

Unearthing African American History & Culture Through Home Movies

by

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Introduction

African American home movie collections across the United States can, and should, play a larger role in the depiction of African American history and culture. As a historical resource, home movies provide a direct and personal look into the lives of African Americans. Culturally, these home movies document their way of life through everyday personal experiences and social interactions. Since the introduction of film in the United States, home movie recording was one of the first opportunities for self-documentation. Before the invention of the 8mm film gauge, only an elite few were fortunate enough to find themselves in a position to record their experiences through photography, and an even smaller group (practically non-existent) were able to record on 16mm; the first amateur motion picture film format. A small percentage of African Americans took part in such leisure activities, however, economic and social conditions in the United States played an important role in *who* and *what* was documented.

During the early 1900s, African Americans found themselves in the midst of a new chapter in their history as a newly formed ethnic group in the United States. Early attempts at capturing the African American experience were, for the majority, conducted as part of government projects such as “Voices from the Days of Slavery”, a collection of audio interviews between former slaves and employees of the Work Progress Administration’s (WPA) Federal Writers’ Project.¹ The WPA was an American New Deal agency that employed millions of unemployed Americans to conduct public works assignments like the Federal Writers’ Project “Slave Narratives”, in which twenty-three interviewees, born during the time of slavery in the

¹ Kniffel, Leonard. "Editorial: The Haunting Sound of a Voice." *American Libraries*, December 1, 2005, 39.

United States, discussed how they felt about the institution of slavery, slaveholders, freedom, and the forced enslavement of their families. While early documentary projects like the slave narratives were an extremely important undertaking for the time, and remain to be an invaluable resource today, they were not self-directed experiences for the black community. Decisions about what experiences to preserve were determined by the administration and recorded by the interviewer, not the interviewee.

When home movie cameras reached American homes, the 8mm and Super 8mm film gauges redefined what it meant to create a lasting legacy for individuals with dreams of creating a multigenerational future. For the majority of African Americans, economic and social equality was slowly improving with each generation. Although African Americans did not appear in any home movie advertisements up until the 1980s, they were a part of the same American public that wanted to capture their experiences on film and create a lasting image of themselves for future generations.

Today, African American home movies commonly reside in unprocessed collections that often times arrive at repositories via Ebay, estate sales or flea markets; and the majority of them have unidentified owners. Their scattered existence and lack of provenance is just one of the reasons many of these films are widely inaccessible. The purpose of this project and the mission of the African American home movie registry is to strengthen the understanding of African American home movies and advocate for the use of minority audiovisual material by fostering access to these materials. In an effort to streamline research, the registry includes repository details and content information for African American home movies found in archival institutions across the United States.

History of Amateur Filmmaking & Post-War Economics in the United States

Before we can understand how collections of African American home movies came to exist, we must explore the generational evolution of the African American people in tandem with the development of the film industry's amateur film market. It is important to review the economic obstacles of the American people alongside the development of the amateur filmmaking market in order to understand the availability of extracurricular opportunities for ethnic minorities and other social classes in the United States.

Since the widespread use of 35mm motion picture film, numerous companies, such as Bell & Howell and Eastman Kodak, sought to expand their business and relevance in the growing field of filmmaking by producing a smaller, low cost film stock and accessories. On January 28, 1923, Eastman Kodak launched the 16mm safety (inflammable) film gauge and the Cine-Kodak camera.² It was marketed as a safe, compact, less expensive production medium for amateur filmmakers. However, while the 16mm filmmaking process was certainly less expensive than that of 35mm, film equipment was still outside the range of what most average Americans could afford to spend on a leisure activity. It quickly found its place as a luxury consumer item, and was a hobby mainly practiced by the middle and upper class.

Even though the roaring twenties highlighted the portion of Americans who were fortunate enough to benefit from what was known as the "Age of Prosperity", this wealth and prosperity was not experienced by all social groups. Prosperity in the United States was experienced by those fortunate enough to find themselves in economic classes that were typically

² Kattelle, Alan. "The Evolution Of Amateur Motion Picture Equipment 1895-1965." *Journal of Film and Video* 38, no. 3/4 (1986): 47-57. Accessed April 18, 2015. www.jstor.org.

free from hardship. Those who were a part of the lower economic classes in the United States were victims of chronic poverty. In most cases, this poverty was repeated throughout each generation and typically included the elderly, disabled, single mother homes, and minorities. Since the abolition of slavery in 1865, former slaves struggled to find a place, both socially and economically, in the United States. After promises of land under Union general William Tecumseh Sherman's "Special Field Orders, No. 15", most African Americans formed their own farming communities in the south.³ However, this hope to become economically self-sufficient landowners after two hundred and forty-five years of slavery was thwarted after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Land that was initially confiscated by the Union and promised to freed slaves was returned to the former slaveowners, and African Americans had no other recourse than to become sharecroppers with little to no economic prospects. In the face of heightened political and economic oppression in the South, around one million African Americans traveled North in the early 1900s in search of better wages in what is known as the Great Migration. Still, the 1920 United States census estimated that 85% (roughly 8,893,661)⁴ of the overall African American population remained in the South; where three out of every four African Americans lived on farms. For those who migrated North in search of better paying jobs, the infamous stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, which immediately followed, brought this short lived success to a grinding halt. African Americans were the first to be fired and the last to be rehired. The Great Depression lasted from 1929 to 1939, with more than twenty

³ Inscoc, John. "Sherman's Field Order No. 15." In *The Civil War in Georgia, 177-178*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2011.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, "Color or Race, Nativity, and Parentage," Chapter 1, 13-100. General Report and Analytical Tables. <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41084484v2.zip> (accessed April 7, 2015).

percent of the United States population unemployed and much of the remaining population, while working, struggled to make ends meet.

During the Great Depression, Eastman Kodak introduced an even smaller, more affordable black and white 8mm film stock.⁵ 8mm was designed to shoot on both sides of a 16mm spool, significantly cutting production and processing costs. For those who could still afford to shoot home movies during the Great Depression, but were at the same time cost conscious, 8mm film was a success. The definition of amateur film began expanding to include family films, in addition to the traditional artistic or documentary style films that were shot on 16mm. In 1939, World War II erupted in Europe, and the United States quickly joined the allied forces after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. In order to contribute to the war effort, Eastman Kodak slowed the production of film stock and film accessories. When the war ended in 1945, 8mm film equipment was once again fully available to the leisure focused, post-war American consumer. Home movies quickly catapulted in popularity amongst the broader, more general population.

