, it certainly references the inequalities stemming from the earlier Jim Crow era as well as the later point in the Civil Rights movement. Here, the white man and black man in the image function as archetypes as opposed to identifiable people within the new documentary's narrative structure. The lyrics of Ochs' song pointedly critique the South in general and Mississippi in particular for the deadly violence associated with whites' upholding of a "traditional" racist hierarchy: "Here's to the state of Mississippi / for underneath her borders / the devil draws no lines / If you drag her muddy rivers / nameless bodies you will find." 15 An image that in my original reading points to the oxymoronic near-yet-separate logic of segregation under Jim Crow now carries with it an added layer of brutality. The horrid history of lynching, murder, and assassination is now projected onto this otherwise banal image.

Figure 12: Knowlton (left) and a sharecropper (right) walk through a cotton field on Perthshire Plantation (Lytle Collection, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).

In the context of Let Freedom Sing, the six-second shot of the men walking through the field approaches what Baron refers to as "intentional disparity." This term functions to account for the difference between the meaning of an

image or images in their original context versus the way they are deployed in the context of an appropriation film. For home-movie material, the original context was that of a close circle of family and friends, while the new documentary is aimed at wide public spectatorship. In order for intentional disparity to be understood by the spectator, however, there must be something in the image or images that point to a different production context with, presumably, a different aim than the current work. While Lytle’s grainy black-and-white footage announces itself as from another historical period than the crisp, color video purpose-shot for the new documentary, there is little in this brief section that signals its status as a private film. It could easily be mistaken for archival documentary footage of another sort, perhaps for a television report on the state of race relations in the South. It is a free-floating section of moving images that, while from a different time, does not give a clear indication of its original intended purpose. On the contrary, when the same six-second shot is used in *American Denial* as part of Myrdal’s presumed private footage, it does convey a sense of an original intended purpose, however vague. Within the codes of home moviemaking, present-day spectators understand the limited viewing contexts of such footage. A greater level of intentional disparity is therefore produced as the spectator imagines that this archival private footage has been found and repurposed to illustrate a particular narrative.

While *Let Freedom Sing*’s treatment of Lytle’s shot of the men walking in the field suppresses its status as a home movie, the next sequence in the documentary to incorporate material from the *Lytle Collection* purposefully announces it. The sequence begins with an interview with Paul Breines, who was a Freedom Rider in the 1960s. Breines is making the point that during the 1950s whites listened to white singers like Elvis Presley and Pat Boone but not to black performers like Little Richard. As he speaks, color 8mm film plays of Lytle and friends sledding during a rare snowy day in Mississippi. Here, Lytle’s group is meant to signify the average white population who eschewed black music. Sound effects were added to this silent clip, such as the sound of the sled gliding down the snowy hill and of voices laughing joyously. Despite the fact that amateur cameras from this period were silent, the use of sound cues functions to personalize the archival home movie footage for contemporary viewers and to create an intimate impression. Here, intentional disparity is foregrounded by the documentary makers. The frivolous act of sledding through snow—compounded by the sounds of laughter—is contrasted with the earnestness of the Freedom Rider’s testimony. Through their use of the archival segment, the filmmakers are making an editorial statement; white supremacist attitudes are not inherent in the home

16 Baron, 23.
17 Baron, 89.
movie images. Spectators read the images as coming from private home movies, but no tie to a specific person is indicated.

Here, the intentional disparity between Lytle’s home movies’ original function and their new reuse is most pronounced. As a tactic, it both conjures and then diverts nostalgic readings of the grainy, handheld 8mm Kodachrome images. It forces contemporary spectators to re-think the performative aspects of home movie imagery as something that celebrates a certain vision of life while obscuring other, more troubling aspects. Even so, the images tell more than just what the new documentary wants them to say. These images, clearly from another time and place, “exceed the intentions of the appropriation filmmaker.”

We recognize the indexical trace of another context of use that carries with it a different, even contradictory reading. As a constructed regional reflection, the documentary reuse augments our reading of the images and opens up the space for a new narrative.

This enactment of archival home movies works with what they can mean or what they could be, versus what they actually are. The irony here is that Lytle, pictured in some of the shots and behind the camera in others, was a supporter of integration and was troubled by the violence erupting in her home state at the time when this clip was filmed. When she and her second husband, Stewart Lytle, lived in Illinois in the early 1960s, she wrote, distressed, about the news from Mississippi. The 1962 riot at Ole Miss that followed Meredith’s enrollment saddened Lytle. She corresponded with her nephew who was a current student in order to verify the media’s accounts and to try to urge him to reject “segregation by force.” Then, she wrote a local Mississippi congressman urging him to support integration, and he very curtly told her that he knew what was best for the state of Mississippi.

Regardless of how they position the presumed intentions of the people onscreen, both American Denial and Let Freedom Sing engage with portions of Lytle’s films as home movies. In fact, this is their appeal. As director Jon Goodman’s (Let Freedom Sing) correspondence with the archive demonstrates, the use of private film is a tactical choice: “What I’m really trying to do with this material is effectively transport viewers to another time and place—a time and place defined and framed by Americans who lived it, and

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18 Baron, 25.
19 Lytle’s research and writings on segregation (Series 9, box 34, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
20 Letter from Lytle to her nephew, Tommy, 1963 (Series 8, box 28, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
21 Letter from Representative Wilburn Hooker to Lytle, March 28, 1963 (Series 8, box 28, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
Disguising Home Movies: *No Longer Silent*, the B. B. King Museum, and the Mississippi Blues Trail Videos

In contrast to the previous two documentaries discussed above, *No Longer Silent*, a 2013 video production made by the University of Mississippi, downplays the amateur subjectivity of the source films. The documentary is based on a personal reflection of the 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi as told by Till’s cousin, Simeon Wright. The film is built around Wright’s participation in a panel discussion at the Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics at the University of Mississippi. A voice-over narrator structures the story, and Wright’s present-day testimony is supported by archival moving images and still photographs, as well as digital video shot in the present that has been manipulated to look vintage.

Wright, who was twelve years old at the time of Till’s murder, describes his life prior to this defining event:

“I enjoyed life in Mississippi. I just didn’t like chopping cotton, picking cotton. Take that out of the equation it’d have been a beautiful place to live. During that time as child in Mississippi, most of the time was fun time because we had a lot of things to do—fishing, hunting. When we wasn’t in the cotton fields we was swimming or going somewhere fishing, so we really had a wonderful time, enjoyed it.”

As Wright speaks, the film cuts between a close up of him in the present day to images of sharecroppers picking cotton. The images of cotton picking are from Lytle’s home movies (and not from *Raisin’ Cotton*) shot on Perthshire Plantation, here the late 1930s are meant to stand in for the mid-1950s. The images, which were originally black and white, have now been altered to sepia tones. Some archival photographs of the outside of Bryant’s Grocery in downtown Money, Mississippi are displayed as Wright recounts the story of how Till, a young African-American boy from Chicago, whistled at Carolyn Bryant, a 21-year-old white woman. This act was forbidden by the social codes of 1950s Mississippi and proved to be deadly in the violent climate of Jim Crow. The narrator explains that, despite their initial fears, after several days without repercussion, the boys began to think that the incident with Mrs. Bryant was forgotten. Once again, cotton-picking footage from the *Lytle Collection* is used to visually support the documentary’s soundtrack,

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22 Email correspondence from Jon Goodman to the University of Mississippi’s archive dated August 18, 2008.
23 *No Longer Silent* (University of Mississippi, 2013).

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this time as a way to show the continuation of the normal rhythms of daily life. It is the same sequence as before, but this time it is played in its original black and white.

The change of the first instance of cotton picking to sepia does two things. First, it visually distinguishes the two otherwise identical sequences from each other so the same footage can be reused twice. But it also makes the sepia-toned archival images from the Lytle Collection visually match the images that were filmed in the present and meant to stand in for past events. For example, six minutes later, a shot of a dirt road with the same sepia filter is meant to represent “Dar Ferry Road”—Dark Fear Road—the location where Till’s murderers brutally beat him to death before throwing his body into the Tallahatchie River.

In this production, archival images are used, but their manipulation to match the recreated sections flattens out the difference, hence depreciating Baron’s archive effect. The subtitle of Baron’s first chapter of *The Archive Effect* is called “Appropriation and the Experience of Textual Difference,” but I see *textural* difference as being a key factor in signifying the “archival”—especially when the material in question is from a home movie. There is a nostalgic pull and a formal difference that is visible through the visual cues of the 8mm medium. The material qualities of small-gauge film make them stand out from other contemporary media, and this is the case whether they are included in a compilation film, projected from the original reels, or transferred to other viewing formats, such as digital and viewed on their own. However, when those textural qualities are augmented and the images are made to match other images in the film—archival still photographs as well as new segments that were shot explicitly for the documentary—it becomes unclear what kind of images these originally were, archival or otherwise. As such, spectators must negotiate between which archival images are *real* and which are *reenactments*. This opens up to epistemological questions where the spectators must decide the degree to which they will rely on the images as indexical traces.24

The B. B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center in Indianola, Mississippi has made use of eleven seconds from the Lytle Collection, none of which appear in *Raisin’ Cotton*. The museum’s exhibitions explore the biography of musician B. B. King (born in 1925) and root his work in the tangled legacy of blues music and the African-American experience. First, upon entrance to the museum, visitors are led into a small cinema to watch a short film about King’s life against the context of cotton farming and racial segregation in the Mississippi Delta. A five-second shot from one of Lytle’s color films is used to demonstrate the workings of the racial hierarchy during King’s youth. The shot begins by showing the profile of a white man on horseback (*figure 13*). He is facing to the right and is smoking a pipe. The

24 Baron, 30.
camera pans from left to right, revealing that the man on horseback is watching an African-American sharecropper working a mule-drawn plow through a field. In voice-over, an interviewee recalls the tone of such interracial encounters, saying, “It was ‘mister.’ And you just didn’t argue with them. It was badder than bad.” Here, the meaning of Lytle’s individual shot is transformed to speak to a more general sense of inequality. In this new context, her particular filmed interaction comes to operate as an argument about regional life under Jim Crow.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 13: Plantation manager on horseback (Lytle Collection, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).*

The singular shot of the man on horseback does not, in itself, suggest home movie material. Like the six-second shot of the two men in the field, it is very short and contains no cuts. While the visual texture of the image is more grainy than other archival images used in the museum’s displays, in its remediated context, it does not announce itself as a private image per se. It does, however, display a lack of professional polish as the frame shakes during the jarring pan from the man on horseback to the man at the plow. This hints at an original amateur context and gives rise to a certain degree of intentional discrepancy. It is in these moments when archival home movie

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25 B. B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center video (Jim Dollard, 2008).
images can be read as operating with new and unimagined intentions that their status as constructed regional reflection is most possible.

