

LOCAL MOTION PICTURE EXHIBITION IN AUBURN, FROM 1894-1928: A
CULTURAL HISTORY FROM A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

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Except where reference is made to the work of others, the work described in this thesis is my own or was done in collaboration with my advisory committee.

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Danielle Elizabeth Williams was born September 11, 1980, in Springfield, Massachusetts, to Earle and Patricia Williams. After moving across the country and attending high school in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and Lead, South Dakota, she graduated from Olive Branch High School in Olive Branch, Mississippi, in 1998. In September 1998, Danielle started Auburn University, where she majored in Mass Communication. In addition to her academic studies, she was involved with Eagle Eye News, where she served as an Assistant Director from 2000-2001, and the Auburn Film Society, where she served as President from 2000-2004. In the summer of 2001, Danielle did her internship in the Writer's Office for the soap opera *Days of Our Lives* in Burbank, California. During her graduate studies, Danielle assisted with the Jay Sanders Film Festival as Associate Director and the Movie Gallery Student Video Competition as Screening Chair. For the 2004 competition, she watched all 160 entries from all over the United States and from Canada, Malaysia, and Australia as well as the finalist videos at least five times.

THESIS ABSTRACT

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Danielle E. Williams

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This thesis is a historical analysis of Auburn's motion picture history from 1894-1928. Auburn's motion picture history is unique because it does not follow traditional film histories. In 1905, Auburn residents and API students watch their first moving picture. However, motion pictures did not have a permanent venue in Auburn until 1912. Auburn's motion picture history adds to the body of knowledge regarding motion picture exhibition because instead of a traditional movie theater, movies were watched in Langdon Hall on the API campus. In addition, student organizations sponsored the picture show. Using Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery's model of analyzing film histories through economical, social, technological, and aesthetic aspects, this research examines newspapers and personal archives to uncover Auburn's motion picture history.

The thesis concludes that Auburn's motion picture history makes significant contributions to motion picture history. Auburn did not experience the nickelodeon or picture palace phases of motion picture exhibition. In addition, Auburn's motion picture history provides insight about the treatment of African Americans and the racist culture in Auburn at the time. Furthermore, although motion pictures started as a fad in this small rural town, students easily adapted motion pictures into their extracurricular activities.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On Monday, 1 May 1916, Alabama Polytechnic Institute (API) in Auburn, Alabama became a part of film history. API witnessed the “Eighth Wonder of the World,” also known as D.W. Griffith’s epic film, *The Birth of a Nation*. Although motion pictures were not new to Auburn, *The Birth of a Nation* was a major event for API students, Auburn residents, and neighboring Opelika inhabitants. For weeks, the API student paper, the *Orange and Blue*, and the Opelika newspaper, the *Opelika Daily News*, promoted this film as the “Most Thrilling Photoplay Produced,”¹ the “world’s greatest picture play,”² and “the greatest picture of the age.”³ Both newspapers warned their readers not to miss this once in a lifetime opportunity.

Although *The Birth of a Nation* was a national success in major cities throughout the country, API’s screening is a uniquely important event in film history. According to Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, local film history is a “large and hitherto virtually untapped source of original film investigation . . . local film histories not only yield information regarding the history of film, but can also lead to a more general understanding of a particular city or town.”⁴

Undoubtedly *The Birth of a Nation* screening is an important event in Auburn film history, but film exhibition in this small rural community began many years earlier. The history of Auburn film begins at API because the university had the only motion picture exhibition in town. If students or Auburn residents wanted to see a motion

picture, they had to go to Langdon Hall on API's campus. This is interesting because in most urban areas motion picture theaters were common. Film scholars have not studied this unique situation. Allen and Gomery argue "little has been done to document film-going at a local level, by doing so it is possible to make a contribution to the state of film historical knowledge."⁵ Scholar George Potamianos argues, "the story of film distribution and the ways in which movies penetrated rural America can enhance the story of cinema history."⁶ David Bordwell and KristinThompson believe the study of social and cultural influence of films leads to a greater understanding of "the ways in which films may bear the traces of societies that made and consumed them."⁷ According to Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, researching local film history can "reshape our thinking on vital questions of economic and social history . . . but can also add to a more general understanding of a particular city or town."⁸ Therefore, the examination of the early history of film in Auburn makes a significant contribution to film history.

Most of the scholarly research about the silent era of motion picture exhibition focuses on urban areas, and there is very little research about motion pictures in rural areas.⁹ Potamianos claims a "surprising lack of scholarship on the distribution system or of efforts to integrate the history of the production, distribution, exhibition and consumption of films."¹⁰ A few scholars such as Gregory Waller and Kathryn Fuller have made significant contributions on this subject. Waller's research on Lexington, Kentucky's early motion picture exhibition history and Fuller's research examines itinerant exhibitors in upstate New York are excellent examples of local film histories that do not follow traditional film history.¹¹

According to Potamianos, during the early period of motion picture exhibition, urban cities received the best and most current motion pictures while the rural areas received whatever the distributors could or would offer. *The Birth of a Nation* screening on the API campus is a prime example of differences in rural and urban film distribution. The urban Alabama cities of Birmingham and Montgomery had *The Birth of a Nation* in theaters months before the May screening at API. The time lapse between an urban audience and a rural audience watching a film such as *The Birth of a Nation* changes the context of the film experience. Potamianos states a rural audience “viewing a . . . print of *Birth of a Nation* several months after its initial release surely came to the theater with a different set of expectations than did an urban audience viewing . . . during its first run nationally.”¹²

Moreover, Allen and Gomery argue research on the aesthetic, economic, technological, and social aspects of film historical research has been absent in regards to particular localities. Technological aspects examine technologies used in film production, distribution, and exhibition technologies; economic aspects inspect “who pays for movies to be made, how, and why.”¹³ Finally, social aspects answer questions about the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures such as: Who made films and why? Who saw the films, how, and why? What was seen, how, and why?

Using Allen and Gomery’s model of economic, aesthetic, technical, and societal aspects of film history, this analysis of Auburn’s early film history contributes significantly to film history. Researching local histories presents new information about motion picture production, distribution, and exhibition. Allen and Gomery’s model is essential in conducting local film history research because the economic, aesthetic,

technical, and societal aspects cover gaps in film history. These tools display how money, technology, and society played an important role in Auburn's early film history and a largely neglected part of film history.

Motion pictures started at API as a technological phenomenon but within a few years became an important part of API culture. As early as 1912, the YMCA sponsored a weekly motion picture show and other student organizations used motion pictures to attract students to their meetings. In this way API students made motion pictures an important part of their lives, and motion pictures continue to impact students' lives today. API, now Auburn University, has free movies three days a week and several special movie events during the year such as drive-in movies and movie screenings on the football field. Most Auburn students attend the free weekly movies without realizing they are participating in long standing tradition that dates to the silent era of cinema. Dudley Andrew argues examining cultural history such as Auburn's is necessary "to see how cinema has inserted itself into social life in succeeding eras and different places."¹⁴ Auburn's early film exhibition must be examined because of its impact on film history and Auburn history.

Methodology

This analysis of Auburn's early film history looks at several primary sources starting with the *Orange and Blue* and *The Plainsman*, the API student newspapers.¹⁵ Issues of the *Orange and Blue* and *The Plainsman* are located on microfilm on the first floor of Auburn University's library. For this study, over one hundred issues are examined starting with the first issue in November 1894 and continuing through December 1927. While conducting film history, Allen and Gomery believe newspapers

are an excellent resource for motion picture information. In researching film history, primary sources provide “details, often small ones that make the past alive in a moment.”¹⁶ Primary resources present first hand accounts of past events and are necessary for investigating Auburn’s film history. The *Orange and Blue* and *The Plainsman* provide information on motion pictures shown on the API campus, the location of motion picture screenings, information about the audiences, and economic issues. The *Orange and Blue* and *The Plainsman* were distributed weekly on the API campus from September through May.

To account for the months of May through August as well as missing issues in the *Orange and Blue/The Plainsman* archives, the *Opelika Daily News* is also utilized. The *Opelika Daily News* was a daily newspaper from the neighboring city of Opelika, which is 10 miles from Auburn and the campus. The *Opelika Daily News* is also on microfilm at the university library. Finally, the Auburn University archives provide supplemental information on Auburn’s early motion picture exhibition. The archives include an audio interview with George Alfonso Wright, a film projectionist at API from 1915-1917; William Askew’s student memoirs; volumes of the student yearbook *The Glomerata*; and issues of the *Alumnus*, a newsletter published by API graduates. Wright’s archive provides information on film exhibition at API and includes a list of motion pictures shown between 1916-1917. These archives are in the Special Collections and Archives Department in Auburn University’s Ralph Draughton Library and were selected through the archives’ finding aid, which is accessible via the library’s web page.¹⁷ The archive resources were selected based on information in the finding aids regarding student life or

motion pictures. *The Glomerata* and *Alumnus* volumes are on the reference shelf in the archive lobby whereas the student memoirs require departmental assistance for access.

