Black Home Movies

Time to Represent

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Given the antipathy the film industry showed African Americans throughout the twentieth century, it is unsurprising that much of the scholarship concerned with African Americans and motion pictures has focused on the various ways in which black people have been negatively characterized and disproportionately relegated to racially exploitative roles. The ongoing struggles African Americans have faced in the quest for more authentic representation in mainstream cinema and concurrently for increased black self-representation have been dominant themes in African American cinema scholarship and in films directed and produced by black filmmakers. While important, this scholarship has focused primarily on movies intended for public exhibition, including fictional Hollywood films, sponsored non-fiction productions (government films, educational films, religious films), and on television. Although these genres and modes of media production differ in important ways, they represent the African American experience for an audience that includes, implicitly or explicitly, whites and African American audiences who approach these representations through the prism of their respective experiences and entrenched perspectives.

In contrast to media produced for public exhibition, African American home movies capture black families and communities engaged in everyday activities that they themselves recorded and intended for private viewing. Because these films were not made with public exhibition in mind, they operate outside of the representational norms of mainstream theatrical media and are thereby arguably able to transcend its limitations. African American
home movies work to redefine mis- and underrepresented black communi-
ties; they provide an intimate moving image record that complements and
counters the often negative imagery in the media. They also respond to the
burden of racial representation carried by race films, expanding on the am-
bitions of early black filmmakers by capturing the diversity of the black com-
munity through self-authorship. These films present multifaceted aspects of
black life in the United States and provide a valuable historical resource for
reexamining and understanding the African American experience.

This chapter takes African American home movies outside of the inti-
macy of the personal context of their filming and exhibition and consid-
ers their significance as moving images and as historical artifacts. African
American home movies operate at the juncture of self-representation, in-
dividual and community engagements with moving picture technologies,
and the broader representational mediascape in which portrayals of Afri-
can Americans and black life circulate. Further, this chapter posits African
American home movies as significant underutilized resources for research
in a range of fields engaged with African American history and culture. One
of the main themes emerging from recent home movie scholarship is that
amateur filmmaking, including home movies, provides microhistories that
challenge the parameters of broader histories and film canons. Through
archives and special collections dedicated to their preservation and access,
African American home movies allow for a previously inaccessible glimpse
into the diverse cultures of black communities in the United States. The abil-
ity of home movies to depict events throughout their subjects’ lives affords a
unique opportunity to trace these communities through multiple individu-
alized perspectives. African American home movies allow us to revise the
history of black representation in cinema to account for its most intimate
self-representations. In so doing, they also provide a privileged view of the
private lives of African Americans, one that serves as an important counter-
image to theatrical screen representations of the black community.

Black Self-Representation and Authorship

During the early 1900s, a number of African American filmmakers and
organizations used the influence and popularity of cinema to produce films
that depicted African American communities in a positive light. In the
1910s, early African American entrepreneurs sponsored and produced films
that were defiantly self-representational and contrary to the racial narrative
that was so prevalent in both mainstream popular entertainment and the
emerging film industry. Some of these early attempts at capturing the African American experience were through actuality filmmaking, the production of nonfiction films by educators, entrepreneurs, and ministers, to name a few, who created short films that featured real events, places, and everyday people. These films were used as documentation, for community cohesion, and as marketing tools to raise funds for programs and various initiatives to promote the social and economic uplift of African Americans. While the majority of these films are no longer extant, they were the earliest films created by black filmmakers specifically for the black community.

Other attempts at capturing and promoting positive African American images on film were through commercial race films, productions with all-black casts made for black audiences. Oscar Micheaux and Spencer Williams were two prolific filmmakers who recognized the need for black self-representation, even when the characters they created were more complex than idealized. From the 1920s through the 1940s they, along with other various race film enterprises, produced and directed films that projected images of race pride for black audiences. While these films were a much-needed counter to the black buffoonery that was prevalent in mainstream feature films, their fictional depictions of black life often participated in the stereotypical casting practices that were perpetuated in the mainstream media. As Anna Everett notes, both white- and black-owned motion picture companies of the time “constructed fictional black worlds characterized by fair-skinned protagonists and dark-skinned miscreants” and promoted “middle-class bourgeois norms over the more folk and working-class realities of the black masses who made up their target audience.” While these films mark pivotal moments in the emergence and development of self-representational black cinema, they were rooted in economic structures (e.g., Hollywood, educational institutions, religious organizations) that nonetheless (re)produced biased images of African Americans.