Despite the fact that Kodak did not produce any advertisements that featured African Americans until 1972, middle and upper-middle class African Americans were shooting home movies and enjoying the post-war economy just the same. In a 1950 issue of "Movie Makers" magazine, an 8mm camera and projector package was advertised for around \$165. In 1949, the mean annual earnings of wage and salary workers was \$1761.06 for black males; meaning it would only cost an African American male 10% of his annual salary to purchase an 8mm camera

⁵ Schneider, Alexandra. "Home Movie-Making and Swiss Expatriate Identities in the 1920's and 1930's." *Film History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 166-76. Accessed April 20, 2015. www.jstor.org.

and projector. Ten years earlier, before the United States entered the war, it would have cost the same African American male nearly a quarter of his annual salary of \$537.



This newfound affordability was mainly due to the industrial advances made in the United States during the war, and the extraordinary spike in the use and demand for formerly rationed resources after the war. Private companies like Kodak and Bell & Howell capitalized on this favorable economic and social climate, and the amateur film market boomed “against the backdrop of a society newly geared towards family and leisure” and “home moviemaking was transformed from a relatively niche-market hobby to a mass cultural phenomenon.”⁶ Amateur filmmaking was no longer just for hobbyists, and it quickly grew into a widely practiced social activity. Eastman Kodak catered to this market by introducing the Super 8mm gauge in June of

⁶ Rascaroli, Laura, Barry Monahan, and Gwenda Young, eds. *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, The Archive, The Web*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

1965.⁷ It was a brand new format with one main goal, to revolutionize the amateur filmmaking market. And that it did, as the heyday of home movie production was ushered into the United States.

The main areas of the amateur filmmaking market were education, commercial and industrial films, and home movies. For families and individuals, amateur home movie recording was a way to create a first-hand account of lifetime memories for the family archive. Kodak capitalized on this opportunity and launched a full-fledged marketing campaign consisting of family oriented commercials for television, and full page advertisements that were placed in popular periodicals like LIFE and LOOK magazines. From a manufacturing perspective, the entire user experience was analyzed. Cameras were designed to be as user friendly as possible, so practically anyone could operate one. Super 8mm film was housed in a cartridge, a change from the reel concept of 8mm, and the entire fifty foot reel could be shot without interruption. In 1973, Kodak added a magnetic sound strip to the Super 8mm format; only further solidifying its role as an easily transportable and complete tool for amateur filmmakers. The Super 8 filmmaker enjoyed “total control of subject matter and execution... having no need to appeal to a wide audience”.⁸ Quality and ease of use made Super 8 a hit with young amateur filmmakers and American families.

Kodak, as well as other camera and projector manufacturers like Bell & Howell, heavily promoted the idea of documentation and using “the camera almost exclusively as a means to

⁷ Zavada, Roland. "The Standardization of the Super 8." *Journal of the University Film Association* 22, no. 2 (1970): 39-42. Accessed April 9, 2015. www.jstor.org.

⁸ Kattelle, Alan. *Home Movies: A History of the American Industry*. Michigan: Transition Publishing, 2000. 297.

chronicle the family”.⁹ Whether it was documenting one’s family, everyday surroundings, or historical events; everyone was encouraged to get behind the camera. In a 1967 television commercial produced by Kodak for their Instamatic movie camera, men (specifically fathers) were encouraged to purchase the Instamatic movie camera for their wife; who would presumably be at home capturing all the childhood memories while the fathers were at work. “Despite Eastman Kodak’s best efforts and, to some extent, that of other manufacturers to encourage women to use the movie camera, most early amateur filmmakers were men”.¹⁰ Although not true in every case, fathers usually ended up taking on this role of documenting the family.

Black Representation & Authorship

Historically, people of color had little control over how they were represented in the media. The traditional narratives of slavery and segregation had come to define black history and culture. But, the idea of self-documentation and narrating one’s own history was ushered in with the popularity and newfound affordability of amateur filmmaking in a post-war United States. Through home movie recording, underrepresented and marginalized ethnic groups were presented with the opportunity to tell *their* story. When asked about the Harold M. Anderson “Black Wall Street” home movie collection, Brent D. Glass, former Director of the National Museum of American History, said:

“This footage is especially important because it looks at the Black Wall Street community through a personal lens... It is rare because

⁹ Zimmermann, Patricia Rodden. "Entrepreneurs, Artists, Hobbyists, and Workers." In *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 282.

so few African American home movies from that time period exist, and it provides viewers with less-mediated footage”.¹¹

Diversity in the preservation of social representations plays an instrumental role in how different generations formulate their understanding of the history and culture of others. In addition to providing diverse representations of the black community, home movies can provide a glimpse into the past for future generations who are interested in what life was like at a certain point in time. They have the ability to provide a more honest depiction of everyday life and culture. Although many home movies are recorded with little consideration of the future, their first person perspective and content serve as invaluable moving image records.

For the purposes of this research project, a decision was made to focus on home movies recorded by African Americans because it was important to see *their* experiences through *their* lens. For example, an unknown home movie from the Wolfson Archives at Miami Dade College contains footage of an African American family having a picnic at a segregated Virginia Key Beach. In the same collection, there is footage of President Eisenhower campaigning in Florida. Traditional family picnics were a regular occurrence at parks and beaches across the United States, the only difference being that black families were relegated to “black only” parks and beaches. This collection depicts everyday experiences captured in numerous home movie collections by all types of families, however, it is made unique by the historical circumstances of the African American community at that time.

¹¹ Smithsonian National Museum of American History,. 2010. Smithsonian Acquires Rare “Black Wall Street” Film. <http://americanhistory.si.edu/press/releases/smithsonian-acquires-rare-“black-wall-street”-film>.

Many home movies of African Americans were recorded by people outside of the black community, and they do exist in repositories throughout the United States. Exploring and researching home movies of a specific ethnic group should not be misunderstood as alienating non-African American authors, or regarding these films as less historically significant. However, while these films equally depict the various experiences of the black community, that first-person perspective is lost.

For minorities, amateur filmmaking was a means of capturing one's own experiences. Whether done consciously or subconsciously, the home movies produced as a result serve as an alternative to the authoritative accounts of African American history and culture. This first-person perspective equips these home movie collections with the ability to "provoke reexamination of issues of identity, culture, history, politics, and memory from the point of view of images made outside the dominant channels of representation".¹² For example, the Gail Sidney collection of home movies at Historic Films, a stock footage company located in Greenport, NY, contains around one hundred reels of an African American middle class family in the south during the seventies. The collection is described as a "cohesive African American middle class family at home, at family gatherings, and on pleasure trips."¹³ When the average person thinks of family home movies, a middle class African American family embarking on vacations does not typically come to mind. However, this collection exists, and it depicts the Sidney family enjoying the same activities as any other suburban middle-class American family

¹² "Introduction." In *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories.*, edited by Karen Ishizuka and Patricia Zimmerman. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007.