The *Orange and Blue*, *The Plainsman*, *Opelika Daily News*, *The Glomerata*, the *Alumnus*, and individual student memoirs are the primary sources used in researching Auburn's early film history. Each primary source is examined for information regarding motion pictures in Auburn, which begins with the first motion picture shown on campus in 1905 and ends in 1927 one year after the city of Auburn received its first motion picture theatre thus ending the dominance of the campus movie exhibition. These primary resources are necessary in order to unpack Auburn's motion picture history. Using Allen and Gomery's model of economic, technological, aesthetic, and societal aspects, the early history of film exhibition in Auburn is analyzed beginning with early entertainment at API.

Social/Cultural Aspects

Social aspects take into account lives of the audience and the everyday culture they produced and consumed. For example, before motion pictures, API students had other extra curricular activities. A most popular pastime on campus was sports. In the fall, students flocked to the football games, and in the spring attended baseball games as well as other athletic competitions between the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes. Besides sports, students participated in various clubs on campus such as the Engineering Society, Agricultural Club, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the Websterian or Wirt Literary Societies (rival debate teams on campus). Throughout the school year, fraternities as well as other groups in the Auburn community held dances for the students. Occasionally, the circus came to town, which was a

“bigger day than Christmas.”¹⁸ Professors excused students from class in order to see the circus. Before the silver screen hit the API campus, most students spent their Friday nights listening to lectures for entertainment. Every year, API sponsored the Lyceum series, in which guest speakers came to Langdon Hall, the student auditorium, to speak on different subjects, which were “pleasure and entertainment for student body.”¹⁹ For a dollar, students received a season pass for each of the dozen or so events or they paid a quarter for each lecture. Yet once motion pictures came to API things would never be the same for some of these pre-cinematic pastimes.

Economic Aspects

Economic factors take into account the business of motion picture distribution and exhibition. For example, motion pictures came to API in November 1905; they were shown in Langdon Hall and “thoroughly enjoyed by all present.”²⁰ A few months later, the *Orange and Blue* changed the format from a newspaper to a literary magazine. As a literary magazine, the *Orange and Blue* did not mention motion pictures. When the *Orange and Blue* went back to the original newspaper format in September of 1912, news about motion pictures resurfaced. The student newspaper had advertisements for movies shown at the Elite Theatre, in Opelika. According to William Askew, a former API student, people occasionally walked to Opelika for special films. However, this was a long ten-mile trek. For a dime, the Elite Theatre provided movies from 3:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. The Elite Theatre ads ran without competition until November, when the *Orange and Blue* reported, “Did you know that there will be moving pictures under the auspices of the YMCA at the School Auditorium once a week?”²¹ The *Orange and Blue* never mentioned why the YMCA decided to bring motion pictures to the API campus,

but it was a very wise and profitable decision. Within five months the YMCA made a \$108.01 profit from its movies, which increased to \$449.80 a year later.²²

Aesthetic Aspects

Aesthetics examine exhibition conditions, which play an important role in the audiences' experience.²³ Within two years, the YMCA movie program became an influential and popular pastime on the API campus. Admission was a dime, and on Friday and Saturday nights, students could "take a trip in our travel ship."²⁴ Normally the show included three movies, which included Charlie Chaplin films every Friday night (from 1912-1916) and lasted forty minutes. The YMCA Picture Show became so popular that it effected other student organizations. For example, the Wirt Literary Society and the Agricultural Club met on Friday and Saturday evenings. In fear of losing members, both organizations wrote in the *Orange and Blue* their meetings would end in plenty of time for the picture show. Moreover, the Engineering Society used motion pictures to attract members. They would show films about the process of making iron ore into steel piping or looking inside a factory. An *Orange and Blue* reporter covering the Engineering Society, remarked:

It's rather surprising to notice the improvement upon attendance at the motion picture lectures. If the same interest were manifested in the "student night" meetings the Engineering Society would have not trouble in taking the place in Auburn that it holds in other Technical schools.²⁵

Students incorporated motion pictures as essential part of their social lives. The popularity of the YMCA Picture Show was a key factor in Auburn's early film exhibition history.

Technological Aspects

The early history of film exhibition in Auburn provides a unique perspective to film history. Unlike other communities, Auburn did not have a local motion picture theater with daily screenings. Auburn's only source of motion pictures came from the university via the YMCA, who sponsored the films. In addition, Langdon Hall, the campus location of the motion picture screenings, was not devoted strictly to motion pictures. Langdon Hall served as a location for several API classes and student organizations. Yet, the YMCA College Picture Show was very popular, and residents of the neighboring city of Opelika, which had a motion picture theater, traveled to Auburn to watch films. However, student memoirs from the archives reveal that all motion pictures were not shown at Langdon Hall in the summer, instead the movies were projected on a bed sheet outside on the lawn.²⁶

Conclusion

Motion pictures became an integral part of the popular culture at API. On Friday and Saturday evenings, API students as well as Auburn residents attended the YMCA Picture Show. From 1912-1917, the *Orange and Blue* had weekly advertisements for the picture show. The advertisements consisted of information regarding the admission price and what motion pictures would be shown at Langdon Hall. Occasionally, the newspaper ran a story about an upcoming picture, which included the actors' names or a recommendation not to miss the motion picture. Another motion picture topic in the newspaper concerned behavior at the picture show. Several issues discuss the students'

misconduct, which included yelling and whistling at the screen during the film.

Furthermore, the *Orange and Blue* ran stories for movies considered special events such as *The Birth of a Nation*.²⁷

By the 1920s, motion pictures were part of API's culture, and the YMCA quit placing advertisements in the *Orange and Blue/The Plainsman*. In less than a decade, motion pictures in Auburn went from a technological phenomenon to a cultural mainstay of API student life. By examining the economic, aesthetic, technological, and societal aspects of early motion picture exhibition in Auburn, this thesis makes a significant contribution to film history because Auburn's film history is unique. For over a decade, Auburn only had one movie venue, which was located on API's campus. Auburn's film history does not follow the historical exhibition transition from nickelodeons to picture palaces. Auburn's motion picture exhibition history enriches the larger history of motion pictures in America because it presents a unique perspective on early motion picture exhibition.

Moreover, Dudley Andrew claims, cinema is "a social ritual that can grow in importance in given historical instances."²⁸ James Carey argues, "Mass Communication, rather than causing certain attitudes or behaviors, provides by diverting audiences from their troubles, feedback into the maintenance of normalized social roles."²⁹ A Communication perspective on this early film history at Auburn takes into account the fact that film exhibition is part of the social fabric of the local culture. By examining film exhibition's development as a social ritual, it is possible to explicate significant cultural issues at work. A Communication perspective treats this social ritual as an important and informative aspect of social interaction.

Research Question:

What is the local motion picture exhibition history in Auburn, Alabama between 1894 and 1928?

Thesis Organization

I. INTRODUCTION explicates the significance of this study and gives an overview of the important cultural and societal issues that are the focus of the study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW surveys the relevant literature pertaining to film history.

III. METHODOLOGY explains film history methodologies and reviews the previous research that informs this study.

IV. ANALYSIS consists of the analysis of the primary source materials.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: explicates the findings drawn from this study.

VI. EPILOGUE provides information on film studies at Auburn University, the Jay Sanders Film Festival, and the Auburn Film Society.