In Uplift Cinema, Allyson Nadia Field argues that “film history is a history of survivors, and scholarly writing is consequently disproportionately weighed towards extant films.” She argues for cinema scholarship to incorporate larger bodies of work that can contribute to discussions surrounding the various manifestations of racial uplift and black self-representation in early films. This imperative is addressed in no small way by African American home movies, which constitute some of the earliest surviving examples of black self-representation on film. Though the distinction between professional and amateur filmmaking was not so clearly delineated in early cinema, this is nonetheless a key point. Because most home movies were
not shot with the expectation of remuneration or public exhibition, they are necessarily freer from the constraints of commercial and institutional productions. A number of home movies from the 1920s through the 1940s share many of the characteristics of uplift that were a central part of the actuality films of the 1910s, while still preserving their individualized perspectives.

Some examples of this investment in filming uplift can be seen in the J. Max Bond Sr. home movie collection acquired in 2016 by the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). Bond was an American educator who served in various college administrations at universities across the United States, as well as in Haiti and Liberia. From 1954 to 1967, Bond was an official of the United States Agency for International Development, with tours of duty in Afghanistan, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, and Malawi. Bond was an avid home movie filmmaker who made it a point to film the various communities in which he lived and worked, instead of shooting traditional home movie scenes of his family and friends. In Tuskegee, Bond provides a look inside the historic Tuskegee Institute in the early 1940s, at farmers, and inside a rural middle school. Through close-ups and shots staged for the camera, Bond documents handmade pottery in the Tuskegee Institute pottery studio and a man sculpting a bust of Booker T. Washington. In another scene, Bond films a class of girls learning to cook and weave cloth on a loom and, later, preparing meals with a chef. This film in particular highlights the accomplishments of the various educational programs at Tuskegee. Unlike the early uplift films shot at Tuskegee in the 1910s that Field discusses in Uplift Cinema, or the actuality films of the institute produced by white-owned companies in the 1920s, Bond’s lens on Tuskegee is a personal record of the institute rather than primarily promotional, persuasive, or commercial. This insider perspective is echoed in a film titled Good Good Good, in which Bond films a rural family engaging in everyday tasks on the farm. The film includes shots of a young boy walking a mule toward the camera, an older man feeding a group of pigs, and the family gathering on the porch and waving at the camera before entering their home. These shots are followed by a number of scenes of the family working on the farm. Good Good Good also includes footage of a black rural middle school, in which children are shown walking in single file and being taught in the classroom. These two films convey the pride Bond felt in the institutions he worked for and the communities he visited; he concentrated on capturing everyday accomplishments and highlighting the progress he witnessed from a privileged, insider position as an educator in the African American community.
The increasingly affordable home movie camera allowed for amateur access to filmmaking and resulted in the ability of individuals from underrepresented and marginalized groups to record their own lives, experiences, and stories. As archives increasingly are expanding their collections to include amateur film, the overall diversity of moving image material allows for a more comprehensive picture of the myriad uses of film. This is significant for an understanding of filmmaking in the United States in general, but it is crucial for African American film history, which is founded from a place of absence and whose surviving artifacts are complex in their racial figurings.

To date, the earliest known 16mm African American home movie collection is the amateur footage shot by Reverend Solomon Sir Jones (1869–1936) of Oklahoma. This film collection is currently split between two archival institutions, with twenty-nine reels held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University and nine reels archived at NMAAH. These rare films take the viewer on a journey with Reverend Jones, a financially well-off minister and businessman who traveled extensively throughout

Figure 18.1. Good Good Good (J. Max Bond Sr., 1940s). Film held by the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History.
his life. Jones was born in 1869 in Tennessee into a family of former slaves and went on to become a Baptist minister, successful businessman, amateur filmmaker, and avid traveler. He was also the head of the Boyd Faction of Negro Baptists in America and built and pastored fifteen churches. His surviving films capture African American communities between 1924 and 1928 throughout the Southern and Midwestern United States including schools, churches, social gatherings, and black-owned businesses. In the case of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Jones's films represent the last surviving moving image record of the thriving black business district. Homemade title cards, complete with dates, were meticulously placed in between each scene to identify the people and places he was filming. Each carefully constructed slate demonstrates the effort and care Jones put into producing his films and documenting the African American community.