¹³ "Historic Films Stock Footage Archive." Historic Films Stock Footage Archive. Accessed April 11, 2015. [http://www.historicfilms.com/search/?type=all&q=Gail Sidney Family#p1](http://www.historicfilms.com/search/?type=all&q=Gail%20Sidney%20Family#p1).

at the time. Today, this collection of candid home movies from the seventies can help transcend and redefine the often misconceived and underrepresented black community.

Redefining the black community is important for a number of reasons. One reason is the misconception that *all* African Americans are part of a monolithic black community, when the reality is “there are - have always been - as many variations on communal black life in the United States as there are locations, arrangements, class alignments, social and economic configurations of black American life in general.”¹⁴ Traditionally, the black community has been referenced with a sense of cultural singularity. Through birthday parties, family holidays, and ordinary family hangouts, African American home movies paint a different picture. One that accentuates the culturally and socially multifaceted actuality of this ethnic group in the United States.

Ebay and Compromising Culture

Today, there is an overwhelmingly large number of home movies that have become orphaned, or abandoned by their owners. However, in the case of home movies, abandonment is not always intentional. In many cases, these films are left to fend for themselves after their owner passes away and no family member or friend steps up to take responsibility for their long term care. Another scenario was laid out in Albert Steg’s paper “The Itinerant Films of Arthur J.

¹⁴ Baker, Mark, and Houston Baker. "Uptown Where We Belong: Space, Captivity, and the Documentary of Black Community." In *Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video*, 217. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Higgins”, in which he described the provenance of a collection of home movies he purchased on eBay some time ago.

“The provenance of the films is this: some time in the 1980s, Arthur Higgins’s widow, passing her later years in the Nebraska City, Nebraska, area, was grateful to a friendly man who helped her do some cleaning and gave him a collection of films, which he took with him back to his home in Minnesota. This man kept them for the next few decades, until he asked his son to sell them on eBay.”¹⁵

Situations like these are why estate sales, flea markets and the eBay marketplace are littered with deserted or unclaimed film stock. At any given time, there are over one hundred anonymous 16mm, 8mm, and Super 8mm home movies for sale on eBay. Some sellers break up collections into single reels of film to maximize profits, while others sell home movies in assorted lots. At a 2007 Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) conference in Rochester, NY, Bill O’Farrell recalled one particular eBay seller who “routinely cut up single *reels* of film into ten- or fifty-foot segments to sell separately” while speaking at a conference panel called, “Ebay: More Than A Four-Letter Word”.¹⁶ As film archivists, it is expected that these practices would be frowned upon. However, what is the alternative? Without public marketplaces like eBay, local flea markets, and estate sales, home movies would most likely wind up in landfills; never to see the light of day again. While some archives have instituted policies that prohibit the purchase of donations, other institutions have taken advantage of the public marketplace and seized the

¹⁵ Steg, Albert. "The Itinerant Films of Arthur J. Higgins." *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 10, no. 1 (2010): 115-25. Accessed March 12, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41167343>.

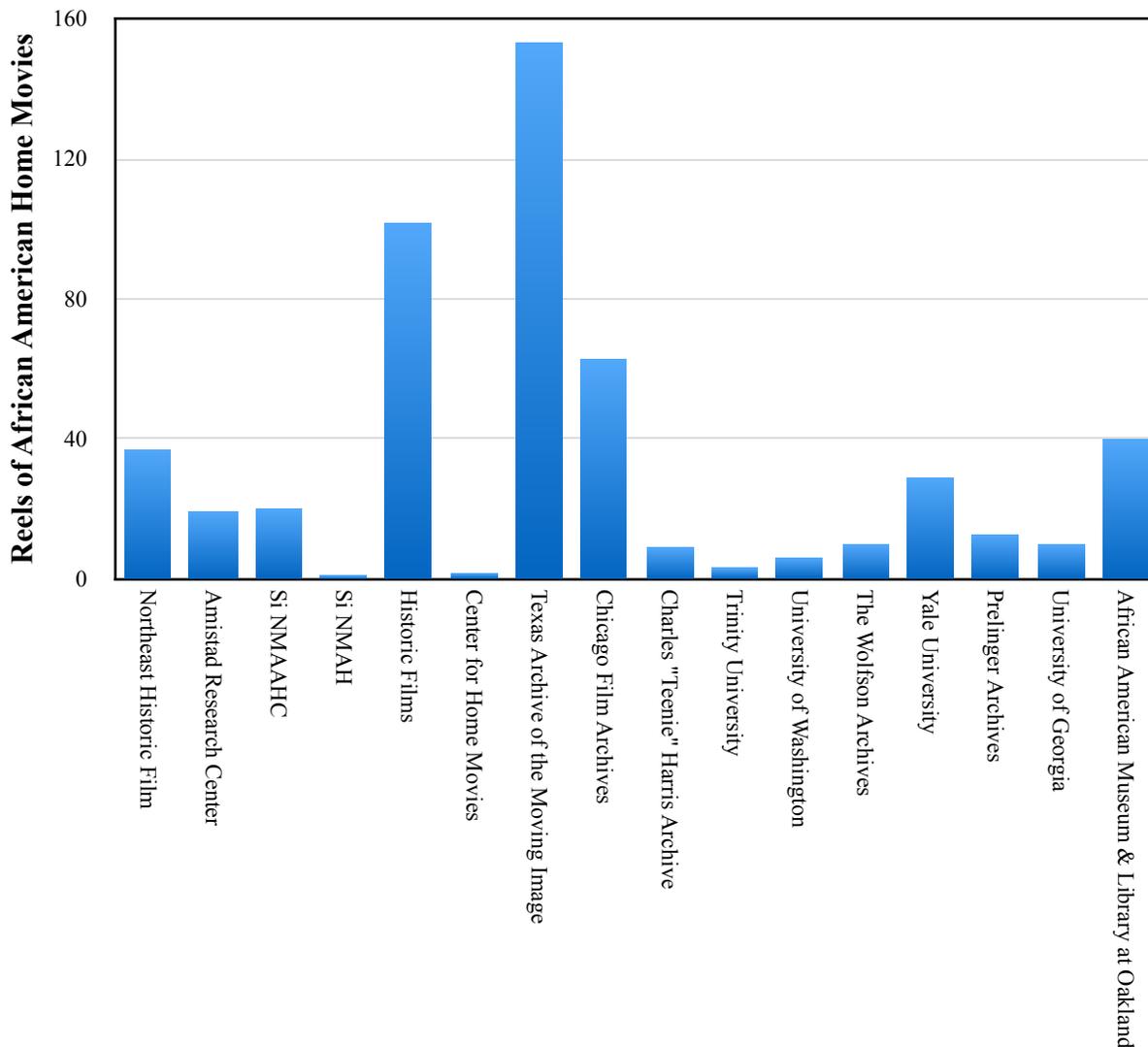
¹⁶ Ibid.