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- ² *Opelika Daily News*, 2 May 1916, 3.
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- ⁴ Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1985).
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ George Potamianos, "Movies as the Margins: The Distribution of Films to Theaters in Small-Town America, 1895-1919," in *American Silent Film: Discovering Marginalized Voices*, ed. Gregg Bachman and Thomas J. Slater (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 25.
- ⁷ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (New York: Mc Graw Hill, Inc., 2003), 1.
- ⁸ Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 193.
- ⁹ Potamianos, *Movies at the Margins*, 25.
- ¹⁰ Potamianos, 12.
- ¹¹ For more information see chapter three.
- ¹² Potamianos, *Movies at the Margins*, 25.
- ¹³ Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 38.
- ¹⁴ Dudley Andrew, "Film and Society: Public Rituals and Private Space," in *Exhibition, The Film Reader*, ed. Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 2002), 163.
- ¹⁵ In 1923, the *Orange and Blue* changes to *The Plainsman*.
- ¹⁶ Richard Marius and Melvin E. Page, *A Short Guide to Writing about History*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2002), 25.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.lib.auburn.edu/sca/>
- ¹⁸ *Orange and Blue*, 7 November 1894.
- ¹⁹ *Orange and Blue*, 19 October 1905.
- ²⁰ *Orange and Blue*, 14 November 1905.
- ²¹ *Orange and Blue*, 2 November 1912.
- ²² *Orange and Blue*, 19 April 1913; 26 November 1914.
- ²³ Douglas Gomery, "Thinking about Motion Picture Exhibition," *The Velvet Light Trap* 25 (Spring 1990): 5-12.
- ²⁴ *Orange and Blue*, 15 October 1915.
- ²⁵ *Orange and Blue*, 10 March 1916.
- ²⁶ George Alfonso Wright, interview by Rebecca Seaman, tape recording, n.d., George Alfonso Wright Collection, Auburn University, Auburn, AL.
- ²⁷ This is discussed in further detail in chapter four
- ²⁸ Andrew, *Public Rituals and Private Space*, 160.
- ²⁹ James Carey, "Mass Communication and Cultural Studies," in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, ed. James Carey (New York: Routledge, 1992), 53.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Motion pictures have transformed American society. For movie audiences, “going to the movies” has become an important social ritual.¹ Garth Jowett and James Linton state “‘going to the movies’ is a social activity which almost everyone in our society has participated in at one time or another.”² The movie theater is more than a building housing the latest movies; it has become a symbolic and cultural site, which also is reflected in its history.³ However, motion pictures were not an overnight phenomenon. For centuries, people had the idea of moving pictures but the not technology to implement the modern movie.

Before Moving Pictures and the Development of Early Film Technology

Anthony Slide argues moving picture history begins in prehistoric times with cave drawings. Suzanne Mary Donahue argues images on a screen began with “the silhouette puppets of China, Java, and Turkey that were imported to Europe to entertain audiences.”⁴ Moving picture technology started in 1640 with the Magic Lantern. The Magic Lantern used mirrors and candle light to project slide images on the wall.⁵ The popularity of the Magic Lantern resulted in the creation of new and improved devices such as the Thaumatrope, Phenakistoscope, Zoetrope, Praxinoscope, Kinematoscope, and Phasmascope.⁶ These devices created an illusion of movement utilizing pictures and persistence of vision.⁷

No one country can take credit for inventing motion pictures because men and women in different countries were working simultaneously on this technology. Moreover, countries borrowed and improved previous technologies as well as developing similar devices.⁸ All of these inventions were important to the development of motion pictures, especially the work of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge.

Marey's work in the creation of motion pictures was for scientific advancement. Marey wanted a device that would capture movements the eye could not.⁹ Conversely, Muybridge's involvement was for monetary gain. Former California governor Leland Stanford hired Muybridge to photograph trotting horses. Stanford wanted to know if horses lift all four legs off the ground simultaneously while trotting.¹⁰ In 1877, Muybridge used twelve cameras, which took pictures in rapid succession, to photograph trotting horses. Not only did Stanford get his answer (the horses lifted all four legs off the ground at the same time) but also Muybridge made a major contribution in the visual study of motion.¹¹ In addition, Muybridge invented the Zoopraxiscope. Using glass slides, the Zoopraxiscope enlarged and projected the still images from the slides on a screen.¹² Muybridge took his pictures and Zoopraxiscope and toured the country.¹³

Marey was not satisfied with Muybridge's work; he wanted a device that was scientifically accurate. In 1882, Marey invented the Fusil Photographique, which was a rifle shaped camera that could take twelve photographs on one glass plate in a second.¹⁴ Robert Sklar credits Marey's device as "the first camera to take motion pictures."¹⁵ Marey's and Muybridge's inventions were vital to the creation of motion pictures, but Thomas Edison "perfected the motion picture and brought about the most successful means to commercially exploit it."¹⁶

Although he was known as the “Wizard of Menlo Park,” Thomas Edison did not invent motion pictures. However, it was not uncommon for Edison to rearrange dates and omit facts (such as the names of the real inventors) to maintain his image as the inventor of modern motion picture technology.¹⁷ For decades, historians recognized Edison as the father of motion pictures, but research has shown that people in several countries were working concurrently on motion picture technology.¹⁸ Moreover, Edison’s motion picture technologies are actually the work of his employee, W.K.L. Dickson. In the Edison laboratories, Dickson, not Edison, worked on motion picture equipment and invented the kinetoscope.¹⁹ Yet, Edison played a vital role in motion picture history as an entertainer and entrepreneur.²⁰ Without Edison, the motion picture would “undoubtedly have been delayed, and its reception by a skeptical public would have been slowed.”²¹

Originally, Edison wanted to incorporate phonograph technology with motion picture technology. The phonograph worked by recording sound onto wax cylinders; Edison believed moving pictures could be done in the same way.²² In the Edison laboratories, Dickson attempted to implement the wax cylinder moving picture but failed. However while traveling overseas, Edison saw Marey’s latest invention, a camera that used flexible filmstrip.²³ Edison informed Dickson of the new technology, and the switch from wax cylinders to filmstrip led to creation of the kinetograph and kinetoscope.

While Marey’s camera used a paper filmstrip, Dickson decided to use a celluloid filmstrip in the kinetograph. Dickson was able to use celluloid film because of the technological advances in celluloid by the Eastman Kodak Company, which made celluloid flexible and transparent.²⁴

According to Robert Sklar, in late 1880s the Edison laboratory made a significant contribution to motion picture “technology, the perforation of the film strip at equidistant intervals so that the films would run smoothly past the lens.”²⁵ Edison called his new inventions the kinetograph (the camera) and the kinetoscope (the player). People peered into the kinetoscope’s viewer and watched twenty seconds of their favorite Vaudeville performers acting, dancing, or flexing their muscles.²⁶ Edison’s kinetoscope was a huge success, and on 14 April 1894 the first kinetoscope parlor opened in New York.²⁷ In addition, during this same year, Edison created the first motion picture studio, the Black Maria. The Black Maria was a small enclosed studio covered with tarpaper mounted on a circular track.²⁸ The roof lifted to let the sunshine in and the studio was placed on a track so that it could be pushed around to follow the sunlight during shooting.

The kinetoscope craze lasted until 1896. By 1896, the kinetoscope’s technology was outdated and new technologies enabled audiences to watch movies simultaneously whereas the kinetoscope was made for only one person at a time. The Lumière brothers created the first large screen projector and displayed their new technology in December 1895 in France making the French the first to project motion pictures to an audience.²⁹ The United States followed with screen projection a few months later on 23 April 1896. On this date, Koster and Bial’s Music Hall in New York City projected movies onto a large screen.³⁰ Once again, Edison played an important role in this debut. Koster and Bial’s Music Hall used a vitascope to project the new technology, which was created by Thomas C. Armat and C. Francis Jenkins. However, Armat sold his patent to Edison and Edison received recognition for the vitascope.³¹ Finally, the technology made the modern motion picture a reality.

Movies During the Silent Era (1896-1928)³²

During this era, moving pictures went from a passing fad to a permanent institution in American culture. People who went to moving pictures to experience the latest technological marvel soon incorporated them into their daily lives. Screen projection technology transformed the moving picture from a personal experience to one shared by many. The moving picture audience increased in numbers and expanded across class boundaries. John Belton argues that moving pictures evolved from “showing” audiences (i.e. *Fred Ott’s Sneeze* or actualities about exotic places) to telling a story.³³ The use of narrative led to the development of film genres, which the film industry still uses to categorize films. Furthermore, the technology created and enhanced during the Silent Era enabled moving pictures to become motion pictures.