In one reel, archived at the NMAAHc, Jones films an African American–owned oil field with people supervising the active oil wells, followed by an extraordinary wide shot revealing acres of land with five oil wells. Intertitles describe the footage: “Their first oil well, 2,000 barrels daily” and “Their second oil well, 3,000 barrels daily.” Rhea Combs, curator of film and photography at the museum, explains the importance of Rev. S. S. Jones’s films and what he captured in these terms:

It flies in the face of what I think some people consider part of African American history and culture. And I think that was one of the things that Oklahoma and S.S. Jones is really showing. That African American history and culture is not a monolith, and in a way it became a kind of marketing tool to encourage individuals to migrate, to move there. . . . There were still palpable racial tensions. There are lynchings, there is Jim Crow, segregation . . . and you still have an African American community, or many communities, that really speak to the fortitude and resilience of black people in this country.

In these ways, Jones’s footage provides a lens on an aspect of American life for which little documentation survives. In doing so, it enhances our understanding of African American migration and the resilience of communities facing tremendous challenges.

In both their status as consumer product and their ability to record personal and community consumption, African American home movies also serve as vectors for tracing black purchasing power. In the 1930s, Montgomery Ward and Co., Lever Brothers, and Anheuser-Busch commissioned the National Negro Business League to conduct the first study of African
American consumers, and “based on the data gathered, the researchers estimated the disposable income of black consumers at the time to be approximately $1.65 billion.”9 While economic and social conditions in the United States played an important role in who and what was documented, it is important to remember that not all African Americans were poor, as evidenced by this study, nor were they uninformed consumers of media. As demonstrated by archival collections of African American home movies, wealthy and middle-class black professionals engaged with new recording technologies to self-document and to participate in new forms of leisure activity.

The Harold M. Anderson Black Wall Street home movies at the National Museum of American History are unique in their representation of a thriving black business district in the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa, Oklahoma, from 1948 to 1952. As curator of the Smithsonian Archives Center Wendy Shay notes, “At a time when segregation limited African American housing options and prevented black customers from patronizing businesses that catered to white customers only, it had one of the largest concentrations of

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black-owned businesses in the country." During the 1921 Tulsa race riot, Black Wall Street was burned down by angry white Oklahomans, and hundreds of African American residents were killed. The black community rebuilt the Greenwood neighborhood, and by 1940 black-owned businesses flourished once again.

Shay credits Anderson with playing a “major role” in Greenwood's resurgence: “A successful businessman, Anderson managed and then owned two neighborhood movie theaters, a skating rink, a bowling alley, and a shopping strip, among other enterprises. He also brought the Golden Gloves boxing tournament to the area, making it accessible to African American fans. Anderson was committed to the belief that, like in other majority African American communities during the Jim Crow era, it was critical that Black Wall Street sustain independent African American businesses to ensure resident dollars would stay in the community and guarantee its future.” People and businesses highlighted in Anderson’s films include a barber cutting a man's hair inside T. C.'s Scientific Barber Shop, a woman and a man making custom-ordered hats inside Manhattan Hatters, a Golden Gloves boxing match between two young men, and the exterior of a movie theater where teens can be seen socializing and exiting after a film. Brent D. Glass, former director of the National Museum of American History, comments on the value of this collection: “This footage is especially important because it
looks at the Black Wall Street community through a personal lens. . . . It is rare because so few African American home movies from that time period exist, and it provides viewers with less-mediated footage.” Anderson’s footage captures this revitalized community through his extensive coverage of Greenwood residents and black professionals, offering a rich illustration of black entrepreneurial spirit in the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, Eastman Kodak Co. introduced regular 8mm film and began producing cameras and projectors for beginners and enthusiastic amateurs alike. For those who could still afford to shoot home movies, the new film gauge was smaller and more affordable. The definition of amateur film began expanding to include family films, in addition to the traditional artistic and documentary-style films that were shot on 16mm. One exemplary representation of this time period exists in the Sandra Bean Home Movie Collection at the African American Museum and Library at Oakland in California, which consists of nine 16mm and regular 8mm films shot during the 1930s and 1940s by a Bay Area resident named Ernest Bean. The collection exhibits home movie footage