opportunity to acquire new material that will broaden the scope of their holdings. Advocating for a deeper respect for home movies as family heirlooms can hopefully instill a sense of responsibility and stewardship in those who interact with these valuable documents in a world where reuse is a widespread practice.

Institutions with African American Home Movie Collections

While only a small number of African American home movies were uncovered as a result of this thesis research, it should be noted that not every collection was able to be presented in this paper. This is due to a number of reasons, such as timing, privacy, and lack of correspondence on the part of the institution. Nonetheless, the past twelve months of research has resulted in finding and cataloguing African American home movie collections at the following sixteen participating institutions.

1. Northeast Historic Film
2. Amistad Research Center at Tulane University
3. The Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture
4. The Smithsonian National Museum of American History
5. Historic Films
6. Center for Home Movies
7. Texas Archive of the Moving Image
8. Chicago Film Archives
9. Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive at the Carnegie Museum of Art
10. Elizabeth Huth Coates Library at Trinity University
11. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division
12. The Wolfson Archives at Miami Dade College
13. Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University
14. The Prelinger Archives
15. University of Georgia Special Collections Library
16. African American Museum & Library at Oakland



Archivists and librarians at each institution provided information on their collections in the form of finding aids, inspection reports, and simple email correspondence. Each institution either actively sought out this material for their collections or acquired it from a donor. Some of the institutions' missions are directly tied to preserving African American history and culture, while others are dedicated to preserving amateur film with no attention paid to race and ethnicity. For example, Northeast Historic Film Archive in Bucksport, Maine purchased a few film collections on eBay solely based on the fact that they were advertised as home movies from a Vermont

family. It was by utter chance that they ended up with a home movie collection from an African American family. Other institutions, like the Amistad Research Center and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, specifically seek out moving image material that will aid them in teaching and sharing the diverse African American experience.

The African American home movie collections found at the aforementioned institutions range in time period, as well as vary in content, with the earliest film in the collection dating all the way back to 1924. The following tables are a detailed account of each institution's holdings.

Northeast Historic Film

The Northeast Historic Film (NHF) archive is a non-profit institution located in Bucksport, Maine. Their mission is to collect and preserve film and video from northern New England (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts), and preserve and foster access to the area's rich history and culture. In 1999, NHF opened the restored Alamo Theatre and now hosts "public exhibits, screenings, documentaries, symposia, film festivals, teachers workshops and workshops for the public on preservation, regional culture, and other topics".¹⁷ Today, the archive has over ten million feet of film and more than 8,000 hours of video.

¹⁷ "About Us." Northeast Historic Film. Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://www.oldfilm.org/content/about-us>.

Collection Name	NHF Collection #2420
Extent	37 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1949 - 1958
Scope & Content	Unknown African American family from Vermont engaging in various social and outdoor activities. Processing label marked "Anna Harris".
Status	Processed

Amistad Research Center

The Amistad Research Center was established in 1966 to protect and care for the historical documents of the American Missionary Association, and branched off into an independent non-profit organization in 1969. "The Amistad Research Center is the nation's oldest, largest and most comprehensive independent archive specializing in the history of African Americans and other Ethnic Minorities".¹⁸ Today, the Amistad Research Center has settled in Tilton Memorial Hall at Tulane University and has collections containing film, photographs, art work, papers and manuscripts, and more.

Collection Name	Robert S. and Lille Mae Green Collection
Extent	19 Reels
Gauge(s)	16mm and 8mm
Year	1950s - 1970s
Scope & Content	Robert S. and Lillie Mae Green collection is comprised of home movies shot by African American photographer Robert S. Green. Films in the collection depict aspects of African American life in New Orleans in the 1950s to 1970s.
Status	Processing

¹⁸ "History of the Amistad Research Center." Amistad Research Center. Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://www.amistadresearchcenter.org/index.php/history-of-the-center>.

The Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture

NMAAHC is a national museum scheduled to open in Washington, D.C. in the year 2016. “This museum seeks to help all Americans remember, and by remembering, this institution will stimulate a dialogue about race and help to foster a spirit of reconciliation and healing”.¹⁹ Its collections will consist of all types of historical papers, media (audio, film, video etc.), art, and other collected items that contribute to recording, preserving and celebrating the African American experience.

Collection Name	Pearl Bowser Collection, Sojourners for Truth and Justice Home Movies
Extent	5 Reels
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1952
Scope & Content	Silent home movie footage of The Eastern Seaboard Conference of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, held at the Harlem Y.M.C.A. on Sunday, March 23, 1952. Featuring footage of Paul Robeson, Charlotta Bass, Dorothy Hunton, and Louise Thompson Patterson.
Status	Processing

Collection Name	Rev. Solomon Sir Jones Home Movies
Extent	9 Reels
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1927-1931
Scope & Content	Reversal home movie footage of rural Oklahoma, circa 1927-1931. An Oklahoman preacher, Reverend Solomon Sir Jones documented locally-owned African American businesses and institutions throughout the state.
Status	Processed

¹⁹ “The Vision for the National Museum of African American History and Culture.” Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://nmaahc.si.edu/About/Mission>.