Inside the museum’s main exhibition space, visitors follow a chronological development of the story of King’s life and how he fit into the larger blues movement. In the beginning of the exhibition—meant to represent King’s childhood—two more parts from Lytle’s films are used. King, as the son of sharecropper parents, worked on cotton plantations, like most African-American children growing up in the Delta in the 1930s and 1940s. Still photographs, vintage relics, brief explanatory texts, and short loops of moving images are used to position visitors in the time and place that had an early influence on King and his style of playing guitar. In one of the first video panels, a wide shot of four men chopping cotton (figure 14) crossfades with still photographs of sharecroppers holding hoes and bent over to pick cotton bolls. The moving image portion, which is from the Lytle Collection, lasts for only three seconds. In another video panel, we see Lytle’s three-second black-and-white shot of a tractor driving away from the camera. Throughout the other video displays in this portion of the museum, there are other sequences reminiscent of Lytle’s films: a young boy operating a mule-drawn plow, close-ups of women picking cotton, a large group of men and women chopping cotton, and a freshwater baptism scene. However similar these films are in content to Lytle’s, there are telltale differences between them. These filmic portions are less grainy than those from the Lytle Collection, presumably filmed on 16mm rather than Lytle’s amateur 8mm stock. Additionally, they have a stronger visual composure than Lytle’s films (which do demonstrate compositional awareness in their own right). Images of cotton picking are taken head-on and from below the subjects, as opposed to from the side and at eye level as in Lytle’s depictions. The dynamism of these other images suggests a professional camera operator.

A similar situation is present in the Mississippi Blues Trail’s videos. In 2010 the Mississippi Blues Commission made a series of web videos, each approximately three-to-five minutes in length, to complement the Mississippi Blues Trail’s markers at historical sites around the state. These markers and the accompanying films profile local musicians, record labels, significant locations, or particular features of African-American life with ties to blues music. Like the video installations at the B. B. King Museum, the moving images of cotton picking from the segment “Saturday Night Blues” and the images of baptisms from the segment “Gospel and the Blues” are from sources other than the Lytle Collection. Instead, Lytle’s footage is used extensively in the segment “Scouting the Delta” and to a lesser extent in “Dockery” and “Muddy Waters.”

The museum’s and the web videos’ use of these professional images to represent these elements of black life on a cotton plantation suggests that images with visual clarity were preferred over Lytle’s homemade ones. For the eleven seconds that Lytle’s films are used in the three places in the museum, it is to fill a lack—a space where no such images exist (like the white overseer on horseback)—or to add diversity to the images already shown that must be repeated in several video contexts (like cotton chopping and picking). While the introductory film mentions the University of Mississippi’s archive and the Lytle Collection in the end credits, viewers unfamiliar with the contents of her collection have no way of knowing which images were hers or that they were home movies at all. The videos playing throughout the museum have no such attribution to Lytle. In this case, images of plantation life are taken at face value, and their meanings as family films are erased. Projects like the B. B. King museum and the Mississippi Blues Trail video series turn to archival home movies as last-ditch efforts for locating suitable visual imagery instead of as sources in their own right. The tension that is created when the appropriated archival material can be identified as coming from a private person’s home movies is diminished. Intentional disparity is suppressed, and, as a result, so is the potential for the archival home movie images to operate as a constructed critical reflection of the region.
Psychic Home Movies: Another Word for Family and Legacy: Cotton

Independent filmmaker and University of Mississippi staff member April Grayson turned to the Lytle Collection for use in her 2007 experimental documentary short, Another Word for Family.27 Through a first-person subjectivity, Grayson traces her own troubled connection to her hometown of Rolling Fork, Mississippi, as well as those of some of its residents.28 Race is at the center of her film, and as a result, cotton is used as a symbol for the Delta town’s history of racism. Recorded testimonies tell about the shame of having slaveholder ancestors in their family tree, while others remember the fear when, in the 1960s, they came home to find a burning cross and a Molotov cocktail in their front yard.

Grayson combines Super-8 footage that she films in the present day with her family’s home movies from her youth. The contemporary footage is sometimes shown in negative, and, occasionally, she films the image from afar as it is projected in a dark room. A little over halfway through the film, a 35-second sequence from the Lytle Collection is used. The sequence features a young boy plowing a field, a close-up of hoes as cotton is chopped, and a group of women picking large, fluffy bolls. Each of these segments come from different reels that Lytle shot between 1938 and 1940. The shots of the young boy operating a mule-drawn plow actually come from Lytle’s 8mm films in color, but Grayson has converted it to black and white to match the other archival elements. The home movies from her own family, however, are shown in color. The plowing and chopping consist of only one take each, but the picking sequence is made up of several different shots. Whereas Lytle’s sequencing of the picking lasts for 30 seconds, in Grayson’s reuse it is reordered and edited down to 17 seconds. In voice-over narration, a woman details the way that cotton farming on a white-owned plantation dictated the shape of sharecropper children’s school year:

The school system was segregated. But also, we wasn’t allowed to go to school until the crops was laid by. Our children had to go to school whenever the farmer said we’d go. The whites went when they were supposed to because they wasn’t in the fields the way we were, the white children. And our children, you know, couldn’t go to school. You know, you had to chop cotton,

27 Another Word for Family was screened at the Oxford Film Festival (Mississippi), the Crossroads Film Festival (Clarksdale, Mississippi), the Ozark Foothills Film Fest (Arkansas), and the San Francisco Art Commission Gallery in 2008.

28 For an examination of first person documentaries as a mode of address that can sustain both the singular (“I”) and the plural (“we”) forms, see: Alisa Lebow, ed. The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary (London: Wallflower Press, 2012). For an investigation of one’s own home movies through the mode of first person filmmaking, see: Michelle Citron’s discussion of Daughter Rite (1980) in Michelle Citron, Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
and then in the fall you start off picking the cotton. And they’d just as soon as pull the children out anytime, and we didn’t have any say so. Our family never had a say so on when we could go to school or shouldn’t go to school. It was always the boss man that said what we could do and couldn’t do.  

Grayson’s film gives voice to the sharecroppers who only appear as silent images in Lytle’s home movies. The voice and image, however, are not in direct correspondence. The speaker did not work on Lytle’s plantation, and neither the speaker nor Perthshire Plantation is named directly. Instead, the relationship between the person heard speaking and the people shown on screen is casual and thematic.

Similarly, the historical timeline of Grayson’s film is not explicit. While this may seem sloppy at first glance, I suggest that it is part of the conceptual structuring of the work. Though Lytle’s 8mm films all appear as black and white (whether they were originally shot in black and white or were later manipulated by Grayson), Grayson’s own family’s Super-8 footage from the past (probably the early 1970s) is presented in color. The new Super-8 footage shot expressly for this film was presented both in color and in black and white. At times it is difficult to place the images as coming from the near or distant “past” or as coming from the new film’s present tense. A close viewing can, of course, uncover details within the image that point to a particular period, such as car models or styles of dress. The archive effect is purposely disrupted in order to suggest a fluidity of time where the past continues to exist in the present. As such, Grayson’s use of Lytle’s films emerges as a psychic home movie for the small Delta town burdened by its past.

Grayson makes use of brief portions of the same sequences of cotton picking and cotton chopping in another experimental short from 2008 called Legacy: Cotton. At just over four minutes long, this non-narrative film uses black-and-white hand-processed 16mm stock to create a collage of the associative links evoked by cotton. The film begins with dark fibers on a white background. These nonfigurative shapes go out of focus and morph into a series of white splotches signifying cotton. At this point, and at three other points during the film, there is a fleeting glimpse of a female sharecropper pulling cotton bolls from the stalk. The fibers return, this time shown in negative so that the white strands against the solid black background further reinforce the connection to cotton. A three-second shot of the shadows of hoes hitting the ground in between rows of cotton plants is followed by quick images of technical specifications of cotton gins. The kaleidoscopic effect of the abstract hand-processed footage rubs against the fig-

29 Another Word for Family (April Grayson, 2007).
30 Unlike Another Word for Family, Legacy: Cotton was not listed in the archive’s records as using material from the Lytle Collection. I found this film through Grayson’s Vimeo page and recognized the Lytle footage. I suspect that the records for Grayson’s request are either non-existent or lost.
Urative sections from Lytle’s material. As such, archival footage gives the impression of not only coming from another time, but of being from another conceptual dimension—as ghostly even.