![Figure 18.4. Black Wall Street (Harold M. Anderson, 1948–52). Film held by the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History.](image-url)
of a middle-class family attending church, playing with their children, and engaging in extracurricular activities with family and friends. Most notably, the films are exceptional historical documentation of Ernest Bean at work as a sleeping-car porter for the Pullman Company.

During the late 1800s, the Pullman Company revolutionized train travel by providing stately sleeping and dining cars staffed with highly disciplined, orderly, and hospitable porters to tend to travelers. The first porters were recently freed slaves who would work long hours for little pay. Over a short time, the Pullman Company employed more African American men than any other company in the United States. The job of Pullman porter was coveted in the African American community, where reliable income and the opportunity to travel around the United States were not common. Still, the work of a porter was grueling, and they were expected to work eleven thousand miles or four hundred hours a month, whichever came first. Bean’s films offer a rare firsthand view into the lives of Pullman porters.

In addition to making this collection available for online viewing, the archivists at the African American Museum and Library at Oakland have created detailed guides, complete with both physical and time-stamped descriptions of the digital surrogates for each reel in the collection. Some scenes offer a glimpse into the personal life of a sleeping-car porter, including footage of family and friends socializing in the garden, men playing catch with a football outside of their home, and an interracial couple posing for the camera with their children on the front steps of their home. The footage also shows a sleeping-car porter standing by as passengers board a train, fellow Pullman porters on the job and socializing between shifts, and scenic mountain views captured from the window of a moving train. Similar to the Solomon Sir Jones films, these films have homemade title cards placed between many of the scenes. They are handwritten on a chalkboard and are often humorous attempts to describe as well as narrate. For example, one title reads, “Ducking the camera at 60 mi. per. hour” before a scene of a man running quickly in and out of the frame to grab something. During another scene, a sleeping-car Pullman porter, identified by his white buttoned-up jacket, walks toward the camera with upright posture on a train platform. Today, Ernest Bean’s home movies exist as a surviving moving image record of an upwardly mobile African American family. They also provide a first-hand account of a profession with deep roots in the emergence of the black middle class. Home movies, like those made by Bean, present an enhanced
Figures 18.5–18.6. Reel 2, circa late 1940s–1950s (Ernest Bean). Film held by the African American Museum and Library at Oakland.
picture of the professional lives of African Americans in roles that were, at best, caricatured or degraded in mainstream films of the period, when they were shown at all. In the case of Bean's Pullman porter footage, they also provide a corrective recentering of black labor, a counterimage to Hollywood's filmic representation of Pullman porters as background to white lives and stories.

Between 1945 and 1955, the median income of black Americans increased more than 350 percent, while amateur filmmaking was simultaneously experiencing a major shift from a “relatively niche-market hobby to a mass cultural phenomenon.” With an estimated $16 billion in buying power, African Americans made up the second-largest and fastest-growing market segment in the United States. The black community was becoming larger and more concentrated, with increasing economic and social stability, more buying power, and sophisticated consumption patterns. At the same time, the Eastman Kodak Company catered to the growing home movie–making market and changing consumer demographics by introducing Super 8mm film in June 1965 and adopting a new ethnic marketing strategy that specifically targeted African Americans. Even though Eastman began producing and selling motion picture film in 1889, the first home movie camera advertisement featuring African Americans was a 1964 print ad for the 8mm Brownie Fun Saver Movie Camera and Kodak Automatic B Projector.