Collection Name	March from Selma to Montgomery Home Movies
Extent	1 Reel
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1965
Scope & Content	Home movie footage of the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965, including footage of military escorts, anti-MLK billboard propaganda, and marchers (including Jim Letherer).
Status	Processed

Collection Name	Cab Calloway Home Movies
Extent	1 Reel
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1951
Scope & Content	Home movie footage of, and shot by, Cab Calloway while on tour in Haiti, circa 1951.
Status	Processed

Collection Name	Richards Family Home Movies
Extent	4 Reels
Gauge(s)	Super 8
Year	1968
Scope & Content	Footage of Beverly Richards and her family fishing (on the Doris Mae III fishing vessel out of Barnegat, NJ), enjoying an amateur league baseball game, and visiting an unidentified zoo.
Status	Processed

The Smithsonian National Museum of American History

NMAH is a national museum in Washington, D.C. dedicated to sharing the American experience. Its mission is “to inspire a broader understanding of our nation and its many peoples—and to make our exhibitions and programs as accessible as possible to all visitors”.²⁰ So far,

²⁰ “Mission and History.” Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://americanhistory.si.edu/museum/mission-history>.

the museum has collected and preserved over three million artifacts that help tell the American story.

Collection Name	2009.3050 (NMAH Acc.)
Extent	1 Reel
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1948 - 1952
Scope & Content	A 16mm film documenting the people and businesses of the Black Wall Street section of Tulsa, Oklahoma in the years following the 1921 race riots.
Status	Processed

Historic Films

Historic Films is a stock footage company that was founded in 1991 in Greenport, NY. Its collections consist of “news, lifestyles, travel, fads, fashion, home movies, celebrity "red carpet" events, vintage TV programs, commercials, interviews, silent films, training films, military films, industrials and cartoons”.²¹ It lends and licenses clips from its library of thousands of hours of film and video dating back as early as 1895.

Collection Name	Reverend L.O. Taylor Collection 1936-1954
Extent	Unknown
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1936 - 1954
Scope & Content	Shot by Reverend L.O. Taylor, this collection extensively covers all aspects of the southern African American experience in Memphis, Tennessee. The collection contains well-shot Kodachrome color and B&W film.
Status	Processed

²¹ “About Us.” Historic Films. Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://www.historicfilms.com/pages/about>.

Collection Name	African American Home Movie Collection
Extent	3 Reels
Gauge(s)	Not Provided
Year	1957-1979
Scope & Content	This collection contains home movies shot by middle class African American families and business owners. The footage includes holidays, family events, nightclubs, lifestyles and events.
Status	Processed

Collection Name	Gail Sidney
Extent	99 Reels
Gauge(s)	Not Provided
Year	1971-1981
Scope & Content	This collection depicts a cohesive African American middle class family mostly at home (interior and exterior shots), at family gatherings and on leisure trips.
Status	Processed

Center for Home Movies

The Center for Home Movies was established in Baltimore, MD in 2005 as a nonprofit by the original founders of Home Movie Day. Their mission is to “transform the way people think about home movies by providing the means to discover, celebrate, and preserve them as cultural heritage”.²² The organization does this by partnering with other non-profit institutions to host screenings, organize and participate in lectures on amateur film, advocate for preservation and restoration projects, and much more.

²² “About.” Center for Home Movies. Accessed March 2, 2015. <http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/about/>.

Collection Name	Unnamed
Extent	1 Reel
Gauge(s)	Super 8
Year	1960s
Scope & Content	One miscellaneous, unprocessed African American home movie amongst the broader home movie collection of the Center for Home Movies.
Status	Unprocessed

Texas Archive of the Moving Image

TAMI was founded in 2002 by film archivist and professor Dr. Caroline Frick. It is a non-profit organization that aims “to discover, preserve, provide access to, and educate the community about Texas’ film heritage”.²³ Their holdings contain amateur films (including home movies), advertisements, local and public access television programming, industrial and corporate productions, and feature Hollywood films. TAMI promotes their archival holdings through film screenings, lectures and educational partnerships with local K-12 schools.

Collection Name	Michael Cook, Jr. Collection
Extent	7 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1950s-1960s
Scope & Content	This 8mm home movie collection was acquired by TAMI in 2011. The collection contains scenes of Michael Cook, Jr.’s time as a U.S. Airman stationed at Ladd Air Force Base in Fairbanks, Alaska. It also documents his life back home in San Antonio, including images of his family, his wife, and his young daughters growing up in the early 1960s.
Status	Processed

²³ “About Texas Archive of the Moving Image.” Texas Archive of the Moving Image. Accessed March 12, 2015. <http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php/TAMI>About>.

Collection Name	Thomas F. Freeman Collection
Extent	146 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm, Super 8
Year	1968-1976
Scope & Content	This home movie collection from the family of Dr. Thomas F. Freeman spans from 1968-76 and documents his career as a professor and debate coach at prestigious Houston universities, his home life, and his service as a minister at Houston's Mt. Horem Baptist Church. The home movies in this collection were primarily filmed by Texas Southern University photographer and close friend to Dr. Freeman, Earlie Hudnall, Jr.
Status	Processed

Chicago Film Archives

The Chicago Film Archives was born in 2003 as a result of the Chicago Public Library's donation of over five thousand films to the not yet established regional film archive. Its mission is to "conserve, promote and exhibit moving image materials that reflect Chicago and Midwest history and culture".²⁴ The archive is committed to restoration and access, and just launched a YouTube channel for people to browse their digitized material.

Collection Name	Don McIlvaine Collection
Extent	63 Reels
Gauge(s)	16mm, 8mm, Super 8
Year	1961 - 1972
Scope & Content	This collection consists of home movies and short films shot by Chicago artist and muralist Don McIlvaine. The collection depicts the Lawndale and Bronzeville neighborhoods of the city of Chicago, and contains interviews with Gale Sayers (Chicago Bears football player) and Angela Davis (political activist and scholar).
Status	Processed

²⁴ "About CFA." Chicago Film Archives. Accessed March 7, 2015. <http://www.chicagofilmarchives.org/about-2>.

Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive at the Carnegie Museum of Art

The Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive is a collection of around 80,000 photographs taken by photographer Charles “Teenie” Harris between 1935 and 1975. There are also multiple reels of black and white 16mm film ranging from a few hundred feet in length to 1,000ft, shot mostly in Harris’ Pittsburgh, PA community. The Harris collection is currently housed at the Carnegie Museum of Art, where Harris’ photo collection is regarded as “one of the most detailed and intimate records of the black urban experience”.²⁵

Collection Name	Charles "Teenie" Harris Archive Film Collection
Extent	9 Reels
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1935 - 1955
Scope & Content	This collection contains home movies shot by Charles "Teenie" Harris, an African American photographer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From 1935 to c. 1975, he photographed the African American community in Pittsburgh. The home movie collection is part of a larger collection including some of the most detailed and intimate photographs of the black urban experience known today.
Status	Processing

Elizabeth Huth Coates Library at Trinity University

The Coates Library at Trinity University acquires and preserves a diverse variety of material for its research collections. One collection, the Claude and ZerNona Black Papers was acquired by the library in 2011. Rev. Claude and ZerNona Black were civil rights and community activists in the African American community in San Antonio, Texas, this collection highlights the history of their Texas community through their social and political work.