*Legacy: Cotton* is a reminder of the Delta’s unbreakable link between the production of this crop and the sharecropping system that sustained it for decades. These brief flashes from the *Lytle Collection* emerge through the static of fibers onscreen as sharp eruptions of a memory that cannot be suppressed. In this way, these miniscule segments from Lytle’s home movies are positioned to function as constructed regional reflections and, thus, as a contribution to the conceptualization of the Mississippi Delta.

**Versions of a Shared Past: *Voices of Perthshire***

The Center for the Study of Southern Culture’s *Voices of Perthshire* project was one method for addressing the fact that all of the films in the archive’s Home Movie Collection were shot by white families. In *Voices of Perthshire*, two separate soundtracks were recorded to play over Lytle’s *Raisin’ Cotton*. While *Raisin’ Cotton* is literally played twice, its overall running time is reduced by almost half. The sections where speakers say nothing are cut out, thereby creating the effect of continuous oral commentary. The first recording is of Lytle herself, while the second recording is of Every Lee Jackson and Eddie McCloud, former sharecroppers on Perthshire Plantation. The significance of *Voices of Perthshire* is not in the fact that it provides oral accompaniment as contextualizing support for the images but, instead, in the way it uses two different sources for that support. The Center for the Study of Southern Culture’s catalog describes *Voices of Perthshire* as “[e]xcellent for teaching about cotton…and the sharecropping system. Also great for teaching about the concept of sources in history, this demonstrates the way people remember and interpret the same events differently.”

While this promotion of *Voices of Perthshire* mentions its potential to critique the possibility of pure representations of the past, it also places emphasis on the kind of knowledge about cotton farming and sharecropping one can gain from watching the film. Other material from the *Lytle Collection* is

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31 The Center for the Study of Southern Culture was formed in 1975 as an inter-disciplinary research institute at the University of Mississippi. Along with the Center for the Study of the American South at the University of North Carolina, it one of the two institutes that focuses on the Southern region of the United States. The Southern Media Archive, the first home to the University of Mississippi’s Home Movie Collection, was established by the Center in 1990 before being moved to the Department of Archives and Special Collections (part of the University of Mississippi Libraries) in 2000.

not explicitly presented that way. *Voices of Perthshire* makes use of Lytle’s *Raisin’ Cotton* (which is approximately one hour long), however the *Lytle Collection* as a whole consists of more material than just this. As discussed in Chapter 2, much of the material in the *Lytle Collection* is very similar in style and content to that included in *Raisin’ Cotton*. What sets *Raisin’ Cotton* apart is its formal presentation: it is neatly edited by Lytle and contains her explanatory intertitles. Further, Lytle’s 1997 voice-over commentary aligns the images with her first-person perspective. To some extent, this is balanced by the former-sharecroppers’ commentary that was added in 1999. The film then reads from different, but still very specific, perspectives. Despite the fact that the *Lytle Collection* as a whole is made up of significantly more material than *Raisin’ Cotton*, Lytle’s edited documentary and the presentation of it in *Voices of Perthshire* are given more authority to represent the past, even as they function as versions of its more overt interpretations. Interviews with Lytle, Jackson, and McCloud quite literally operate as the soundtrack to the images in *Voices of Perthshire*. Here, the interviews could function as oral histories on their own, but they also function to contextualize Lytle’s *Raisin’ Cotton*. They filter the archival material through the framework of the present—or, the late 1990s—and situate it as removed. The testimonial first-person perspectives also function to fix Lytle’s, Jackson’s, and McCloud’s interpretations of the footage, closing off other opportunities for spectator interpretation (as will be discussed in the following chapter).

This filtering of the archival material through the present, however, does function to allow Baron’s archive effect to be activated through viewings of *Voices of Perthshire*. Before Lytle’s footage is played, we see brief video interviews first with Lytle and then with Jackson and Mary Metcalf (who died before the audio commentary could be captured). These interviews situate a present tense for *Voices of Perthshire* and set up the images from *Raisin’ Cotton* as coming from a distinctly different time period and context.

Further, another layer of the archive effect is at play. Each recorded commentary also functions as a documentation of the ways the archive effect can operate. Like Sobchack’s shifting modes of engagement (which will be discussed in the next chapter), Lytle and the former sharecroppers viewed *Raisin’ Cotton* in different modes. There are several distinct themes that differentiate Lytle’s viewing and commentary of *Raisin’ Cotton* from that of Jackson and McCloud. These themes include overall perspectives on the sharecropping system, reactions to the situations the film depicts, and types of focus. Lytle’s reaction to the racialized economic hierarchy of tenant farming was diplomatic in tone. She neither shuns the system on which she and her family earned their income nor embraces it wholeheartedly. As she put it, “Like all human endeavors, it wasn’t all bad. It wasn’t all good either.” The former sharecroppers, on the other hand, presented a more pointed critique. McCloud, recalling an old joke about cotton farming, said, “You’re
going to plant it. You’re going to chop it. You’re going to pick it. You’re going to haul it. You’re going to gin it. And then they’re going to take it.”

Unsurprisingly, Lytle’s reactions to the practices of cotton farming depicted onscreen also took a different form than those of Jackson and McCloud, who began working in the fields on Perthshire at the age of six. For Lytle, a sequence of women picking cotton by hand prompts her to reminisce over the sounds that would accompany African-American manual labor. She says, “There used to be people singing in the fields. Very beautiful. Nobody can sing on a tractor. I have a friend who did, and he ruined his voice. Everything today impersonalizes to a great extent…” During this same sequence, Jackson and McCloud remembered how picking 300 pounds of cotton in a day would tear the skin from their hands. Comparing life in the early 1940s to the present day, Jackson says to the interviewer (Glynn), “That’s much different, honey. The time is really good now. I mean, compared to what it used to be, we’re living in a heavenly time.”

Finally, the baptismal scene from *Raisin’ Cotton* also evokes the fundamental difference between Lytle’s viewing and that of Jackson and McCloud. As discussed in Chapter 2, *Raisin’ Cotton* has the possibility to be read as a home movie of not only Lytle and her family but of the families who also lived and worked on Perthshire Plantation. Similarly, the home movies shot by Thomas and discussed in the previous chapter also demonstrated the ways in which a substitutional gaze can create memorials to black memory. The spaces for these alternative readings form on the fine line that separates proximity from distance. For Lytle, the section of *Raisin’ Cotton* devoted to African-American baptisms on Stamps Lake evokes memories of the supreme reverence of the ceremony, of her fascination with the beauty of the sublime, and of the difficulty in capturing these feelings on film. As Lytle remembers, “It took a good bit of editing to get the sequence as it is.” Here, Lytle points out her own artistic intervention into the portrayal of the event, while Jackson and McCloud focus, instead, on the visceral memory of being there. For them, the lake baptisms during the layby represented joyous times of communion and sociability. Unlike Lytle, sequences such as this can stand in for their own memories and not just observations of events.

While *Voices of Perthshire* directly addresses the problems of representing the South (or the bi-racial South of that time) from a white middle-class versus black sharecropper perspective, this strategy also opens up the fundamental problem of representation. Here, each individual’s personal experiences are burdened with standing in for the experiences of others. However, *Voices of Perthshire*’s significance is the way that its very creation was a

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33 *Voices of Perthshire* (Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 1999).
34 *Voices of Perthshire* (Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 1999).
35 *Voices of Perthshire* (Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 1999).
performative act of remembering through home movie images, both on Lytle’s part and that of Jackson and McCloud.

Archival home movies are visually tied to a person, a place, and often a date or time period. But this tie is tenuous and, as a result of this, it is as if the films are always found when they are encountered in a new context like a contemporary documentary or in a live screening (which will be discussed in the following chapter). Like found footage, archival home movies would require an extraordinary amount of superfluous information in order to view them the way they were originally intended to be viewed. This does not prevent contemporary, non-family spectators from being able to view and engage with them, but it does fundamentally restructure the process of watching, especially when remediated into documentaries.

The invisibility of the archival home-movie image’s reuse carries with it several consequences. It gives the impression that the home movie collections have entered a final resting place upon their entrance into the archive when, in fact, they continue to spread to new cultural productions. It makes tracing the reuses difficult, though certainly not impossible. The University of Mississippi formally requires that all productions that reuse material from the Home Movie Collection provide the archive with a copy of the finished product. At the time of my research, no production companies had fulfilled this request. Naturally, the archive’s small staff has not put enforcing this policy as their top priority. Institutional acknowledgement of these instances of reuse would open up the possibility for more complex readings of the home movies in the archive’s collections. Explicitly acknowledging the ways that archival home movies have moved into new contexts would add a valuable new layer to the cultural meaning of the particular images that have been reused. This is especially the case with single sequences that have been used multiple times in different contexts.

This chapter traced the reuse of a collection of archival home movies in contemporary documentaries and museum installations. It demonstrated that the invisibility of archival home movies as private, amateur films in these projects lessens their potential to operate as constructed regional reflections. Conversely, projects that highlight the archival home movies’ private status, emphasizing intentional disparity, open up the films for critical contemplation.