The Pre-Nickelodeon Era (1896 –1905)

During this period, motion pictures did not have a permanent venue or standardized technology. Although Edison tried to prevent other inventors from using his patents, the demand for motion pictures was too large and inventors stealing or modifying his patents could not be stopped. Moreover, inventors in the United States were competing with Great Britain, France, and Germany to develop the latest motion picture technologies. The competition and monetary rewards of developing durable cameras and projectors that great.³⁴ For example while researching Lexington, Kentucky’s film history, Gregory Waller discovered citizens viewed motion pictures projected on the cineomatragraph, magniscope, or vitascope. All three projectors were used in different theaters throughout Lexington in December 1896. Waller argues theaters would promote the projectors’ technology to attract audiences. Motion pictures were a moneymaking

industry, and inventors, distributors, producers, and exhibitors wanted their share of the profits.³⁵

Going To See The Moving Picture

Besides competing technologies, motion pictures did not have a permanent venue to call their own.³⁶ People watched motion pictures at vaudeville theaters, circuses, penny arcades, dime museums, traveling shows, amusement parks, and other places.³⁷ Vaudeville theaters used motion pictures between acts and inadvertently demonstrated how important motion pictures were to audiences. In 1901, vaudeville performers went on strike. Instead of closing down the theaters, the managers showed motion pictures. Surprisingly, the audiences loved them and the theaters remained packed.³⁸

Itinerant Exhibitors

A misconception in film history is that moving pictures were primarily an urban phenomenon. However, film historians such as Douglas Gomery, Robert Allen, Kathryn Fuller, and Gregory Waller found rural and urban audiences experienced moving pictures. Generally film history has been told from an urban perspective, but in the early 1900s, 70% of Americans lived in rural areas and communities with 10,000 or fewer residents.³⁹ Rural audiences were omitted from early film histories even though they had a major impact on the film industry.⁴⁰ During the Pre Nickelodeon Era, rural audiences' source for moving pictures was itinerant exhibitors. One example is Kathryn Fuller's research on the Cook and Harris High Class Moving Picture Company, an itinerant exhibitor that traveled in upstate New York in the early 1900s. Cook and Harris went to hundred of towns promoting spectacular moving pictures accompanied with the latest and most popular music.⁴¹ Cook and Harris were one of several itinerant exhibitors traveling

around upstate New York. Each itinerant exhibitor had a gimmick to attract audiences. For example, Cook and Harris promoted entertainment and music whereas Lyman Howe's High Class Moving Picture Company promoted educational films. In addition, itinerant exhibitors did not arrive spontaneously in the rural communities. Usually, exhibitors had to find a sponsor in each city; they needed a place to set up their moving picture show. Sponsors ranged from civic groups, clubs, churches, or opera houses. The sponsor received money for use of their building and a percentage of the ticket sales.⁴² While moving picture exhibition in amusement parks, vaudeville theaters, and other locations are important to motion picture history, itinerant exhibitors play a major role in bringing moving pictures to the rural audiences.

Audience

Rural and urban communities during the Pre-Nickelodeon Era had one thing in common, the audience. The pre-nickelodeon audience consisted of the middle class. The working class and immigrants could not afford the admission price or had the leisure time. According to John Belton, in 1900 the working class worked 60 hours a week and their salaries were less than four dollars a week. Furthermore, upper class citizens did not attend motion pictures but went to the opera, theatre, or other amusements.⁴³

Other Amusements

Undoubtedly, motion pictures were a popular pastime, but they were not the only amusement available. Furthermore, motion pictures did not immediately dominate American pastimes or cause other amusements to disappear. Instead of watching moving pictures, people listened to their phonographs, used the telephone, or went on trips via trains or automobiles.⁴⁴ Other amusements included the circus, opera, theatre, Wild West

shows, burlesque house, dances, lectures, roller skating rinks, and sporting events.⁴⁵ For example, when motion pictures first came to Lexington, Kentucky, they had to compete with and initially lost out to the current fad of roller-skating.⁴⁶ Yet eventually motion pictures became the fad in Lexington. Besides other amusements, the moving picture industry itself was responsible for losing audiences. According to Gerald Mast, in 1900 the industry was in trouble; he argues, the “same rushing trains, ocean and mountain views, one-joke pranks, and historical vignettes dominated the screen. Audiences began to yawn at these same predictable film subjects.”⁴⁷ Mast credits filmmakers’ use of narrative for getting the industry out of its slump. Instead of exotic locales or people performing routine tasks, moving pictures told a story. The use of narrative in George Méliès’ *A Trip to the Moon* or Edwin S. Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* influenced filmmakers around the world.⁴⁸ Undeniably, the switch to narrative prevented moving pictures from becoming a passing fad. However, changes in film exhibition played an important function also.

The Nickelodeon Era (1905-1915)

Motion Pictures finally found a permanent venue in the nickelodeon. On the day after Thanksgiving in 1905, the first nickelodeon opened in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Originally a storeroom, the owners transformed it into a theater by adding decorations, chairs, a piano, and a projector.⁴⁹ The name “nickelodeon” came from the five-cent admission price and the Greek word for theater (odeon).⁵⁰ Nickelodeons marked the second phase in motion picture exhibition history. Instead of being part of another attraction, motion pictures had a permanent location and were the main event. The nickelodeon in Pittsburgh received recognition as the first nickelodeon in the United

States. However, cities such as Los Angeles, New York, New Orleans, and Chicago had storefront theaters as early as 1896.⁵¹ The nickelodeon craze became popular with the Pittsburgh premiere and during this era thousands of nickelodeons opened across the country. Any restaurant, storefront, or pawnshop could be converted into a nickelodeon with some kitchen or folding chairs, a projector, a bed sheet for the screen, red or black paint for the walls, and films.⁵²

In addition to permanent venues, the moving picture industry evolved during this period. Film genres were developed, color film was used (i.e. tinting and toning), and a new audience went to the movies. During the Nickelodeon Era, moving picture exhibition, production, and distribution changed dramatically.

Exhibition

Russell Merritt describes the nickelodeons as “a pioneer movie house, a get rich quick scheme, and a national institution that was quickly turned into a state of mind.”⁵³ Although the word “nickel” is in the name, nickelodeon admission was not a nickel in most places; admissions were usually ten cents. However Pittsburgh where the nickelodeon originated, the admission price remained a nickel well after the nickelodeon era. In 1914, the East Liberty Regent Theater opened in Pittsburgh and charged a dime for admission but soon went out of business because of its high admission price.⁵⁴ Yet the ten-cent admission did not deter many moviegoers and by 1908 over 8,000 nickelodeons were in operation.⁵⁵ Nickelodeon owners took the names of their nickelodeons very seriously; they felt that a nickelodeon name gave viewers their first interaction with the theater.⁵⁶ Owners named their theaters after local attractions or landmarks in their city to create a sense of community or with escapism or exotic names

so audience members felt removed from their reality.⁵⁷ It was not unusual to see a nickelodeon called the Dreamland, Fairyland, or Pastime.⁵⁸

In addition to exotic names, nickelodeons used their exteriors to attract audiences. Nickelodeons were covered with movie posters featuring the latest attractions. In addition, nickelodeon owners used bright lights to make their theater stand out. Another tactic involved noise. Barkers would stand outside the theater yelling to people walking by encouraging them to come inside. Besides barkers, theater owners placed a piano or a phonograph outside hoping the music would attract customers.⁵⁹ For many nickelodeons, these gimmicks served as their only source of advertisement.⁶⁰ Fuller argues owners spent more on the nickelodeon's exterior than interior. John Belton describes the interior as "small 200 seat theaters . . . quickly installed in or near shopping districts and/or entertainment districts in former stores, which were converted, in a makeshift way, to movie theaters."⁶¹ However, the lackluster interiors did not stop audiences from going to the nickelodeon.

Rural Nickelodeons

The majority of histories regarding nickelodeons are about the theaters in urban settings such as Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York. However, small rural towns outnumbered urban cities, and the rural audience was swept into the nickelodeon craze also.⁶² Douglas Gomery states, "rural America did not fall behind in experiencing the latest marvels of modern entertainment."⁶³ For example, the southern city of Lexington, Kentucky received its first nickelodeon on 12 June 1906.⁶⁴ By 1910, motion pictures were a permanent fixture in urban and rural areas.⁶⁵ As late as 1913, cities with a population of 5,000 had between one and four theaters.⁶⁶

Kathryn Fuller claims nickelodeons in rural areas varied across communities depending on geography, theater access, town values, ethnic and racial restrictions, and economic status. For example, the South did not have as many nickelodeons as other areas of the country because residents were not in close proximity to the theater or could not afford the admission price. Furthermore, community influences such as churches hindered the nickelodeons; preachers told their parishioners moving pictures were sinful.⁶⁷ However, nickelodeons were in the rural South and other rural regions of the country and just as popular as their urban counterparts. Moving pictures went from the latest fad to being a part of people's everyday (in urban and rural settings) lives.⁶⁸ According to Garth Jowett, the popular success of the nickelodeon "led to the development of a motion picture industry which consisted of three basic segments- production, distribution, and exhibition."⁶⁹

The MPPC

The vast majority of people who went to nickelodeons weekly were unaware of the behind the scene battles between producers, distributors, and exhibitors. In January 1909, Edison, Biograph, Vitagraph, Essanay, Lubin, Selig, Pathé, Kalem, Kleine, and Méliès production companies created the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC).⁷⁰ All ten companies pooled their patent rights and inventions.⁷¹ The MPPC formed because of the increasing competition between independent companies and the larger companies such as Edison, Biograph, and Essanay. Exhibition and distribution had guidelines within the MPPC, but members were not censored in film production.⁷² Distributors and exhibitors were allowed to distribute and show only films created by the MPPC.