²⁵ “About Teenie Harris.” Carnegie Museum of Art Teenie Harris Archive. Accessed March 14, 2015. <http://teenie.cmoa.org/About.aspx>.

Collection Name	Claude and ZerNona Black Papers, Sub-Series 2: Movie Film, circa 1950-1962 (Box 73)
Extent	3 Reels
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1950 - 1960
Scope & Content	The Claude and ZerNona Black Papers were acquired by the Coates Library in October 2011. This collection documents the civil rights, civic activism, and Baptist ministry of Reverend Claude William Black, Jr. (1916-2009) and his wife, ZerNona Stewart Black (1906-2005) in San Antonio, Texas. The collection mostly consists of paper documents such as scrapbook, funeral programs, and newspaper clippings, with a few home movies (3 films and 4 videos).
Status	Processed

University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division

The Special Collections division of the University of Washington Libraries is the central “resource for rare and archival materials covering a broad range of topics, formats, and periods”.²⁶ Amidst their other holdings, there is one small African American home movie collection by Armeta Hearst. She was an active member of the African American community in Seattle, Washington.

Collection Name	Armeta Hearst
Extent	6 Reels
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1958 - 1962
Scope & Content	Armeta Hearst was an active member of the Seattle African American community. She was born in 1906 and moved to Seattle from Oakland with her husband Bennie in 1923. Bennie worked as a Pullman porter and was an avid collector of newspaper articles about African American history and life. This home movie collection documents the couple's travel to New York City and Canada between the 1950s and the 1960s.
Status	Partially Processed

²⁶ “Special Collections.” University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. Accessed March 17, 2015. <http://www.lib.washington.edu/specialcollections>.

The Wolfson Archives at Miami Dade College

The Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archives, also known as The Wolfson Archives at Miami Dade College, have acquired over 35,000 hours of video and 23 million feet of film. The archive collects television news footage, home movies, and documentaries; with some of their earliest collections dating all the way back to 1910. As an official archive of the state of Florida, collecting, preserving, and providing access to their moving image collections is essential.

Collection Name	Hayes Home Movie Collection
Extent	10 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1956 - 1962
Scope & Content	A home movie collection from an unknown African American family in Miami, Florida. This collection contains footage of President Eisenhower campaigning in Florida, housing projects, road trip, picnic at the, then, segregated Virginia Key Beach, and more.
Status	Partially Processed

Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University

“The Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library collects, catalogs, preserves, and makes accessible rare books, manuscripts, and other formats from ancient to modern times in support of the teaching and research mission of the students and faculty of Yale University and visiting scholars throughout the world.”²⁷ Their collection of African American home movies, shot by

²⁷ “Mission.” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Accessed March 20, 2015. <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/about/mission>.

Reverend Solomon Sir Jones between 1924 and 1928, is the oldest collection of African American home movies known to exist.

Collection Name	Solomon Sir Jones films, 1924 - 1928
Extent	29 Reels
Gauge(s)	16mm
Year	1924 -1928
Scope & Content	The Solomon Sir Jones films consist of 29 silent black and white films documenting African-American communities in Oklahoma from 1924 to 1928. Jones filmed Oklahoma residents in their homes; during their social, school and church activities; in the businesses they owned; and performing various jobs. The films document several Oklahoma communities, including Muskogee, Okmulgee, Tulsa, Wewoka, Bristow and Taft. The films also document Jones' trips to Indiana, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Illinois, New York City, South Carolina, Colorado, and overseas to France, England, Palestine, Switzerland, Italy, Northern Africa, and Germany. Each scene is separated by a slate that identifies the locations, dates, and subjects. Total time is 355 min.
Status	Processed

The Prelinger Archives

The Prelinger Archives was founded by film archivist and aficionado, Rick Prelinger. The archive advocates for access and has made thousands of its titles available on the Internet Archive. The Prelinger Library in downtown San Francisco, California is open to the public and houses the archive's vast collection of books, periodicals, and other printed material. Due to an overwhelming amount of moving image material, compounded with a lack of resources, their home movies are either partially processed or unprocessed altogether.

Collection Name	Newhouser Collection
Extent	11 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1930s-1940s

Collection Name	Newhouser Collection
Scope & Content	This collection contains 11 reels, not all from the same family. It includes half a dozen reels that were shot by an African American family who spent much of their time (or lived) in the Midwest. Collection highlights include footage of Mary McLeod Bethune (an American educator and life rights leader best known for starting a private school for African-American students in Daytona Beach, Florida) and Ralph Bunche (an American political scientist, academic, and diplomat who received the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize for his late 1940s mediation in Israel).
Status	Partially Processed

Collection Name	Prelinger Home Movie Collection
Extent	2 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1960s
Scope & Content	Miscellaneous home movie footage. Origins unknown.
Status	Unprocessed

University of Georgia Special Collections Library

At the University of Georgia Special Collections Libraries, their mission “is to acquire, organize, preserve, and provide access to unique and rare materials related to the history and culture of Georgia”.²⁸ The Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection aims to preserve the overall moving image history of Georgia.

²⁸ “About Us. Mission Statement.” University of Georgia Libraries Special Collection Libraries. Accessed March 22, 2015. <http://www.libs.uga.edu/sc/about/mission.html>.

Collection Name	Bailey Home Movie Collection
Extent	10 Reels
Gauge(s)	Super 8
Year	1969 - 1975
Scope & Content	The Bailey Home Movie Collection is a collection of Super 8 home movies shot by an African American family in Athens, Georgia. The footage includes scenes of birthday parties, summer vacation, and Christmas.
Status	Processed

African American Museum & Library at Oakland

The African American Museum & Library at Oakland started out as the East Bay Negro Historical Society (EBNHS) in 1965. Over the years, EBNHS documented black culture and merged with the Oakland Public Library in the early 1980s. “The African American Museum and Library at Oakland is dedicated to the discovery, preservation, interpretation and sharing of historical and cultural experiences of African Americans in California and the West for present and future generations”.²⁹ Their collections consist of books by or about African Americans, oral histories, microfilm, home movies, scholarly journals and more.