In the following chapter, I present the Lytle Collection, as well as selections of other home movies, in a different kind of context than the remediation into new audio-visual material. Instead, I activate the films in the context of a series of live screenings. In these cases, the films circle back to their communities of origin, though separated by multiple decades. This staging of home movie activation stimulates a range of spectator engagement.
5. Activating the Regional Reflection Through Live Screenings

“Thus the home movie archive live is conceptualized not as a product but as a process, not as a place but as an encounter, not as a representation but as a collaborative, dynamic space.” – Patricia R. Zimmermann, “The Home Movie Archive Live”

As this dissertation’s final stop along home movies’ never-ending continuum of production, I look to case studies of live screenings to demonstrate modes of spectator engagement when collections of home movies are drawn even further away from their original contexts. These screenings thematize the relationship between spectators and the archival home movie as constructed regional reflections. Whereas the previous chapter saw archival home-movie fragments transformed into the narrative and arguments of documentary projects, this chapter opens up the films to the imaginative rememberings and nostalgic longings of the spectators at three live screenings. These screenings were Home Movie Day events that I staged using material from the Home Movie Collection, the Delta State University Archives, and films brought in from attendees.

Home Movie Day and the “The Home Movie Archive Live”: Critical Tensions

Once a year in mid-October, cities and towns around the world host Home Movie Day events where family films are screened publicly. Home Movie Day was started in 2002 by a group of film archivists in the United States. One of the primary aims of the event is to increase awareness of small-gauge film preservation by outlining the steps people can take to properly care for their personal collections of home movies. Additionally, Home Movie Day

2 Home Movie Day 2015 featured 87 unique events in 21 countries worldwide.
3 As a medium, film can be very durable as long as it is handled properly, housed in a breathable container, and stored in a cool, dry environment.
promotes amateur filmmaking and amateur films as important—yet often overlooked—parts of the cultural history of the twentieth century. Participants are encouraged to bring 8mm, Super-8, or 16mm films to a local Home Movie Day event where they will be inspected for damage and screened publically, thus the element of projecting original materials is also a key feature. While each Home Movie Day event is organized and run independently, they are linked by the Center for Home Movies, a non-profit, volunteer-run organization formed in 2005 that functions as a centralized administrative body. The Center for Home Movies also acts as a distribution channel for some “exceptional” films screened at the Home Movie Day events, first with the production of the DVD Living Room Cinema: Films from Home Movie Day, Vol. I and later through the creation of the Home Grown Movies website in 2013. For Home Grown Movies, the Center for Home Movies partners with a transfer house to get high-quality, scanned versions of the films. This small handful of digitized home movies is then uploaded to the website with new supplementary materials. These supplementary materials can take the form of an essay written by the film’s owner, an archivist, or a film historian, or it might be in the form of audio commentary by the original home moviemaker, in an attempt to re-create the feeling of the Home Movie Day screening. Some Home Movie Day events feature musical accompaniment to the silent films, and in those cases, the online version is presented as scored.

According to Zimmermann, “home movies are often positioned as dead, inert, ghostly, decayed.” She proposes instead, “an opposite, almost counter-intuitive move towards ‘live’: alive, to live, lively, enliven, living.” The kind of live screenings that Zimmermann describes are forms of multimedia performance art that incorporate music, architecture, and embodied spectatorship. Unlike the conventional musical accompaniment to silent film or archival amateur film, Zimmermann insists that the sound or musical score must not accompany the images but function as an equal part, to drive the images, even. This is related to Zimmermann and Helen De Michiel’s concept of open space documentary, a form of practice that combines the digital with “a more place-based practice of co-creation.”

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4 Some Home Movie Day events are able to project other film formats like 9.5 mm, which gained popularity in Europe during the 1920s-1940s, as well as, increasingly, a number of non-film formats such as VHS, Hi8, DVD, MiniDV, and digital video.
On one hand, Home Movie Day screenings can be seen as conventionally image centric. However, I propose that Home Movie Day film screenings are of a different order than the types of archival screenings that operated around the “fetishized image.” Instead, I see Home Movie Day as an improvisation of spectator response to community-curated screenings. The oral commentary that accompanies the images functions as a spontaneous live performance from members of the audience. Not secondary to the images—though it might initially spawn from them—the oral commentary may run parallel to what is happening onscreen, or it might go off into a divergent path based on mental associations or other vocalized comments.

In October 2015, I organized and participated in three Home Movie Day events in the southern United States. The first took place on the Delta State University campus in Cleveland, Mississippi. Here, I screened films brought in from the public, films held by the Delta State University Archives, and Lytle’s *Raisin’ Cotton*. The second was a “Home Movie Day Special Event” at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi. In this case, I presented a special screening of Lytle’s home movies and a section from *Raisin’ Cotton* instead of offering an open call for home-movie material from the public. At this time, I also gave a guest lecture on Lytle’s films and held an open discussion with the audience. The final event was in St. Francisville, Louisiana. In this case, I only screened those films brought in by the public, including a series of orphan films. These three events, detailed below, demonstrate some of the ways home movies are transformed by public screenings through spectator comments and associations, event framing, and other contextual factors. I discuss selections from the events where spectator reactions played a prominent role in the live presentation of the films.

Creating the Object of Study

As I approached the end of my dissertation project, I wanted to close with a consideration of the function of live screenings external to familial situations. Archivists at the University of Georgia participate yearly in Home Movie Day, often travelling to small towns outside of the Athens, Georgia campus. Here, Home Movie Day functions as a form of archival outreach and a way to source new material for donation. Similarly, the Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archives, the Texas Archive of the Moving Image, and the Tennessee Archive of Moving Image and Sound have also participated throughout the 15 years of Home Movie Day’s exist-

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ence. Since the University of Mississippi’s screenings of Lytle’s films and a small selection of other home movies in the mid-1990s, there have not been live screenings of any material from the Home Movie Collection.10

One option would be for me to trace the conditions of the archive’s screening of the Lytle Collection in the 1990s. Inspired by Janna Jones’s work with archival screenings of an amateur film from the Northeast Historic Film’s collection, I had hoped there were diaries kept by either Glynn or Rankin (or possibly even Lytle herself) that detailed the public’s reactions to the films.11 After contacting both Glynn and Rankin, it seemed there were no such diaries, and the twenty-year gap in time proved to be an obstacle for collecting any detailed information about these screenings. Similarly, Lytle’s own archive of personal papers at Delta State University Archives only contained a collection of ephemera such as newspaper clippings and one cue sheet related to a screening in Gunnison, Mississippi hosted by E. P. Leftwich. Through conversations with Glynn and Rankin, combined with Lytle’s own records, I was able to put together a limited list of the cities and towns where the films were shown, but I found little else related to the screenings and nothing directly addressing spectator engagement.

In this case, I chose an alternative way to elicit the kind of spectator engagement that I was interested in. I set out to create the opportunities for screening that did not yet exist with the material in the Home Movie Collection. I chose the format of Home Movie Day as a way to both present archival home movie material (from the Lytle Collection) and bring in home movie material that still remained in private collections with families. This would afford a chance to study the dynamics between films that had various levels of familiarity for those watching.

My role in this part of the study was split. On one level, I initiated the events and acted as an organizer on site. I collected and inspected the films brought in, and I also chose the order of films to be presented. At Delta State University and in St. Francisville, Louisiana I ran the screenings along the lines of traditional Home Movie Day events where participants were encouraged to discuss their own films or the films brought in by others in a spontaneous manner during projection. On another level, I was also a researcher who studied the events through participant observation. I noted what people commented on and how they responded, and I tried to plot out the various vectors of these responses. At the Oxford, Mississippi Home Movie Day special event, my identity as researcher played a more pronounced role than

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10 One exception is that portions from the Thomas Collection were shown in the Double Take Documentary Film Festival (now the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival) at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina in 2001.
my identity as event organizer. Here, I was given one hour during a weekly lecture series at the University of Mississippi’s Center for the Study of Southern Culture. I presented my research on Lytle’s films, interspersed with some clips from her home movies, before showing a longer portion from *Raisin’ Cotton*. While I encouraged the audience to comment on the films, there was less spectator involvement here than when I showed *Raisin’ Cotton* at Delta State University. This was perhaps due to the social codes of lectures versus the more interactive spirit of Home Movie Day.

*When Not What:* The Temporality of Archival Home Movie Engagement

Home-movie images are filled with meaning depending on who is doing the looking—it is not only a matter of who is doing the filming. As discussed in previous chapters, “historical value” and “cultural value” are not fixed concepts. They shift when, for example, home-movie material is viewed through local, regional, or even national lenses. Asking *for whom, when, or in what instances* a home movie has cultural or historical significance also transforms such questions of value from overly simplistic ones to something that interacts with situated nuance. Of course, the archive in question also operates as a framework that defines what kind of material they consider to be significant. Donald Preziosi suggests a semantic shift of *what to when* as a means to take the pressure off the *thing* in question and focus instead on the situation that locates our encounter with it in historical time. Like asking for whom a home movie has cultural relevance, Preziosi’s inquiry pushes aside *what* and instead asks, “When is heritage? Or culture?” Beyond historicizing the encounter, this also emphasizes how home movies are never only one thing or another. Depending on who encounters them and where or how determines the *when* of Preziosi’s question.

From the perspective of museology, Didier Maleuvre discusses how a cultural object placed in a museum becomes “a spectacle objectively removed.” Much of his argument revolves around a piece of artwork per se, but the key idea translates to any object that is taken “from history” and placed in an institution such as a museum or an archive. Just as the historian’s moment of questioning is a “historical gesture,” so is the very process of choosing the artifact: “it takes place in history; it passes judgment on history; it grants artworks [or cultural objects] a historical character.”

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14 Maleuvre, 12.
example, when a home movie becomes an object in an archive, because it is encountered in historical time, it is the shifting frames of relations that spectators experience while watching that would, therefore, determine when the film is culturally significant, as opposed to which films are—as if the criteria were based solely on the content.