Although the MPPC controlled the film industry, a few independent distributors tired of paying weekly dues to the MPPC. In 1909, Carl Laemmle became an independent distributor.⁷³ Other distributors such as William Fox and William Swanson followed in Laemmle's footsteps, and the MPPC had competition.⁷⁴ The MPPC responded to the uprising by forming the General Film Company (GFC) in 1910.⁷⁵ The GFC bought out 57 out of the 58 exchange companies. However several independent companies still survived as well as foreign competition. The MPPC restricted the number of foreign firms allowed in the MPPC and films imported into the United States.⁷⁶ While many countries were shut out, French filmmakers were able to independently distribute their films in the United States.⁷⁷ The MPPC dominated the motion picture industry until 1915 when it was dissolved for violating anti-trust laws.⁷⁸ Yet even before 1915, the MPPC lost its power because the demand for films made it difficult to enforce patent violations.⁷⁹

Reforming Nickel Madness

Motion picture production also changed during the nickelodeon era. As moving pictures increased in popularity, people questioned their impact on audiences, especially children. Critics of moving pictures worried children would imitate the violent acts they had seen in films.⁸⁰ The work of Jane Addams and the reform movement in Chicago is an excellent example of motion picture censorship. At first, Addams was partially supportive of motion pictures because she recognized the benefits of motion pictures as family entertainment. However, Addams wanted children to have more recreational options than motion pictures and she wanted films censored.⁸¹ In 1907, the city of Chicago gave the police chief permission to censor films; the police chief either cut

portions of films or banned them entirely.⁸² In Lexington, the city established a Board of Censors.⁸³ Across the country, states and cities created their own censorship boards. This was problematic for the industry because each state and town had different standards. The industry responded to this crisis by creating the National Board of Censorship in 1908, which was in charge of creating censorship guidelines for moving pictures. In addition, filmmakers willingly submitted their films for the board's approval. Although the National Board of Censorship did not eliminate state and censorship boards entirely, it prevented government censorship of moving pictures. The reform movement against motion pictures remained strong during the nickelodeon era and continued through the silent era.

New Audience

Blue-collar workers and immigrants were the primary audience for the nickelodeons for several reasons.⁸⁴ First, the nickelodeons were affordable. For a quarter, workers were able to take the entire family to the movies, which was not possible for other amusements such as opera or the theater in which admission cost over twenty-five cents per family.⁸⁵ Second, the motion pictures did not require knowledge of the English language. Although some nickelodeons hired translators for the movie intertitles, the movies were easy enough to understand without assistance. Third, motion pictures allowed workers to escape.⁸⁶ Although the average workweek decreased, the working class continued to work strenuous, physically demanding jobs. Garth Jowett argues moving pictures "filled a vacuum in the lives of many Americans bringing pleasure where none had existed before."⁸⁷ Workers went to the nickelodeons to relax and forget about their jobs. Fourth, workers could relate to the characters and stories in moving

pictures because they were often about the working class. Steven J. Ross states “movies turned class struggles previously confined to the hidden, private, realm of factories, mines, and fields into highly visible parts of public culture.”⁸⁸ Motion pictures were an important part of the working-class’ social life and became the most popular pastime for this group.⁸⁹

To attract patrons, nickelodeons advertised by using garish lights, barkers, and gaudy posters to promote the latest film.⁹⁰ All of these tactics were used to attract moviegoers in immigrant and working-class neighborhoods.⁹¹ Generally, nickelodeons’ operating hours ran from noon to midnight seven days a week and some opened as early as 8:00 A.M.⁹² However, nickelodeons were not the only venue showing motion pictures. Motion pictures continued to be shown in amusement parks and traveling shows as well as being used by churches, unions, and schools to boost attendance.⁹³ The working class supported motion pictures, but exhibitors really wanted the middle-class audience.⁹⁴ For the middle-class audience, motion pictures had a stigma as being a lower-class entertainment; theater managers desperately wanted the middle class in their theaters. Yet, the absence of the upper and middle class did not hurt motion picture audiences. By 1910, there were over 10,000 nickelodeons across the country attracting 26 million people weekly.⁹⁵

Film Genres

During the Nickelodeon Era, 100 films were made and distributed weekly.⁹⁶ Film historian Gerald Mast explains that the nickelodeons were responsible for the large number because they needed about six one-reel films per program and they had to change the programs very often to keep the customers coming back regularly.⁹⁷ The high

demand for film and the use of narrative led to the development of film genres, which placed films into different categories such as comedy, melodrama, serial, action and adventure, and westerns. Film genres have similar qualities to genres in theater and literature. For example, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson argue the melodrama has similar characteristics to theater and literary melodramas. John Belton describes film genres as “a more or less fixed body of character and story types, settings and situations, costumes and props, thematic concerns, visual iconography, and conventions.”⁹⁸ Genres are important because they stabilize the film industry. If a film does very well at the box office, studios will make another film just like it hoping to generate the same amount of profit.⁹⁹ During the Nickelodeon Era, two popular film genres were melodramas and comedies.

According to John Belton, the melodrama symbolizes the silent film era. He argues that all film during this period had melodramatic qualities. Belton describes the melodrama as a political tool because the subject matter dealt with social problems such as poverty and societal evils such as drinking and gambling. Critics loved melodramas such as D.W. Griffith’s *A Drunkard’s Reformation* and *The Birth of a Nation* because of their messages of good winning over evil.¹⁰⁰ Another popular genre was the comedy. Belton argues the silent comedy was more than humorous gags; comedies dealt with ethnic, race, and class differences. During the silent era, audiences went to the slapstick comedies of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. Their comedies followed in the footsteps of Mack Sennett’s comedies, which Belton describes as a “series of gags, loosely strung together, that escalate from simple comic misunderstandings to physical roughhousing, such as pratfalls or the throwing of custard

pies. This action, in turn, frequently leads to an extended chase sequence.”¹⁰¹ Although comedies and melodramas were very popular during the silent era, Anthony Slide states that all film genres during this period were important to the industry.

Technology

Although the motion pictures created during this and the previous era are known as silent films, they were not silent at all. Nickelodeons provided sing alongs before the film in which the song lyrics were displayed on the screen. In addition, during the film there was music from an orchestra or an organ; some theaters had workers who translated the intertitles from English into different languages.¹⁰² Some nickelodeons had actors behind the screen who provided dialogue for characters in the film.¹⁰³ Nickelodeons primarily used sound to cover the noise from the projector.¹⁰⁴ Another option for nickelodeons was to create their own sound effects. For example, a nickelodeon would have a sheet of thin flexible metal to create thunder.¹⁰⁵

Besides sound, there were color pictures during this period. Color was produced through tinting and toning. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell describe the tinting process as “dipping an already-developed positive print into a dye bath that colored the lighter portions of the images while the dark ones remained black.”¹⁰⁶ Toning involved “the already-developed positive print was placed in a different chemical solution that saturated the dark areas of the frame while the lighter areas remained nearly white.”¹⁰⁷ Different colors symbolized different things. For example, an amber tint represented daylight, dark blue symbolized night, red meant fire, and green represented sea sequences.¹⁰⁸

End of the Nickelodeon

By the end of the nickelodeon era, motion pictures were an important part of American popular culture and “filled a vacuum in the lives of many Americans bringing pleasure where none had existed before.”¹⁰⁹ For the working class, motion pictures were cheap and entertaining; the low admission prices made it possible for the entire family to go to the nickelodeon. Yet the nickelodeons were not perfect. For example, some critics disapproved of the piano music at some nickelodeons. They felt that the music took away from the film’s power and should be more refined or theatrical.¹¹⁰ The building of huge elaborate movie theaters removed the stigma of the motion pictures as a lower-class entertainment by finally brought the middle class into the theaters.