In 1972, Eastman's advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson Company, produced an advertisement for the Kodak Instamatic camera depicting a black Santa Claus in Ebony magazine. For the first time, African Americans were targeted as a viable market for home movies. And, while they were underrepresented in commercials and print media, black families took part in chronicling their families as well.

The Spiller-Doughty home movies, a private film collection digitized and included on the African American Home Movie Archive website, is one film collection that features a middle-class family during the politically and socially transformational time of the 1960s and ’70s. The Spiller-Doughty home movie collection features husband and wife Curtis and Emile Spiller of Gary, Indiana, and their three children, Curt, Meredith, and Noreen. Their family films record day trips to the beach, road trips to Kentucky and Tennessee, family reunions, Chicago Cubs games, trips to the zoo, the family before and after church, and other aspects of family life. Noreen is now the keeper of her family’s home movies and is able to provide some contextual information about the films. Her mother, Emile Spiller, graduated from Indiana University in 1948 and worked as a substitute and full-time teacher, while
her father, Curtis Spiller, was a World War II veteran who worked for United States Steel until his retirement in 1982. In part of the footage, her father can be seen in attendance at the United Steelworkers of America Constitutional Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where he served as a delegate. During the 1960s, black steelworkers were protesting job discrimination within the union. Many black steelworkers claimed they were shut out of opportunities to move up in the company, and consigned to the more dangerous and physically demanding positions. As Herbert Hill and James Jones note, “Delegates to the 1968 convention of the United Steelworkers of America were handed a series of leaflets each day by members of the Ad Hoc Committee, a nationwide caucus of black steelworkers which had placed picket lines at the entrance of the convention auditorium. In a widely distributed statement . . . the caucus stated . . . ‘The time has come for black workers to speak and act for ourselves.’” Protest within the United Steelworkers union was instrumental in creating equal working conditions, as well as access to equal advancement opportunities, for both black and white steelworkers. Through these home movies, the subjects share their story on a personal level, and we learn their history and culture within the familiar framework of an unfolding life.

While ostensibly training their lenses on subjects personal to the camera operator, home movies capture the incidental, yet not insignificant, traces of a given moment’s history and culture. This record is especially powerful as a document of daily life under segregation. For example, footage from the Hayes Family Movies at the Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Florida Moving Image Archives at Miami Dade College shows an African American family enjoying a picnic at a segregated Virginia Key Beach. Children wade in the water and wave at the camera, and family and friends dance and joke around with each other as they all enjoy a meal under the beach palm trees. This is a fascinating view of an African American leisure spot in its heyday. Virginia Key Beach, a Dade County Park, was established in 1945 as a vacation place for people of color. It was the first “colored only” beach in Miami-Dade County and “the only place where African-Americans and Bahamians, who made up one-third of Miami’s population and helped build the city, could swim and enjoy beach activities.” In a case typifying environmental racism, the beach went downhill when a city sewage plant began discharging waste and dumping garbage in one of the Virginia Key Beach outlets. Despite these conditions, the beach remained open and was given park status before it was closed in 1982 due to a lack of city funding. In 2002, Virginia Key Beach was given historical status in Florida and placed on the
National Register of Historic Places, reopening to the public in 2008. The Hayes Family Movies offer a glimpse of the experience of African American families enjoying a segregated beach in Florida, an important testament to life under segregation as well as the self-documentation of a particular family’s leisure activities.

Hiding in Plain Sight

Current home movie and amateur film scholarship has concluded that home movies counterbalance broader film canons and histories, so why have African American home movies been noticeably absent from the recurring conversation in cinema scholarship surrounding black self-representation? Their neglect, to date, is in large part due to roadblocks created by orphaned material, a lack of funding for preservation and digitization of existing collections, and the seemingly inevitable obscurity cast upon the majority of home movie collections overall. Of the twenty-nine African American home movie collections that have been located and identified as a result of...
my research, only twelve are available to be streamed online by researchers and other interested parties. This is a truly significant obstacle to access by researchers and amateur enthusiasts since today almost all research begins on the internet. When institutions lack a contemporary online presence that can enable researchers to review moving image collections, they inadvertently relegate access to a small, privileged group of people. Copyright is widely invoked as a justification for the lack of online presence. This barrier can be twofold in that institutions have not cleared the material they physically own, or they are uncomfortable with the terms and conditions of free online web streaming services that can easily be utilized. Consequently, the visual narrative of African American history and culture for much of the twentieth century has become unintentionally expressed by a fraction of the films that exist. Access and promotion are necessary for African American home movies to contribute effectively to a broader understanding of black communities during the first half of the twentieth century.