These shifting frames can be conceptualized through Sobchack’s interpretation of Meunier’s categories of spectator engagement. These categories—with particular reference to the home movie/film-souvenir category—require some modification, though. Sobchack describes how the spectator’s level of focus on the on-screen images is greatest in fiction films, less so in documentaries, and the least in home movies. With home movies, this assumption is based on the fact that the spectator has a familiar relationship with the people, places, or things onscreen. In that case, they are less dependent on the screen images to convey specific information, as in a documentary-viewing mode. Sobchack goes on to point out that Meunier himself saw these categories as something “fluid” that spectators might shift between at various moments within a single film. In this way, the less familiar a spectator is with the person, place or thing shown onscreen, the more they will depend on the images for information, perhaps moving from the home movie mode of viewing to the documentary mode. Problematic here is the inherent assumption that spectators are unlikely to be able to watch a stranger’s home movies in the home movie mode. While this is not explicitly stated, it is implied within the bare-bones sketch of Meunier’s work that Sobchack presents. As discussed later in this chapter, there are various points of entry through which spectators are able to watch the home movies of “others” from an intimate, home movie mode. This can include, for example, recognizing a place that is familiar to them, seeing an event that they remember, or even identifying broader cultural narratives through one family’s story.

From a semio-pragmatic perspective, Odin has specifically addressed what happens when home movies move from the home to the specialty archive. In these non-familial modes of spectatorship, the home movies’ meanings are asked to be something other than domestic scripts. Odin claims that home movies are valuable to archives when they are read in the “documentary mode,” stating, “effectively they import valuable topics of information on whole vistas of societies that have never been documented by official information sources or through professional reporting.” However, Odin claims that screening home movies for local visitors of, for example, a regional archive does not operate in the documentary mode but back to the “private mode”: “During screenings that are more or less ritualized, we get

15 Sobchack, “Nonfictional Film Experience,” 244.
16 Sobchack, “Nonfictional Film Experience,” 247-248.
17 Sobchack, “Nonfictional Film Experience,” 252.
together to share a common history and to show our sense of belonging to a particular community; the production of meanings and effects, therefore, creates a relationship with group memory…The relational aspect of communication becomes more important than the production of meaning.”¹⁹ Unlike Sobchack’s reading of Meunier, Odin allows strangers the ability to watch archival home movies in the “private mode” (Meunier’s “home movie mode”). Conversely, Odin does not allow spectators the sliding scales of identification as in Meunier’s model where one can shift from the private mode to the documentary mode, or vice versa. While Odin’s focus on meaning making may seem at odds with Sobchack and Meunier’s account of spectator experience, I position them together as ways of conceptualizing spectators’ meetings with historical moving images that are also private images.

Jones appropriates the term “bifocality” to refer to the way present-day spectators watch and interpret images of the past as “a kind of temporal shifting between the past and the present.”²⁰ Jones’s study compares and contrasts the kind of spectator engagement at work in public screenings of the amateur archival film From Stump to Ship (Alfred Ames, 1930) and the contemporary compilation documentary Woodsmen and River Drifters (Karan Sheldon and David Weiss, 1989). Based on Northeast Historic Film archivist Karan Sheldon’s diaries written while showing From Stump to Ship to approximately 8000 people across the state of Maine, Jones reports that “the specifics of Ames’s film hardly seemed to matter to the retired [timber] workers. After the viewings, what they had explicitly seen on the screen was not discussed; instead, they saw through the images of From Stump to Ship and used them as a springboard for their own memories.”²¹ Here, Jones presents a fluidity of spectator engagement with archival images of the past that moves between connections to onscreen practices and places and intersects with individual memory.

It is difficult to know where or how to draw the lines that designate significant relationships to the home-movie images of a particular collection housed in an archive or screened publicly, for example at a Home Movie Day event. There is no mathematical formula that proves that familiarity with time period plus familiarity with the people onscreen equals a strong investment to the images, while familiarity the location or action portrayed equals a weak one. Categories like people portrayed onscreen (people), locations (places), actions portrayed (practices), and time period (periods) do prove to be significant factors that influence spectators’ engagement with

¹⁹ Odin says that it is researchers who actually view archival home movies in a documentary mode since, “the question of verisimilitude is essential for them.” Odin, “Space of Communication,” 23.
home-movie images, whether or not the spectators are related to the family who shot the films. By identifying the elements such as people, places, practices, and periods, for example, I do not want to suggest that these elements do not overlap. Any attempts to isolate them is only a rough exercise to aid in visualizing how spectator engagement with public home-movie images is a complicated shifting between modes without a stable identification pattern. Instead of a hierarchy of people, places, practices, and periods, I suggest that these be seen as stratified concepts that are linked through plotting, as if on a graph. Multiple axes of identification—people, places, practices, and periods—stretch in various directions while curving lines plot the spectator’s degree of relationship to the images. This image is closer to the kind of sliding scales of identification that spectators experience when viewing home movies that are not their own than a linear one that only allows for shifting between two opposing modes of viewing. Later in this chapter, I discuss how familiarity with practices and period triggered one spectator’s identification with the Lytle Collection during a live screening.

Home Movie Day: St. Francisville, Louisiana, October 24, 2015

I was at the West Feliciana Parish Library on the day before Home Movie Day to accept and inspect films. I had scheduled a block of six hours where I would have a table with posters and equipment set up in the entryway to the library so that everyone going in or out would pass by me. The library is a new 6-million-dollar facility that opened in October of 2014. There was high traffic throughout the afternoon by adults checking out or returning books, as well as children who use the library’s computer lab after school.

I brought a small viewer to inspect the films. This is the kind of amateur editing kit that was marketed towards home moviemakers so they could look at their films without projection. These viewers consist of two small hand cranks that slowly wind the film through a space that illuminates, reflects, and finally magnifies the image, which then shows up on a tiny screen. Some of the films’ original splices, done with cement or tape splices, lose their adhesion over time and break. This is much easier to locate and correct with a viewer than on a projector. At the end of each reel, I rewind the film from the pickup reel back onto its original reel. While doing this, I gently touch the sprocket edge of the film with my fingers, which are covered in soft cotton gloves, and feel for changes as the film passes by. Any alteration in the smooth strip of film usually indicates either some form of damage—like a broken sprocket or crimped film—or the insertion of a splice. In the case of cement splices, there is always a tactiley apparent gap, no matter how minute, where the two pieces of film meet. If tape splices were used, there is a
slight raised edge where the tape is applied over the top and bottom sides of the filmstrip.

As soon as I walked in and started setting up my winders and viewers Jacquie Alberstadt, who works at the library, came in with three reels of 8mm film that were shot in 1965 while she and her husband lived in Bermuda. She had not seen the films in 40 years, but she knew they featured her daughter as a one year old. She was not sure if the films had long spaces of darkness and was uncertain of the overall image quality. Also, since the films had moved with them to various new homes over the years, including humid Louisiana, I noticed that several of the reels had molded. I cleaned up the films and could see in the viewer that they had bright, clear images, mostly featuring their infant daughter in sunny beach settings.22

After that, a woman with three children came up to my workspace. The oldest, a teenager named Matthew Dreher, was carrying a box with a projector in it. He reached out his hand and introduced himself as the amateur vintage electronics repairman who had written to me earlier about volunteering for the event. He had found the Elmo Sound ST-600 M 2-track Super-8 projector for $10 at a Goodwill store in nearby Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He replaced the bulbs and motor belts, and restored it to working condition. He also found five reels of Super-8 sound film in the box with the projector that he brought in addition to his family’s Super-8 films from the late 1970s and early 1980s. He had come to learn how to inspect and prepare films for projection, and would also operate his Super-8 projector for the event the next day.

Soon, another bag of Super-8 films came in from a local couple, Marsha and Eddie Daniel. These were shot in the late 1970s and early 1980s, chronicling their wedding day and several “firsts” (first birthday, first Easter, first Christmas) for their first-born son. These films were in good shape, but only a few had any labeling on them. The Daniels had not seen the films in many years and only had a hazy idea of what was on them. They had never had the films transferred to DVD, and if they did have them transferred to VHS, even that technology had become unplayable for them in recent years. The films actually had a sound strip, which even the Daniels were surprised by when we turned on the sound during projection on the day of the event and they heard their voices coming out from the speaker.

The last person to come in was 90-year-old home moviemaker Claiborne Traweek from Quitman, Mississippi. I had met him several years before when he showed me a selection of his films from the 1960s-1980s on 8mm and Super-8.23 I was impressed by the scope of his collection, which featured family gatherings as well as travels with his wife. Both his wife and son had died untimely deaths, and as a result his films were now heavy with joy and

22 Alberstadt Home Movies (Private Collection).
23 Traweek Home Movies (Private Collection).
sorrow, with abundance and loss. He had pulled out two 200’ reels from his collection to show at Home Movie Day, and I took them without prescreening the content, knowing that his films possessed a technical and thematic quality that was sure to be exciting for the audience to watch.

For projection, I favored the films with some form of title, however vague. I chose Marsha and Eddie Daniel’s 50’ color reel from 1979 called “Wedding part 1.” This film was shot by the groom’s brother who was sitting in the front row of the church. We see the couple as they say their vows and exchange rings. The Daniels explained to everyone watching that the person who was hired to take still photographs had no film in his camera, so the Super-8 films are the only images they have of their wedding.