Picture Palace Era (1915-1928)

While many scholars agree the Picture Palace Era begins in 1915, they have different explanations for this transition from nickelodeons. Some credit D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of A Nation* for the shift because he “demonstrated that movies could be art; he had attracted upper class Americans to the movie theater for the first time.”¹¹¹ Steven J. Ross argues the era begins a year earlier when the Strand Theater opened on 11 April 1914 in New York City. The Strand Theater had 3500 seats, carpeted floors, and plush seating and is considered the first picture palace.¹¹² Russell Merritt believes that by 1914 the middle class was already attending motion pictures, which led to the shift from nickelodeons to picture palaces. These scholars are all correct; all of the events assisted in the transition. However, Kathryn Fuller provides the most convincing argument: the demand for motion pictures led to an increase in the number of nickelodeons. By 1915, the motion picture market was saturated with nickelodeons and exhibitors needed a new

gimmick to attract audiences away from their competition. The Picture Palace Era saw an increase in the quality of motion picture theaters and brought a new audience to watch.

Return of the Middle Class

Russell Merritt places the middle-class audience in theaters in 1914, “waiting for the spectacles and movies stars that would follow.”¹¹³ Moreover for years, theater managers had been targeting the middle class audience, especially women.¹¹⁴ The picture palaces did bring a new motion picture audience, but the nickelodeon played an important part as well.¹¹⁵ Moreover, nickelodeons continued to exist during the Picture Palace Era.¹¹⁶ For example in Pittsburgh, moviegoers still went to nickelodeons because of their cheap admission price in comparison to the new picture palaces.¹¹⁷ Douglas Gomery argues that picture palaces were not as commonplace as has been argued in past histories. However, it was not until after World War I that the middle class became frequent patrons of the picture palace.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Steven J. Ross argues that in the 1920s motion pictures became “a genuine institution of mass culture—one that reached all Americans regardless of their race, class, gender, ethnicity, or geographical location.”¹¹⁹ The motion picture industry was fortunate in that they were able to keep their working-class audience while attracting an entirely new audience to motion pictures.

Luxurious Picture Palaces

A large part of the urban motion picture audience went to the picture palace instead of the nickelodeons because of quality. The picture palace offered more amenities to its patrons. For example, at the picture palace attendants opened the doors, ushers took people to their seats, and patrons could use the picture palace facilities that included lounges and daycare. Once inside the theater, audiences were entertained with

stage shows, orchestras, or pipe organ before the picture even started.¹²⁰ Lavish decorations covered the interior and exterior of the picture palace; sometimes the picture palace had an exotic theme such as a Spanish villa or Egyptian temple.¹²¹ According to Janna Jones, the picture palace interior included, “velvet curtains, balconies, mezzanines, crystal chandeliers, fountains, classical statues and artwork, dramatic lighting, and handsome furnishings.”¹²²

Janna Jones argues the picture palace was more than a place to watch movies; it marked “the moment when a city and its inhabitants had ‘arrived’ . . . representing the pinnacle of urban development.”¹²³ Jones argues the picture palace overshadowed the movies themselves; people went to the picture palace to enjoy its amenities first then the movie. Picture palaces were responsible for most of the movie industry’s revenue, and Charlotte Herzog credits the picture palace for making motion pictures the number one form of entertainment during the 1920s.¹²⁴ Yet, while the new middle-class audience brought prestige to motion pictures, reformers continued to censor the industry.

MPPDA

Educators wanted to reform the industry; they wanted to use motion pictures as an educational tool. Educators felt motion pictures had a social obligation to society.¹²⁵ Many educators attempted to incorporate motion pictures into the classroom but could not due to school size, lack of equipment, poor quality of films, and lack of funding. Educators wanted to use motion pictures to teach, but many wanted to censor motion pictures because they contained too much violence and sexuality. In addition, the Supreme Court ruled that states could censor movies.¹²⁶ Censorship boards were created and by 1926 over 100 cities had them.¹²⁷ Censorship boards were the result of industry

scandals during the early 1920s. For example, beloved comedic actor Fatty Arbuckle was accused of raping and murdering a young woman at a party. Arbuckle was acquitted of all charges but the scandal ended his career.¹²⁸ The public wanted to intervene and control the industry because of these scandals and the content of films. However, studios were able to prevent intervention by creating the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA). The MPPDA would censor films and hired someone outside the industry, former Postmaster General William H. Hays, to run it. The MPPDA promised to clean up Hollywood and its films. Yet Hays was a glorified public relations man who never satisfied critics and allowed stars to live in the same manner before the creation of the MPPDA.¹²⁹

Star System

In addition to the picture palace itself, the star system attracted moviegoers to the theaters during this period.¹³⁰ Producers, distributors, and exhibitors used stars and directors' names to sell movies. Names such as Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith, or Cecil B. de Mille meant "both prestige and dollars and cents."¹³¹ Generally the star system is considered a separate part of motion picture research, but Diane Negra feels that the star system played a vital role in the history of motion pictures and should be incorporated into motion picture history research.¹³² Moviegoers went to the theater to see the latest Charlie Chaplin or Mary Pickford film. An actor or actress was determined a "star" based on fan mail and box office receipts.¹³³ John Belton claims fan magazines assisted in creating the star system. Movie fans purchased magazines such as *The Motion Picture Story*, which provided information about their favorite movie stars as well as

coming attractions. Belton argues the star system generated a lot of revenue for the studios as well as the actors themselves.

Studio System

Although the MPPC had been dissolved, total control of the movie industry once again came in the form of the studio system. The studio system consisted of five major studios (Paramount, Loews/Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, Fox/20th Century Fox, Warner Bros, and Radio-Keith-Orpheum) and three minor studios (Universal, Columbia, and United Artists). Beginning in the 1920s, Thomas Schatz states the studio system controlled motion picture production, distribution, and exhibition.¹³⁴ Studios made their films and showed them in their theaters. For example, an MGM movie would not be shown in a theater owned by Paramount. In addition, all studio employees were under contract. These seven-year contracts prevented employees from leaving and they had to do the studios' bidding. The studio system dominated the end of the silent film era and for the next two decades.

Technological Advancement

During the 1920s new technological advancements occurred in the industry. According to Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, in 1925 the Eastman Kodak Company improved panchromatic film. Panchromatic film had been around since 1910, but it was too expensive. Panchromatic film was a higher quality film stock and included more of the color spectrum.¹³⁵ Another advancement was color film. Anthony Slide argues by the end of the 1920s, color film had made several advancements. A filmmaker now had 16 color tints to choose from such as peachblow, audacious magenta, verdante, or caprice.¹³⁶ In addition to new tinting and toning colors, Technicolor was first used in

the 1920s. Some filmmakers used a two-strip Technicolor system. However it was too expensive and the colors came out wrong.¹³⁷

Coming of Sound

The technological advancements in film stock and color were important to motion pictures, but the coming of sound to films transformed the industry and brought an end to silent films. Many film historians credit *The Jazz Singer* (1927) as the first talking motion picture. However, Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell point out that this film was not the first. The sound-on-disc technology was available in 1925, but the studios were wary. Moreover, they did not want to spend money to convert their theaters to sound. However, Warner Bros. decided to invest in the new technology and created a series of short films and the feature film *Don Juan* in 1926.¹³⁸ In 1927, they released *The Jazz Singer*, which changed the industry. The other studios soon followed with “talkies,” and the silent era was over. The transition from silent to sound was short, and by the early 1930s silent films were extinct.

Conclusion

The examination of the literature about the Silent Film Era helps to contextualize Auburn’s film history. Douglas Gomery states media historians need to “rethink historical analysis and begin at the local level.”¹³⁹ Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery argue that film history had omitted important aspects of exhibition history, and examining local film histories can fill in these gaps. The literature examined in this chapter demonstrates that Auburn’s film history can make a contribution to motion picture history by explicating its local exhibition history. That local Auburn history does

not follow the same development as larger urban areas of the same time and is, therefore, unique.