Many of the African American home movies held by various institutions do not have donor agreements as a result of their orphan status. This can happen a number of ways, but the most common reason is because the films are donated or purchased from someone who is not the original owner. Consequently, widespread access to these materials can be 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 and adding them to the pool of resources made available to their visitors for the purpose of researching and learning, instead ends up serving as a prison for the films. Although most archivists would agree that it is good practice to be wary of copyright, they would also acknowledge, as Albert Steg does with regard to another type of orphaned media, that most of these films “simply languish in their vaults, occupying a dreary ‘someday when we get the time and resources’ level of priority.”

Still, popularity is the main factor that has the most influence on the level of access these materials receive; if the demand is great, a film quickly becomes a high preservation priority purely based on its marketability. Toni Treadway, founder of the International Center for 8mm Film, argues for the importance of preserving home movies in these terms: “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.”24 If more collecting institutions adopted this approach and truly advocated and worked toward modern online access, African American home movie collections could finally start serving as a crucial tool in the understanding of American history and culture. Without this approach, these films fall back into general obscurity and become understudied simply because they’re unavailable.

In light of the recent surge of interest in public digitization initiatives and exhibition-based projects, it is clear that there is a strong interest in home movies. The public, especially the African American community, is hungry for broader representation in history and in the mainstream media. African American home movies offer a candid depiction of the black community. While mainstream motion picture film and television has historically lacked diverse representation, black history was being preserved in these films. Through them, we may discover aspects of the black experience in ways that do not exist in any other moving images. Where popular media failed, personal documentation filled in the gaps.

As more collecting institutions make preservation and digitization a priority, it is imperative that these institutions make overall access to home movie collections a major focal point of their preservation philosophies. Archivists, preservationists, librarians, and scholars should see themselves as modern-day archeologists, studying and analyzing human history through the excavation of moving image collections thought otherwise to be lost or nonexistent. This ends not with analog preservation and digitization efforts, but with unencumbered access to all moving image collections. The understudied nature of home movies, copyright, and access are all intertwined, and when they are not addressed, the result is an incomplete picture of American history. This must change, and collecting institutions must prioritize conquering these obstacles and finding new and innovative ways of collecting with access as the main purpose, not merely the aspiration.

Initiatives and Access

Home movies are powerful tools for digital storytelling and pedagogy initiatives. A number of organizations are looking to fill the moving image gap by promoting home movies as a means for learning about African American history and culture and contributing to a more inclusive and comprehensive American narrative. The following organizations are adopting and experimenting with this new way of learning about and exploring history.
This traveling program is a transmedia community engagement project focused on outreach. It was started by Thomas Allen Harris and has adopted a digital storytelling model as part of a photographic archival outreach drive. Since 2009, the Digital Diaspora Family Reunion has traveled to different communities across the United States, with special appearances in Addis Ababa, Toronto, and Rio de Janeiro. According to the project’s website, “Modeled on the Emmy-nominated PBS program ‘Antiques Roadshow,’ which examines family heirlooms and uncovers the stories behind them, the DDFR Roadshow is a community photo-sharing session, a veritable show-and-tell of fascinating family stories.”

A typical program resembles a community gathering and consists of projected photographs that participants bring to the event. Other audience members react with their own insights and observations. Their overall goal is to “create a global movement that celebrates our shared values and experiences as Human Beings.”

This exhibition-based project is the brainchild of Jacqueline Stewart, professor of cinema and media studies at the University of Chicago. It began in 2004 and is dedicated to circulating the stories told in home movies shot by Chicago’s diverse South Side residents. The project also collects original films and videos and has partnered with the NMAAHC to digitize a large number of these films as part of their Great Migration digitization initiative. The South Side Home Movie Project operates under the belief that these films not only document the various ethnic communities within Chicago’s South Side, but that the films also “contain a wealth of information about the ways in which people have represented themselves and their views of the world.” Their website (http://southsidehomemovies.uchicago.edu/) provides information about the project, opportunities to view films from the collection at different neighborhood screenings, and stills from select home movies.