After this, I picked another 50’ reel from their group of films titled “Neighborhood Wood Split” (figure 16). This one featured a parade of performances of masculinity as one male neighbor after another strode up to the wooden stump, ax in hand, and tried to chop it one smooth stroke. More often than not, the ax only made a slight dent in the thick wood. A gaggle of onlookers clutching beer cans try to psych out the prospective chopper, a scene reminiscent of youth baseball players chanting insults from the dugout

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24 Daniel Home Movies (Private Collection).
to force the player from the opposing team into a poorly timed strikeout. This reel made most of the crowd laugh as they tried to identify each virile male who tried his hand at the chopping.

Figure 16: "Neighborhood Wood Split" from the Daniel Home Movies.

I also showed the first 200’ reel of my grandparents’ 8mm films. These were shot in Eight Mile, Alabama in the mid-1950s to early-1960s. They were significant in this context since my mother and uncle, both featured in the films as children, had been a part of the St. Francisville community for nearly 40 years.

The films that Matthew Dreher brought from his family’s collection had a special relevance to the town. The color Super-8 films were shot in the late 1970s featuring Matthew’s father (Rod Dreher) and aunt (Ruthie Dreher Leming) as children. It was very touching for the crowd to see since Ruthie Leming was a beloved schoolteacher who, at the age of 41, had died from an aggressive form of cancer just a few years before. On one 200’ reel, we see a local baseball game and swimming at the town pool. Then, a young girl is playing with a puppy on a grassy backyard on a summer day. The little girl is Leming, and she starts off by putting the puppy in a cardboard box. The

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25 Savel Home Movies (Private Collection).
26 Dreher Home Movies (Private Collection).
puppy jumps out of the box in an attempt to run away, and this time the girl covers the puppy with the box. At first the box does not move, but then the puppy begins to walk while the box is still on top of it. The phantom moving box shocks the girl, and she jumps backwards. The animated box keeps moving towards her as she tries to run away. In this case, Odin’s description of the public viewing experience does shift to the private mode. The group of spectators was moved to laughter by the antics of the girl on the screen and the dog under the box, but they also made comments that referred to Leming in other stages of her life. Thus, the moment was defined by a communal act of remembrance. Even though this particular home movie came from a private collection, I discuss it here as an “archival home movie” because of its context in a public Home Movie Day screening. In this case, it function more as a community film than as strictly family film.

Home Movie Day: Delta State University, October 17, 2015

On Saturday morning, the day of the screenings, archivist Emily Jones and I set up the projectors in an event room on the lower level of the Charles W. Capps, Jr. Archives building.27 Two Delta State University students with backgrounds in theatre and documentary filmmaking arrived to help out with the day and to learn about handling small-gauge film (figure 17). I taught them how to inspect the various formats of film for projection and what steps needed to be taken with any films we would show. This included, among other things, making sure there was adequate leader on the reels and adding some if necessary, testing the sturdiness of splices and repairing those that no longer held fast, repairing broken sprockets with splice tape, and cleaning films that were dusty or moldy.

The following are two examples from the screenings at the Delta State University Home Movie Day. As outlined below, each of these examples operated in a different way in terms of spectator engagement. The first is a 50’ color Super-8 film brought in by George Frisbee. He shot this while stationed in Vietnam in the 1970s. The other example is an orphaned film that is now part of the permanent collection at the Delta State University Archives. It is a 400’ color 8mm film that was shot by a local man named Joe Wilson.

In the film by Frisbee, we first see thick green trees shot from above. Frisbee grounds the scene for the audience.28 He tells us that in the film he was riding in a Huey helicopter while stationed at the Bear Cat Base Station

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27 October 17 was the official day for Home Movie Day 2015’s worldwide events, but some locales choose to participate on days before or after this date.

28 Frisbee Home Movies (Private Collection).
in Vietnam in 1971. He describes the structures we see in the aerial shots of the artillery base. He explains what is happening onscreen when the helicopter is resupplying Thai troops in the jungle. From this vantage point, we see Thai soldiers unloading supplies that were lowered from the hovering aircraft. Next, the film jumps to a sequence where the soldiers are shooting machine guns in the free fly zone. As the screening continues, Frisbee tells stories from around this time period that begin to diverge from the images onscreen. The helicopter soars over the thick, green canopy below, and his narration wanders off into accounts of missile attacks. Soon the images show more specific structures. He breaks off from his reverie and says, “That’s the Michelin Rubber Plantation up there in the upper right.” After this, we see shots of a sergeant with a bath towel wrapped around his waist. He shakes his naked leg in front of the base camp’s shower area. Frisbee’s narration begins to turn to stories about the people who lived on the United States base, starting with those we see onscreen and then spiraling off into other associations.

The collection from the Delta State University Archives was donated in three metal cases (figure 18). On the back of one case, the history of this film collection, erroneously referred to as “tape” was written in black mark-

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29 *Fisher Collection* (Delta State University Archives).
These tapes were made by Joe Wilson 2nd Ave. Cleveland, MS. He worked for Delta State. His grandson (my stepson) gave them to me Douglas Fisher. Most of them are family events but there are lots of Cleveland and Delta State.” Even though this collection of films was donated to the archive in 2013, the deed of gift was only finally signed in 2015, limiting what the archive could do with the films in the interim. Additionally, since the archive does not have an 8mm projector, Jones had never previously seen any of the films in the collection.

Figure 18: A collection of films with unknown contents that were donated to the Delta State University Archives and screened at Home Movie Day.

Before the projection of a film from this collection, I start the screening by reading out loud the handwritten notes that were included in the can for this 400’ reel: “St. Regis opening 11/14/68, wedding 12/22/68, Christmas and New Year of 1969, Valenties, birthday, Bermuda, Ricky and Todd, 3 small places, rest is vacation spots, etc.” Jones, the archivist, has deep roots in the Delta and does not recognize the name St. Regis. She asks the group to see if anyone knows what it might refer to. No one is able to identify it, nor do they recognize the buildings onscreen, including grain bins. Soon we see a sign that identifies the area as Monticello, Arkansas, a town roughly 100 miles (160 kilometers) to the west of Cleveland, Mississippi. The scene quickly shifts to a Christmas parade at sunset. Despite the low lighting, some people in the room were able to identify it as taking place in Cleveland and...
could see the Delta Belles, the university’s dancing majorettes, marching alongside the Pride of the Delta Marching Band (figure 19). The scene changes to Christmas dinner, and a lady in a red dress and cateye glasses is goofing around at the table. She pretends to stab the person sitting next to her in order to steal their food. The family then begins to open their Christmas presents. A man in his 50s stands in front of the tree and pulls the wrapping paper off his gift to reveal that it is four cartons of cigarettes. He holds them up proudly to the camera, and people in the room watching the film begin to laugh. Then the man, smiling broadly at the camera, takes the red bow from the wrapping paper and attaches it to the front of his pants over his crotch.

As a group, we start to speculate that, while the camera belongs to this man, it was his wife who was filming while he unwrapped his presents. More family members stand in the same spot in front of the tree to open their gifts. In the segments featuring Valentine’s Day, the man and the woman both appear on screen at the same time. They are sitting beside each other in chairs and are filmed from several meters away. The scene is steady and composed. The man gives the woman a heart-shaped box of chocolates. The woman gives the man a Valentine card. They show these to the camera and then lean in to give each other a gentle peck on the lips. We start to determine that this is most probably filmed from a tripod based on the physical stability of the shots and the candid, yet incredibly formal, nature of the couple’s Valentine’s exchange.

Figure 19: The Pride of the Delta Marching Band in 1968, instantly recognizable for Cleveland, Mississippi residents of various ages (Fisher Collection, Delta State University Archives).
What these two different kinds of films exemplify are points on the spectrum of spectator engagement. They are not totally opposing points since in both scenarios, there was either someone in the room who knew specific information about the images (Frisbee’s film), or the spectators were able to identify specific things about the film just through the act of watching (the orphaned film shot by Joe Wilson). The full spectrum would stretch from knowing everything to knowing nothing, or total familiarity to total unfamiliarity. In this case, Frisbee’s films were shot in a country where he was stationed in the military. He certainly had knowledge of his surroundings, but this knowledge is of a different order than the kind of knowledge one has of the place where one is from—due to the amount of time he was stationed there and due to the nature of military involvement. The opposite end of the spectrum would include the kind of film where, for example, it is impossible to determine the location or how the people in it are related to one another—if not by family ties then by their relationship to one another in terms of what is happening on the screen. Ideally, the spectrum would not only stretch horizontally. Instead, it would feature a spiral that plots points on multiple lines of knowingness—people, places, practices, and periods. Even so, there are contrasting modes of engagement that begin to emerge through these two films. During the screening of Frisbee’s film, his recollections shaped the flow of the group conversation and audience engagement with the images. We were able to enter into his oral narrative and relate back to the images based on when he turned back to them through his narration. When the orphan film was screened, the group worked together to understand what its sequences were about. The collective narrative was built on contributions from each person based on what pieces of information or insight they could provide. Unlike in Odin’s account of the private mode, this was not only a situation of recollection. Instead, the spectators worked collectively toward the creation of knowledge.