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III. METHODOLOGY

Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery's model for analyzing film history is the central methodology used in this analysis of Auburn's film history. This methodology stresses the importance of analyzing film history through economic, technological, social, and aesthetic aspects.¹ Allen and Gomery argue film historians need to acknowledge "the development of the cinema involves changes in a film as a specific technology, film as an industry, film as a system of visual and auditory representation, and film as a social institution."² These four aspects are vital in defining film history.³

Technological Aspects

The technological aspect of Allen and Gomery's model examines technologies used in motion picture production and exhibition. Using this model, historians trace the creation and implementation of these technologies. One example is Gregory Waller's research on Lexington, Kentucky's film history. In 1896, audiences viewed motion pictures projected on the cineomatragraph, magniscope, or vitascope. All three projectors were used in different theaters throughout Lexington, and theaters promoted the projectors' technology to attract audiences.⁴

Douglas Gomery's research on the Balaban & Katz theater chains provides another example of examining technological aspects in film history. In 1917, Balaban & Katz used air conditioning in their theaters to attract customers. According to Gomery, before air-conditioning, the summer heat forced many theaters to close or use fans. The

heat kept moviegoers away from the theater, whereas during the winter people flocked to the movies. In this way, air conditioning revolutionized motion picture exhibition.

Balaban & Katz had higher box office receipts during the summer than in the winter because of their installation of air conditioners. Waller's and Gomery's research each demonstrate the importance of examining film history from a technological perspective.

Economic

In analyzing film history, economic aspects inspect “who pays for movies to be made, how, and why.”⁵ Thomas Schatz's research on the studio system examines the economics of the motion picture industry. From 1930-1950 movie studios controlled motion picture production, distribution, and exhibition. Schatz provides information about the major studios, the people in charge, and the economical impact of the studio system. Gomery's research on picture palaces during the 1930s and 1940s also demonstrates the economic model. Gomery examines studios' control of motion picture exhibition by building or buying theater chains.⁶ Studios wanted picture palaces because they generated the most revenue.⁷ Gomery's and Schatz's work illustrates the value of conducting film history research from an economic perspective. Studios total domination of the film industry during the golden age of cinema generated tremendous profits and drove the industry for decades.

Social

Social aspects answer questions about the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures such as: Who made films and why? Who saw the films, how, and why? What was seen, how, and why? Allen and Gomery state “the popularity of film as a mass entertainment medium has prompted both film and social historians to regard the

movies as a unique source of insight into national cultures.”⁸ Perhaps the best known social film history is Siegfried Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler*. In his book, Kracauer assesses the impact of German film on German society and argues German films are an important part of German history because they reveal “the actual psychological pattern of this nation.”⁹ Kracauer provides information on German films, filmmakers, and audience reception from 1895- 1933. By tracing Germany’s history through film, Kracauer exemplifies research in analyzing film history from a social perspective.

Aesthetic

The last aspect of Allen and Gomery’s model is aesthetic. Although aesthetic includes film’s history as an art form, Allen and Gomery define the aesthetic aspect, “much more generally to include the study of all the ways film technology has been used to give sensory (aesthetic) pleasure and to create meaning for audiences since the beginning of movies.”¹⁰ Kathryn Fuller’s research on the Cook and Harris High Class Moving Picture Company examines film history from an aesthetic perspective. Cook and Harris was an itinerant exhibitor in upstate New York in the early 1900s. Bert Cook and Fannie Harris¹¹ started the Cook and Harris High Class Moving Picture Company because of the potential financial reward; moving picture exhibition was a very profitable business in upstate New York.¹² Because of competition, Cook and Harris had to make their company unique. Moreover, they wanted their company to be more successful than their main rival, Lyman Howe’s High Class Moving Picture Company. Lyman Howe’s use of educational moving pictures made it the leading itinerant exhibitor in the area. At first Cook and Harris tried to imitate Lyman Howe, but they found more success in promoting their moving pictures as entertainment. The Cook and Harris High Class

Moving Picture Company was a successful itinerant exhibitor, but it always had competitors. Yet, Cook and Harris and other itinerant exhibitors were responsible for bringing moving pictures to the rural audience. Fuller argues “The itinerant movie shows themselves were shaped by their audiences’ desires to see . . . film subjects that would be as good as anything shown in the big city theaters.”¹³ Fuller’s research illustrates the importance of itinerant exhibitors in creating an aesthetic experience for the rural audience.

Combining Technological, Economic, Social, and Aesthetic Aspects

Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery believe motion pictures have technological, economic, social, and aesthetic aspects that simultaneously work together to create the film experience.¹⁴ This reasoning can be applied to conducting film history research. These aspects are intertwined and it is difficult to analyze film history without addressing each. However, Allen and Gomery acknowledge the problems in doing film history, “To the film historian working in the latter part of the twentieth century, the new-fledged status of the discipline presents him or her with a significant problem historians in other fields do not have: the lack of preceding analyses.”¹⁵ Allen and Gomery provide a solution to the film historians’ dilemma; they argue film historians need to address film history from a local perspective.

According to Allen and Gomery, film historians need to research film history at the local level because “it is a large and hitherto virtually untapped source of original film investigation.”¹⁶ In addition, Allen and Gomery believe film history research from the local level, will “make a contribution to the state of film historical knowledge.”¹⁷ Local histories can provide information about the economic and social aspects of a community

and enables historians to learn more about motion picture audience demographics. Allen and Gomery state “We know surprisingly little about the movie audience or movie-going as a social experience in national terms, except in the grossest demographic sense. At the local level we know even less.”¹⁸ Furthermore, local film histories enrich film history as well as a community’s history. Scholars J. A. Lindstrom, Jeffrey Klenotic, Gregory Waller, Michael Aronson, Taso Lagos, Kathryn Fuller, and Douglas Gomery have enriched film history by conducting film history research at the local level. I will review each of these in the following sections.

Moving Picture Reform

J. A. Lindstrom examines the motion picture reform movement in Chicago during the early 1900s. According to Lindstrom, the reform movement was the result of the nickelodeon boom. Throughout film history, historians have argued reformers were worried about the impact of motion pictures on young audiences; they believed children would imitate the violent acts seen in movies. However, Lindstrom discovers two reformers who supported motion pictures: Jane Addams and Louise DeKoven Bowen. At first, Addams was partially supportive of motion pictures because she recognized the benefits of motion pictures as family entertainment. However, Addams wanted children to have more recreational options than motion pictures and she wanted films censored.¹⁹ Lindstrom’s findings present a different perspective on the reform movement; all reformers did not view motion pictures unfavorably.

Jeffrey Klenotic examines reform movements in Springfield, Massachusetts, between 1930 and 1940. During this period, the city created the Springfield Better Film Council (BFC) to monitor Springfield theaters, especially the Strand theater located in the

Hill district, which was a section of town inhabited by working-class immigrants. In addition, the Hill had a unique location because wealthier communities surround it. According to Klenotic, the BFC was an attempt by the upper class to reform the lower class. The BFC wanted the lower class to use movie theaters as family entertainment; they promoted “family nights” at theaters. However, the BFC switched gears and began a new campaign against using movie theaters as daycare. Klenotic states the BFC’s reform movement did not change anything in the Hill district, and parents continued to use the Strand as their babysitter.²⁰

Besides an example of a failed reform movement, Klenotic located information about the working-class audience. Klenotic argues going to the Strand was an important cultural ritual for the working class. Children were the Strand’s primary audience. As they grew older, they attended less frequently, but remained loyal to the neighborhood theater. Klenotic’s research demonstrates “the cultural space of the Strand as it was inhabited by youth and used by parents in ways that were . . . a distinctively community-based working-class tradition of childhood and family organization.”²¹ Through their research, J. A. Lindstrom and Jeffrey Klenotic make significant contributions to Chicago and Springfield’s history and to film history.

Moving Pictures’ Popularity

Gregory Waller’s research into Lexington, Kentucky’s amusement history reveals moving pictures were not an overnight sensation. The movies had to compete with and initially lost out to the roller-skating fad.²² Yet eventually motion pictures became the fad in Lexington. In addition, the nickelodeon boom did not impact the city. Although Lexington’s first nickelodeon opened in 1906, nickelodeon theaters struggled to stay in

business. According to Waller, Lexington did not have a permanent venue for motion pictures until 1911.²³ Lexington's film history challenges previous film histories and reveals the importance of conducting research at the local level because it shows that movies were not an overnight success everywhere.

Michael Aronson's research presents new information about motion picture history. His research revises earlier film history, which states nickelodeon admissions were ten cents. Through his research of Pittsburgh's film history, Aronson discovers nickelodeons throughout the city only charged five cents for admission.²⁴ In 1914, the East Liberty Regent Theater opened with admission price of ten to twenty cents. However, one month later, the East Liberty Regent Theater dropped its price to a nickel.²⁵ Pittsburgh theaters finally raised the admission price in 1916. Aronson credits theater owners with the low admission price; they agreed to keep the admission price a nickel. This union prevented other theaters such as the East Liberty Regent Theater from charging a higher admission price. Aronson argues, "any local exhibitor who attempted to raise his prices while surrounded by a half-dozen other theaters whose owners still were charging a nickel was doomed to . . . failure."²⁶ Pittsburgh is credited with the first nickelodeon in the country in 1905, and ten years later admission prices still were a nickel.