In mid-2014, I created the African American Home Movie Archive (http://www.aahma.org) to serve as an online resource for researchers, educators, students, archive and library professionals, amateur film aficionados, and other interested parties. The main feature of the website is the Black Home Movie Index, an aggregate of African American home movies from the
early 1920s through the early 1980s. Complete with collection names, scope and content, dates, links to online finding aids, video streaming links (if provided by the institution), and contact information for each participating institution, the virtual archive aims to serve as a liaison for African American home movie research by streamlining access to this information. The website has been live since 2016 and has already aided a number of archival film researchers, museum curators, and graduate students conducting research. By encouraging access, research, and reuse of these films, the main goal is to open a gateway to a broader, more diversified understanding of the African American community. In addition to pointing to other collecting institutions, I actively collect, digitize, and provide access to acquired films via the website’s AAHMA Film and Video Collection page (http://www.ahma.org/privatecollections).

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Since its opening on September 24, 2016, NMAAHC has debuted a groundbreaking initiative focused on home movie preservation and access. In 2014, NMAAHC media archivist Walter Forsberg began laying the groundwork for a revolutionary public digitization program called The Great Migration: “The Great Migration is a unique digitization service program that partners the National Museum of African American History and Culture with individuals and organizations across the United States to preserve their valued analog audiovisual media.”28 In addition to partnering with other institutions to preserve and digitize audiovisual material related to African American history and culture, this initiative allows members of the public to schedule an appointment with the museum’s audiovisual conservation team and have their media digitized in the Robert F. Smith Explore Your Family History Center on the second floor of the museum. Preservation and access are at the heart of this project, with a major component being online access to view these home movies on the museum’s website. Families who opt in will enable people around the world to watch and experience African American history and culture through home movies. In addition to The Great Migration, NMAAHC has acquired, collected, and preserved a number of African American home movies. Notable home movie collections include the Cab Calloway Home Movies, the Maurice Sorrell Home Movies, the J. Max Bond Sr. Home Movies, the Michael Holman Home Movies, and the Rev. Solomon Sir Jones Home Movies.
FILMOGRAPHY

All available films discussed in this chapter can be streamed through the book’s web page at https://www.dukeupress.edu/Features/Screening-Race.

Rev. Solomon Sir Jones Films (1924–28)
ACCESS: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Sandra Bean Home Movie Collection (c. 1930s–1940s)
ACCESS: African American Museum and Library at Oakland, California.

J. Max Bond Sr. Home Movies (1940–46)

Harold M. Anderson Black Wall Street Home Movies (1948–52)

Spiller-Doughty Home Movies (1950–85)
ACCESS: African American Home Movie Archive.

Hayes Family Movies (1956–62)
ACCESS: The Wolfson Archives at Miami Dade College.

RELATED FILMS

The Michael Cook, Jr. Collection (1960s)
ACCESS: Texas Archive of the Moving Image.

NOTES


3 See Field, Uplift Cinema.


5 Field, Uplift Cinema, 23.
6 For a discussion of the significance of absence in African American film history, see Field, *Uplift Cinema*.


11 Shay with Sanders, “Black Wall Street on Film.”


13 Ernest Bean, untitled film, c. 1930–50, 8mm, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, California.


15 Laura Rascaroli, Barry Monahan, and Gwenda Young, eds., *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).


17 Kodak, “Kodak gifts say ‘Open me first’ and save your Christmas in pictures!” (advertisement), *Ebony*, December 1964, 49.

18 Kodak, “Give the Pocket. Kodak pocket Instamatic camera” (advertisement), *Ebony*, December 1972, 139.


21 Hayes Family, untitled film, 1956–62, 8mm, Wolfson Archives at Miami Dade College, Miami, Florida.


26 “Digital Diaspora Roadshows.”