The final portion of the Home Movie Day event at Delta State University consisted of a screening of Lytle’s *Raisin’ Cotton*. This was a digital copy of her 8mm film that is held by the University of Mississippi. The film was shot on Perthshire Plantation near Gunnison, Mississippi, only 26 miles (42 kilometers) from where we were sitting. People were watching and talking to each other as the film began, but as soon as the first mule-drawn plow appeared onscreen, the room immediately grew silent. Gradually, people in the room began to talk again but not to each other. They were talking about the film—it was almost as if they were talking to the film. “What is that?” one student asked about some antiquated farming equipment. A man in his 60s explained the purpose of the machine in question. Despite the geographical proximity, what we were watching did spark some familiarity in the audience. What I had expected to ignite moments of recognition based on the visual similarity of the farmland from then to now, instead provoked an extreme disassociation in the viewers, who ranged in age from their 20’s to
their 60s. The nearness of the land, with rich red dirt that does, in fact, look the same now as it did then, actually made the filmed images look more alien, more unknown and unexpected because of their physical proximity. When a film like this is screened in a place even farther away, in a context even more contrasting to its rural images, all difference is packed into the same category of not like here and not like now. But when the images of a very different looking past are layered onto a very similar looking place, the result is jarring and forces spectators to try to establish lines of connection between what they see onscreen and what they see in their surroundings.

Home Movie Day Special Event: University of Mississippi, October 21, 2015

On October 21, 2015 I arrived at the University of Mississippi’s Center for the Study of Southern Culture to deliver a guest lecture and screen a selection of films from the Lytle Collection. The screening was a Home Movie Day special event arranged by the center in conjunction with the Department of Archives and Special Collections where Lytle’s films are now held. A small crowd of approximately fifteen staff, researchers, students, and locals assembled in the lecture hall of the Barnard Observatory just before I began my presentation. The Barnard Observatory has been the home to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture since 1979; however, the significance of the location goes even further. In 1994, Lytle herself screened and discussed Raisin’ Cotton in the very same lecture hall. This was part of the newly formed Southern Media Archive’s attempts to drum up interest in and support for what would go on to become the Home Movie Collection. So, 21 years later, I stood in the same room as Lytle did and showed her films. Just as the conditions and context of her public 1994 screening differed significantly from the way she screened her films privately, my own screening took on a different form. It functions as yet another intervention into the collection’s meaning, and it plots out another point on the continuum of its formation. In the Introduction, I presented a rudimentary division of then and now as separating the original (family) context of shooting and screening home movies from the now of their archival lives. As the Lytle Collection attests, a singular now is not sufficient. Instead, the post-donation life of Lytle’s films have seen multiple interventions that have augmented their meaning, enhanced their accessibility, and drawn them past their particular significance.

As the audience took their seats, I noticed a couple in their 80s sitting on the right hand side of the room in the front row. I started the event by talking for about 10 minutes before pausing to show my first clip. The clip was a short segment of about a minute and a half—a black and white excerpt from
the Lytle Collection (described in the beginning of Chapter 2). It was a segment that had been collected in the original round of donations to the University of Mississippi’s archive. There are shots of cotton picking and weighing the product. These agricultural images bookend shots of Emma’s daughter, Eleanor, who, in the late 1930s was around two years old.

I turned down the lights and pressed play. I stepped to the side to watch the images projected on the large, overhead screen. When the sequence with Eleanor and the Jack Russell Terrier appeared (figure 20), I heard a sound from the other side of the room. There was a gasp, and then, “That’s me!” It was the elderly woman. She was watching someone else’s home movies, and, at the same time she was watching her own. After the screening, this woman told me that she was four years old in 1937, so we determined that the Lytle films were roughly contemporaneous with her own early childhood. She grew up on a cotton and rice farm in East Texas in the 1930s and 1940s. Her family also shot films, but that did not happen until later when her brother took over the farm as an adult. In this case, Lytle’s films were transformed into this woman’s own home movies as proxies for missing images from her childhood. The practices and time period onscreen matched this woman’s own experiences to an extent that she could view the films in a “private” or “home movie mode,” as Odin and Meunier/Sobchack refer to them respectively.

Figure 20: Lytle’s daughter petting a dog on Perthshire Plantation (Lytle Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi).
I asked the woman how she found out about the event and why she decided to come. She told me she read about it in the center’s newsletter and the description of the films caught her attention. It sounded so close to her own experience that she wanted to see if it looked the same. She wanted to find herself in these home movies and, despite the geographical distance between her and Lytle’s origins, she did.

This chapter has positioned the live screening of private films at Home Movie Day events as a “collaborative, dynamic space.” Through the analysis of three stagings of home movie screenings, I plotted out the modes of spectator engagement that took place. This engagement was related to onscreen content, but not strictly bound to it. Instead, an engagement with partial onscreen elements—based on people, places, practices, or periods—defined the nature of the encounters. Further, audience member’s oral commentary and interpersonal discussions during the live screenings drove the focus of the encounter. On this level, the community—curated live screenings functioned as publicly constructed regional reflections.

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Final Discussion

Archival home movies as constructed regional reflections are not mere glimpses into the past. Instead, they act cumulatively to process visions of the region, both in the past and what it means to us in the present. No matter how much one strives to look through the images or to read them against the grain, however, there remains an unwavering tie to the specificity of the images’ origins, the people they portray, and the places and situations they show. The image is inescapable, yet it is not all encompassing. What we are presented with on the screen defines the scope of the kind of work we can do with the films and the kinds of readings we can make from them. The particularities of actions, of people and places, of tropes typical to a home movie film, and of topics deemed relevant for acquisition by an archive all function to shape the cachet of cultural images we have to work with. Inherently, these factors determine the basic parameters of research.

In the Home Movie Collection, images shot within the state of Mississippi and across the South, shots of cotton farming and birthday parties, parades and horse races, beach vacations and bridge building all function as regional gestalts, however limited or biased they may be. To borrow a metaphor from photography, the on-screen imagery might set the aperture for contemporary projects of regional reflection, but it does not necessarily determine the focus. Between these representations, we can map the places where these images are incomplete or lacking. We can use framed readings to understand how the family film camera shapes the events it is said to capture. We can pull the focus back so that a vision of the region emerges out of a nexus of incomplete family histories.

This dissertation contributes to work in the field of amateur film studies by taking a self-reflexive look at home movies not only as a form of familial representation, but also as distinct archival objects. I have combined a hands-on study of archival practices with more traditional textual readings of film material in order to demonstrate the ways home movies’ meanings are negotiated as they migrate out from private spaces. I have sketched out methods for researching archival home movies, drawing from various sources, including work on both personal and family photographs, as well as written diaries. These methods can also be used by scholars in disciplines other than media studies who might not have a proficiency in working with moving images but could explore archival home movies as rich research material. This dis-
The dissertation specifically intersects with southern studies and hopefully opens up for further investigations into other archives of southern home movies.

Strategies from the study of diary and family photographs, especially photo albums, specifically help to develop a chronology of a home movie collection, which is sometimes necessary when the material has been edited into non-chronological compilations by family members before donation to the archive. But perhaps even more significantly, these methods illuminate the rhythms of home movie material and the way both generic and unexpected topics appear and reappear repeatedly within a single collection.

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated how an expanded notion of “home” facilitates strategic re-readings of archival home movies, specifically selections from the Lytle Collection shot on Perthshire Plantation and discussed in Chapter 2. Highmore’s concept of “ordinary” has travelled through all the chapters of this dissertation as a conceptual touchstone, linking the content of the films to their historical contexts. In Chapter 3, I have posited southern home movies as mediated witness to the social workings of Jim Crow in a small Mississippi town through the Thomas Collection. I contrasted this with the archival news footage presented in the now-classic documentary Eyes on the Prize as a means of highlighting the political overtones in seemingly innocuous home movie footage.

Previous studies of family photographs and family film have pointed to the ways these media function to obscure discord and present a harmonious picture. As such, this study of southern home movies has demonstrated how a double logic of obfuscation is at work in these films. In addition to a vision of familial harmony, the southern home movie also puts forth a vision of racial harmony. And this onscreen racial harmony, when presented during the Jim Crow years, should be understood as the result of a specifically white fantasy of racial togetherness that, at the same time, upholds traditional hierarchies. Contrary to still photographs, home movies present us with a succession of images. Therefore, in the study of southern home movies, there is an opportunity for the seemingly harmonious racial frame to be ruptured. These moments of disruption happen in an instant, but their impact is substantial. Something as seemingly insignificant as turning away from the camera, refusing to smile, or a returned gaze signals the constructedness of both the family frame and the racial frame within these films.

The rather open narrative construction of many archival home movies, including Lytle’s (and even Raisin’ Cotton which I consider to be only semi structured), provide outside spectators with spaces for breaking and restructuring Hirsch’s “familial frame.” In this way, the films can be read for their regional meanings and across varying degrees of spectator engagement. Drawing on Didi-Huberman, I presented the constructed regional reflection as a concentrated effort to renegotiate seemingly benign images and actively relate them to narratives about the past. In reading archival home movies as “visual events,” I have pointed to the ways these films can act as mediated
witnesses. Specifically, I have read a selection of southern home movies as witness to the way structural racism under Jim Crow plays out in “ordinary” situations. In contrast to other visual imagery that portrays the overt brutality of the time, these scenes from so-called everyday life point to the invisibility and the pervasiveness of these structures and, potentially, can make us more aware of how this chapter in American history is not yet closed. While this dissertation looks to a specific southern example, the potential for studying the “ordinary” in archival home movies filmed during times of conflict or unrest is unlimited.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how instances of ephemeral black celebration, such as parades, function to break the lenticular logic of white home movies. This is not simply because there are African Americans onscreen in a white home movie. Instead, this is because the act of commemoration being filmed is done so through a white perspective. The parade, for example, is an intervention into the daily life of both black and white community members. Parades, a frequent trope in home movies, prove to be an area of study in need of further attention. Additionally, home movies from the Thomas Collection and the Lytle Collection feature what I refer to as a substitutional gaze, though at different points in time. Lytle’s own films were shown to former sharecroppers on Perthshire Plantation and functioned as home-movies-in-absentia during the Voices of Perthshire project in the 1990s. Similarly, Thomas’s films were borrowed by black community members around and shortly after the time of filming in the mid-1950s. Though these short portraits most likely did not function the same as home movies, they did provide the local African-American community of Walls, Mississippi with moving images of friends in the absence of images shot with their own cameras.