Collection Name	Collier Family Papers
Extent	3 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1951-1953
Scope & Content	This collection of home movies, shot by Frank Collier, consists of family footage on a U.S. Air Force base in California.
Status	Processed

²⁹ “African American Museum and Library at Oakland: History.” African American Museum and Library at Oakland. Accessed March 22, 2015. <http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/locations/african-american-museum-library-oakland>.

Collection Name	Frank and Diane Davison Home Movie Collection
Extent	23 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1960s
Scope & Content	The Frank and Diane Davison Home Movie Collection documents the Davison family life in the 1960s. Footage includes birthday parties, holidays, travel scenes in Alaska, Atlantic City, Oakland and Panama.
Status	Processed

Collection Name	Sandra Bean Home Movie Collection
Extent	9 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1930s - 1940s
Scope & Content	The Sandra Bean Home Movie Collection contains footage of middle class African American social and work life. Footage includes women gardening, Pullman Company sleeping car porters, dancing, children playing, and more.
Status	Unprocessed

Collection Name	Harrison Family Home Movie Collection
Extent	5 Reels
Gauge(s)	8mm
Year	1960s
Scope & Content	This collection contains home movies of the Harrison family, owners of Harrison's Bar-B-Que, from Richmond, California. Footage includes a road trip through Denver, Colorado and rural Texas, and farmers picking grapes in Napa Valley, California.
Status	Processed

Private Collections

In addition to searching traditional archival institutions for African American home movie material, private collectors and individuals who maintained their personal home movie collections were also sought out. For the most part, this attempt was unsuccessful. During the summer of 2014, an advertisement was placed in the Atlanta Journal Constitution newspaper as a

trial run to find out how much interest was potentially out there. The ad read, “NYU Graduate student seeks home movies in the following formats: 16mm, 8mm, and Super 8mm for thesis research. For more information, please contact Jasmyn at jrc623@nyu.edu”. The ad ran for two weeks with no responses.

Another attempt to connect with private collectors was through YouTube. A general search for “African American home movie” was conducted, and a number of videos showed up from stock footage companies and a few individuals. An effort was made via direct messaging on YouTube to speak with three of the private collectors about their home movie collections, but only one responded. That one private collector ended up being Dwight Swanson, a member of the Center for Home Movies’ Board of Directors. Over email, he talked about his film, which contains footage of an unidentified African American family in Detroit (circa 1961), and how a friend of his acquired the film from a local flea market.

The final attempt to connect with a private collector happened rather serendipitously. While browsing home movie collections on Etsy, an online marketplace for handmade and vintage goods, a casual inquiry turned into a conversation with a seller who goes by the name of “BigMamasBasement”. It was revealed that she, Noreen, had a collection of home movies from the sixties and seventies that belonged to her father; an avid filmer. She was very intrigued by the research project and offered to share her home movies, and mailed DVD copies to me.

Noreen aside, it is very common for private collectors and original owners to be reluctant to share their material. Because of this, there is much more unaccounted for material out there. Some families have managed to care for their home movies throughout the years, passing them

down from generation to generation. While this generational sharing is considered to be a best case scenario, documenting the existence of these home movie collections would be ideal.

Access and Preservation Priority of Home Movies

Home movies retain both personal and cultural significance. They capture memories, temporarily fulfill our desire to be remembered, provide future generations with a glimpse into the past, and hold historical and documentary significance beyond the family setting. When deciding whether or not home movies are important, one of the main questions often is, Who really cares about preserving generic, everyday home movies for future generations? Most people would agree that the home movies of Marilyn Monroe would attract more attention than the home movies of an average unidentified family from Kenosha, Wisconsin. Still, watching past lives is entertaining, whether it's yours or someone else's. Home movies may be ephemeral in the sense that the physical material they are captured on is impermanent, but they are not at all temporary in the cultural value they possess. In her article "Home Movies: A Basic Primer On Care, Handling and Storage", Toni Treadway, founder of the International Center for 8mm Film, speaks about the importance of preserving home movies.

“All records of the culture, be they amateur or professional, naively or purposefully constructed, could one day have value to the maker's descendants or to artists, historians and cultural anthropologists of the future. It is not for us today to guess which

films will be important, rather let's save as many documents as possible for the future to examine"³⁰.

Treadway states that the value of something is not always apparent, but this should not suggest that it is infinitely meaningless. Home movies are full of potential, and the purpose they serve can be different for each individual. As a moving image record, they capture the histories of everyday people that would otherwise be forgotten.

When compared to other types of material, home movies have not traditionally been considered a high preservation priority, or a topic that has attracted widespread interest. In the moving image archiving and preservation community, it is believed that home movie collections are underused either due to lack of appeal, unfamiliarity, or access policies of the repositories. Many of the African American home movies found in institutions, for the purposes of this project, do not have donor agreements as a result of their orphan status. Consequently, wide spread access to these materials is hindered by the parent institution's fear that they could face legal consequences for copyright infringement. What starts out as good intentions on the part of the repository, which is to take on the responsibility of preserving these materials for the long term, ends up creating a sort of prison for the material. Although most archivists would agree that it is good practice to be wary of copyright, they would also acknowledge that most of these films "simply languish in their vaults, occupying a dreary 'someday when we get the time and resources' level of priority".³¹ Access to collections of African American home movies differs

³⁰ Treadway, Toni. "Home Movies: A Basic Primer on Care, Handling, and Storage." (2001) Accessed March 14, 2015. <http://www.littlefilm.org/Primer.20010717210308.html>.

³¹ Steg, Albert. "The Itinerant Films of Arthur J. Higgins." *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 10, no. 1 (2010): 115-25. Accessed March 12, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41167343>.

with each institution. However, the main factor that has the most influence on the level of access these materials receive is popularity. Simply put, if a lot of people want to see something, it quickly becomes a high preservation priority solely based on its marketability.

Being aware of the existence of this material is one of the primary obstacles to access by unseasoned researchers. Today, almost all research starts off as web-based. Most “researchers choose to conduct their searches using Google, while some prefer to use specific websites that they have identified as containing the related research topics”.³² It is important for museums, libraries, and archives to have a user friendly web presence so researchers can simply gain access to moving image collections. When institutions lack a contemporary online presence that will enable researchers, regardless of experience, unique moving image collections are relegated to an experienced class of researcher; leaving the general public behind.

Present Day Efforts to Bring Home Movies to the Forefront

Many archives, libraries, and museums have begun to embrace the value of home movies and recognize the benefits of including them in their repositories. When it comes to present day home movie culture, there are currently some efforts being made to preserve and provide access to home movies of the past.

Home Movie Day, a response to the large generation of people who lost touch with their family films, developed out of a Small Gauge and Amateur Film Interest Group (SGAF) meeting at the 2002 Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) conference in Boston,

³²Salleh, Rozita Md. 2014. "ONLINE INFORMATION SEARCH BEHAVIOUR AMONG RESEARCHERS IN STRIDE." *Defense S&T Technical Bulletin* 7, no. 2: 140-144. *International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 23, 2015).

Massachusetts. The first Home Movie Day event was held on August 16, 2003 (Month/8 = 8mm and Day/16 = 16mm, the most common film formats). The two principal elements of a Home Movie Day event are inspection of film and the actual screening of those films.

In 2005, The Center for Home Movies was established as a nonprofit by the original founders of Home Movie Day. The initial goal was to oversee the ongoing progress of the Home Movie Day project, as well as explore and find funding for other home movie related initiatives. Their mission “..is to transform the way people think about home movies by providing the means to discover and preserve them as cultural heritage”.³³ Currently, they have a collection of 148 home movies and amateur films located at the Library of Congress’ Culpepper facility, with some available for online viewing at the Internet Archive (archive.org). Another project of the Center for Home Movies is the Home Movie Registry (homemovieregistry.org), an online directory that compiles thousands of digitized home movies and amateur films into a searchable database. Since accessing the site last year, the online registry has undergone reconstruction and evolved into a more sophisticated home movie database. They are looking to display collections that are already hosted online by other organizations, which would enable them to crawl the original sites for any metadata pertaining to each home movie. Any participating organizations are also encouraged to send metadata for their films to the Center for Home Movies in the form of a spreadsheet, or request access to the Home Movie Registry so they can enter any information directly into the database. So far, participating archives include Chicago Film Archives, Prelinger Archives, Texas Archive of the Moving Image, and the United States

³³ “About.” Center for Home Movies. Accessed March 2, 2015. <http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/about/>.

Holocaust Memorial Museum. The overall goal is for the registry to collaborate with as many collecting organizations as possible, and reflect their missions and collections.

The African American Home Movie Archive

In the spirit of sharing knowledge and promoting access to the African American home movie collections researched for this project, a website was created to serve as a resource to researchers, amateur film aficionados, teachers, students, archivists, curators, librarians, and anyone else who would like to learn more about these films. At <http://aahma.org>, visitors can read about the project and search the collections of multiple institutions across the United States. The main goal of the African American Home Movie Archive is to centralize and streamline access to African American home movies that currently exist in private and institutional film collections across the United States. In doing so, the registry hopes to build a broader perspective of African American history and culture, while also encouraging research and creative use of the highlighted materials. AAHMA seeks to reach a diverse audience that has a wide array of interests, such as scholarly research, education, film and video art, individual curiosity, and much more.

Websites are ephemeral, and according to Science Magazine, “At current rates of decay, an educational site has only a 50-50 chance of lasting more than 5 years”.³⁴ Creating a website today is easy, but ensuring its long term sustainability requires ongoing care and maintenance. The most vulnerable section of the website is the African American Home Movie registry.

³⁴ “NetWatch Archive.” Science Magazine. Accessed March 14, 2015. <http://www.sciencemag.org/site/netwatch/index.xhtml>.

Contact information and links for accessing home movie collections online are stored here, and will therefore need to be consistently validated. Since the website officially launched on April 3, 2015, this will be the date of the annual audit of the website.

In order to combat link rot and inaccurate contact information for each of the listed collections, an annual audit will be conducted on the website. Using a mass email service like MailChimp, an email will be sent out to each repository asking them to confirm or update their contact information. Using the verified contact information for each repository, an email will be sent to each institution whose online access links are broken. Each institution with broken access links will be asked to provide an updated URL for the collection in question, or communicate to AAHMA why the material can longer be accessed online. Lastly, a follow-up email will be sent to each repository that did not provide online access links to their material asking if there has been any progress providing online access to their material. While this may seem like a lot of work on the end of AAHMA, it is necessary to commit to this level of maintenance for material with such a high percentage of unprocessed items.

Half of the archives, museums and libraries that are listed in the African American Home Movie Registry lack the funding and resources to dedicate any substantial time to cataloguing, preserving, digitizing or gathering detailed metadata on their home movie collections. With that being said, AAHMA will periodically reach out to each institution via email blasts to re-establish a connection and gather any new updates. Each organization will be encouraged to keep in touch with AAHMA and create their own online web presence to represent their African American home movie collections. Ideally, this web presence would provide information on the current

state of their collections. The most realistic expectation is that the registry will be maintained as a result of collective efforts between AAHMA and each institution.

Conclusion

This thesis research developed out of a desire to learn more about African American history and culture from a time when first person documentation of the black community was, and still is, widely unseen. While this research was able to ‘dig up’ a number of obscure African American home movie collections, there are still an indeterminate amount of home movie collections out there. Archivists should see themselves as a sort of modern day archeologist, studying and analyzing human history through the excavation of moving image collections thought to otherwise be lost. In a contemporary society that has increased access to knowledge and history, especially with the aid of new media, these uncelebrated documents should be widely available to all. By increasing access to these materials and promoting home movies as significant historical and cultural artifacts, they have the opportunity to be researched, interpreted, and appreciated in ways never before imagined.

The representation of African Americans in the media has not always been seen in a positive light, and many have called for a broader and more comprehensive view of the African American community. While major motion picture film and television has historically lacked such diverse representation, black history was quietly being preserved in the numerous home movies shot by African American families throughout the United States. These home movies were traditionally created for the entertainment of family and friends, and never intended for public audiences. Nonetheless, the uninhibited black community is candidly discovered through

the everyday events captured in these films ranging from the 1920s to the 1970s. Where popular media has failed, personal documentation has filled in the gaps. Over the years, these moving image records have been utilized by numerous film and television productions due to their undeniable ability to provide an intimate moving image record that differs from the news or documentary footage of the time.

Today, there exists a broad range of media outlets that include print journalism, photo journalism, advertising, radio, television, film, and the internet. Over the years, these media and communication outlets have converged and blurred the lines between traditional media and new media. With increased exposure to these entertainment and informational outlets, and an increase in the overall reliability on these outlets to act as reputable sources, it is no surprise that how people are represented in the media is how they will be remembered in the future. If today is tomorrow's history, it has become even more essential to seek out and preserve these unseen histories, and make them accessible to the public. By promoting this material, these traditionally marginalized histories become a part of the American culture; not just African American culture.

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