Watching archival home movies entails seeing them from a remove. This distance is most likely characterized by watching the people onscreen from the position of an outsider to the family and their circle of friends. However, this distance often also includes a temporal or generational distance, as well as sometimes even a locational distance. Finally, there can also be a distance from the situations presented onscreen—an overall unfamiliarity with a family’s idiosyncratic traditions or with regionally specific acts. Spectator relationship to these various axes—people, places, practices, and time periods—shapes the nature of their encounter with archival home movies. In Chapter 2, I discussed how Tom Gary’s voice-over narration to his mother’s and aunt’s home movies shot on Wildwood Plantation put him at a generational distance from the time of filming. As a result, his description of the onscreen imagery focused on his knowledge of places and practices that he was familiar with. In this way, he was not able to comment on the names of the sharecroppers who appeared in the film as Lytle had done when reviewing her own home movies for Voices of Perthshire. He was only able to refer to non-family members who worked on the plantation in relation to the jobs
they performed and not as individuals. On the other hand, non-family modes of engagement can also approximate a level of familiarity with the people onscreen when other factors are present. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, a spectator at a screening of the *Lytle Collection* was able to see her own childhood in Lytle’s home movies based on the time period and the farming practices portrayed.

The constructed regional reflection has been presented as a way we engage with moving-image versions of the past. In this way, home movies are deployed in new contexts—in archives, within other films, or in live screenings. Different than history proper, the constructed regional reflection is neither “History with a capital H” nor history with a small one. Neither is it a postmodern free-for-all possible of meaning anything to anyone. Instead, the constructed regional reflection is a plastic, place-based and time-based phenomenon that is re-worked with each new intervention.

Throughout each of the chapters of this dissertation I have accounted for ways family film is transformed into curated archival collections. This transformation is achieved through practices of cataloguing, indexing, and description, but it is also achieved through ideological positions. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, the University of Mississippi’s archive both singled out collections that featured African Americans and aligned them as culturally significant representations. While I contend that these representations are something that can become culturally significant through constructed reuse, the archive equates any and all representation as a vision of regional black life.

This transformation of the family film to the curated archival collection also impacts if and how the material does circulate back into our contemporary visual culture at large. In Chapter 4, I mapped the ways content description linked to digitization, and how digitization then impacted documentary reuse. But archives themselves also function to filter the material they take in, as this dissertation has demonstrated. Newspaper ads with calls for submissions and even Home Movie Day events structure the archive’s contact with the public and shape the material that is donated before it even enters the walls of the archive.

Strategic re-readings of collections of archival home movies can function to recuperate images of people of color shown onscreen or to find alternative narratives of the past. But these, too, structure the kinds of regional reflections that are possible to be constructed. Barthes’ description of the still photograph as something that “fills the sight by force” can be conceptualized in more than one way in relation to archival home movies.1 In Chapter 1, I described the way home movies can create a singular mythos within the family that obscures non-documentary—and perhaps even contradictory—family

stories. As archival home movies are deployed to create constructed regional reflections, they too “fill the sight by force” to the exclusion of other images—whether these images actually exist or are only possible images. In this way, the archival home movie as source of memory is also a source of forgetting.

The Home Movie Collection’s exclusive focus on the private films of white families is an endemic orientation and not a prescriptive one. The absolute lack of any home movies made by African American families is endemic of the social and economic barriers of amateur film as a middle-class hobby, as well as the social filter of the university archive. It is telling that Northeast Historic Film found Anna Harris’s home movies on eBay instead of receiving them as a donation. The South Side Home Movie Project at the University of Chicago has successfully overcome this problem. Similarly, The African-American Home Movie Archive, an online portal that connects users to institutions with African-American-made collections in their holdings, was launched in 2016. To date, they map a network of 18 archives and museums, though not all of the participating institutions have “processed” home-movie material linked to the site and others hold only singular collections. This scarcity points to the limitations of the archive and not necessarily to an absence of material.

In the Introduction, I discussed the “5 A’s of Amateur Film Preservation” that characterize the professional border crossings common in work with amateur film. This list could also be amended. In addition to the amateur, the archivist, the academic, the artist, and the artisan, I propose the addition one final “A”: the activist. The “activist,” as I formulate it here, is not a defined, professional role. Instead it is an orientation that overlaps in a way similar to the other overlapping strands of the “5 A’s.” Formally trained archivists can also be tinkering artisans who rebuild archaic amateur projectors. Artists can theorize the home movie through experimental films. Or, as I have done in this project, an academic can act as a hobby archivist at Home Movie Day events.

The activist orientation is one that can connect communities that have traditionally been underrepresented in collections of archival home movies to

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4 “From A to A: The Five A’s of Amateur Film Preservation,” conference panel with Simona Monizza et al at the Saving Private Reels Symposium, University of Cork, September, 18 2010.
institutions that are actively searching for this type of material. The activist orientation looks to networks of unofficial repositories, such as churches, community centers, and even local elders. As such, the activist orientation is another hat to wear when we work with archival home movies. This orientation is pertinent now more than ever as archives grapple with how to collect and keep home movies on other formats like analog videotapes and digital media. By focusing on the University of Mississippi’s collection of small-gauge films, I do not address home movies on other formats in this dissertation. The questions of how to collect and preserve the next generations of home movies on various formats of videotape, as well as digital files, of what to keep and how to make it accessible are necessary next steps. These questions are currently being debated by archivists and academics working with all kinds of moving images.

Perhaps ironically, what comes at the end of this dissertation is actually a beginning. The activation of archival home movies through live screenings is an area in need of much more exploration. Home Movie day events and Zimmermann’s concept of the “home movie archive live” are only starting points. Emerging practices like interactive documentary (iDocs) have opened this territory and present exciting models for shaping projects. The potential for online interaction with and crowdsourcing information about archival home movies is one way for engaging publics with this material. But place-based “live” screenings also open up for significant embodied encounters that connect people on a face-to-face level. Live screenings, both in archives and outside of them, represent another area where the intersection of the roles the “5 A’s” with an activist orientation can open up for creative engagement with archival home movies—those that have already been collected, as well as those that have been forgotten and have yet to be found.

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Schneider, Alexandra. “The Tripod or ‘When Professionals Turn Amateur’: A Plea for an Amateur Film Archaeology.” In Exposing the Film Apparatus: The Film Archive as a Research Laboratory, edited by Giovanna Fossati and Annie van den Oever, 165-174. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016.


Websites


Films

American Denial (Llewellyn M. Smith, 2015)
Another Word for Family (April Grayson, 2007)
B. B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center videos (Jim Dollarhide, 2008)
Daughter Rite (Michelle Citron, 1980)
Eyes on the Prize (PBS, 1987)
Legacy: Cotton (April Grayson, 2008)
Let Freedom Sing: How Music Inspired the Civil Rights Movement (Jon Goodman, 2009)
Mississippi Blues Trail web videos (Robert Gordon and David Leonard, 2010)
No Longer Silent (University of Mississippi, 2013)
Raisin’ Cotton (Emma Knowlton Lytle, 1941)
Sea in the Blood (Richard Fung, 2000)
Something Strong Within (Robert A. Nakamura, 1994)
Voices of Perthshire (Center for the Study of Southern Culture, 1999)
Wildwood Plantation: The Way it Was (Tom Gary, 1983)

Home Movie Collections

Alberstadt Home Movies (Private Collection)
Alvis Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Buckley Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Cohen Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Daniel Home Movies (Private Collection)
Dreher Home Movies (Private Collection)
Ethridge Home Movie Collection (Brown Media Archives, University of Georgia Libraries)
Fancher Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Fisher Collection (Delta State University Archives)
Frisbee Home Movies (Private Collection)
Gary Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Grantham Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Grubbs Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Hammond Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Jones Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Lamb Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Lott Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Lotterhos Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Lytle Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Savell Home Movies (Private Collection)
Therrell Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Thomas Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Traweek Home Movies (Private Collection)
Treas Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Walker Collection (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries)
Archival Documentation

Anon. Exhibition Catalogue, 1986 (Series 8, box 2, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
Anon. Home Movie Collection Shot List, n.d. (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).
Anon. Video Interview with Emma Knowlton Lytle, n.d. (Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).
Glynn, Karen. “Articles” (Internal, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).
Goodman, Jon. Email Message to Pamela Williamson, August 18, 2008 (Internal, Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries).
Leftwich, E. P. Cue Sheet (Series 10, box 31, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).
Lytle, Emma Knowlton. Research and Writing on Segregation. (Series 9, box 34, Gibert-Knowlton-Lytle Family Papers, Delta State University Archives).

Participant Observation

Home Movie Day: Delta State University, Cleveland, Mississippi, October 17, 2015.
Home Movie Day Special Event: University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi, October 21, 2015.
Home Movie Day: St. Francisville, Louisiana, October 24, 2015.

Interviews

June 20, 2012, Charles Therrell, Sugar Tree, Tennessee.
July 26, 2012, Susan Chaisson, Jefferson, Georgia.

Songs

“Here’s to the State of Mississippi.” Phil Ochs, 1965.