Taso Lagos' research examines Seattle's film exhibition history. Seattle's film history is similar to Lexington's because moving pictures were not originally a popular pastime. In Seattle, the press and residents ignored moving pictures. Moving pictures became popular when the film *The Great Corbit-Fitzsimmons Fight* came to town in 1897. Newspapers carried advertisements for the film, and it was a huge success. Lagos

argues *The Great Corbit-Fitzsimmons Fight* transformed Seattle's film exhibition history. According to Lagos, people watched the film because boxing was outlawed in Seattle and "watching a movie version of the fight was the only way many fans had a chance to witness the popular sport."²⁷ Lagos argues Seattle "provides a useful case study of the growth of nickelodeons, and the diverse group of individuals who took advantage of the cheap technology to create an important new industry."²⁸ Gregory Waller's, Michael Aronson's, and Taso Lago's findings impact film history because they give an alternative perspective on the original impact of motion pictures in communities.

Film Exhibition

Kathryn Fuller's research on upstate New York itinerant exhibitors provides information on rural film exhibition. Fuller states itinerant exhibitors "constructed a large and diverse audience for motion pictures outside the largest urban centers . . . small-town audiences, in turn, grew accustomed to the idea of movie going as a regular habit . . . because of traveling movie shows."²⁹ In addition, Fuller argues itinerant exhibitors did not disappear because of the nickelodeon boom. For example, the Cook and Harris High Class Moving Picture Company traveled across upstate New York until 1911.

Douglas Gomery examined film exhibition history in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Augusta, Kansas; and New Orleans, Louisiana, which he uses as case studies in his book *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. Gomery argues these case studies "show that the coming of the nickelodeon was remarkable because of its speed of adoption."³⁰ In Milwaukee, nickelodeons were popular from the start, and a nickelodeon boom hit the city. Gomery states more than half of Milwaukee's population

went to the movies each week.³¹ The same phenomenon occurred in New Orleans as well as Augusta, Kansas.³²

Summary

The scholars mentioned in the previous sections have made significant contributions to film history. Their research demonstrates that moving pictures affected communities differently. While these researchers provide new perspectives on film history, Allen and Gomery argue more local film histories must be done and the “more one understands about the process by which film history is researched and written, the more enjoyable one’s study of the history of cinema can become.”³³ Allen and Gomery provide a model for conducting film historical research; yet they also state “there is no one correct approach to film history.”³⁴ In order to use Allen and Gomery’s model effectively, literature on how to perform historical research must be examined.

Historiography

John Arnold defines history as “a true story of something that happened long ago, retold in the present.”³⁵ According to Anthony Brundage historical research is important because history is a dynamic process and “historians are constantly reviewing and rethinking the past discovering new patterns and meanings.”³⁶ Arnold argues historians need to provide more than facts and dates; he urges historians to interpret the past so that “the past is brought to life once more, and the unequal contact between then and now has been re-established.”³⁷

For historians, historiography (the process of writing history) involves more than writing about important facts and dates. Jules Benjamin describes historians’ work as “a serious and systematic study of the past and . . . use the knowledge they gain to help

explain human nature and contemporary affairs.”³⁸ For Richard Marius and Melvin Page, historians are storytellers and “the art of history lies in combining fact and interpretation to tell a story about the past.”³⁹ Marius and Page define history as an unending detective story; it is the historian’s job to uncover as many facts as possible about a case.⁴⁰

Historical Research

Before starting historical research, Thomas Felt believes historians need to examine the literature. He claims, “reading histories is an essential part of the historian’s education.”⁴¹ Anthony Brundage believes examining the literature is important because “knowing the kinds of approaches and interpretations already employed by others, as well as the still unanswered questions on the topic can help direct your inquiry along original lines.” However, John Arnold argues historical research starts with the historians themselves; historians select research topics based on their interests and experiences.⁴² Once historians have a topic, their research starts with locating primary and secondary sources.

Primary Sources

Jules Benjamin defines primary sources as “the actual words of someone who participated in or witnessed the events described.”⁴³ Primary sources include diaries, manuscripts, newspapers, notebooks, letters, interviews, and “any works written by persons who claim firsthand knowledge of an event.”⁴⁴ Richard Marius and Melvin Page state primary sources provide “details, often small ones that make the past alive in a moment.”⁴⁵ Anthony Brundage divides primary sources into two categories: manuscript sources and published sources. Manuscript sources are sources intended for private use (i.e. diary) and published sources are materials intended for public use (i.e.

newspapers).⁴⁶ Primary resources present first hand accounts of past events and are necessary for conducting historical research.

Newspapers are an important primary source for historians. Jules Benjamin argues, “for on the scene accounts of what took place . . . there is often no substitute for newspapers.”⁴⁷ Thomas Felt claims “nothing quite equals an old newspaper for recalling the imagination to a time long past. The daily or weekly survey . . . balances the familiar and remote in a way that writers of formal histories would like to achieve but seldom do.”⁴⁸ Newspapers are a vital primary source for historians because of the wealth of information they provide.⁴⁹

Locating Primary Sources

Thomas Felt believes quality not quantity is important in doing historical research. Yet, finding enough primary sources is also a problem for historians. Over time, primary sources such as newspapers and diaries deteriorate. In addition, primary sources are destroyed. For example, in 1994 the Norfolk and Norwich Record Office (NRO) lost 350,000 historical records when the building exploded from an electrical malfunction.⁵⁰ Although the NRO suffered a significant loss, John Arnold points out that the NRO only lost 350,000 records out of two million that are housed in the NRO. However, those documents destroyed in the fire cannot be replaced and are lost to historians forever.

Generally, primary sources are located in archives, which are “systematized repositories of information, cared for and nurtured by professionals who . . . take relics of the past and put into order so others can use them.”⁵¹ Within the archives are finding aids, which are “lists of documents, often with brief summaries of what they contain.”⁵²

Finding aids are an essential tool for historians because of the large amount of records in archives. Historians do not have enough time or resources to examine every document.⁵³

In addition to finding aids, archive employees are a valuable resource for historians.

Archive employees are familiar with the finding aids as well as the primary sources housed in the archives.

Secondary Sources

According to Jules Benjamin, secondary sources include “the findings of someone who did not observe the event but who investigated primary evidence.”⁵⁴ Examples of secondary sources are books, textbooks, essays, and articles.⁵⁵ Richard Marius and Melvin Page believe secondary sources are a useful resource for historians because they provide supplemental information about primary sources. Historians can examine previous research on their topic. Secondary sources help historians effectively evaluate primary sources and “when you have gained an understanding of the kinds of questions posed and approaches taken by other historians you will be much more skillful with the primary sources.”⁵⁶ A thorough historical analysis includes “understanding the secondary works historiographically as well as analyzing the primary sources.”⁵⁷

Doing Film History

John O’Connor believes historians should “use film and television in critical ways and to train future generations to view everything they see more critically.”⁵⁸ Motion pictures are indicators of a cultural values and “must be recognized as shapers of historical consciousness.”⁵⁹ Media historians are obliged to “provide updated information within each media industry, brief biographies of leading media personalities,

and new historical interpretations.”⁶⁰ Richard Butsch argues the discoveries from historical research are beneficial to the communication discipline.⁶¹

Researching Auburn’s Film History

The search for Auburn’s motion picture history begins with the *Orange and Blue*. The *Orange and Blue* was the API student newspaper, and issues of the *Orange and Blue* are located on microfilm on the first floor of Auburn University’s Ralph Brown Draughon library. For my thesis, over one hundred issues were examined starting with the first issue in November 1894 and continuing through December 1928. The *Orange and Blue* was distributed weekly on the API campus during the regular academic year (September through May).⁶² Every issue of the *Orange and Blue* was examined for references to motion pictures. Moving pictures were first mentioned in the *Orange and Blue* in 1905 when motion pictures were first shown on campus. However, motion pictures did not become part of the API culture until 1912. In 1912, the YMCA sponsored a weekly motion picture show, which according to the reports became one of the most popular amusements at API. Other organizations on campus used moving pictures to attract members. The *Orange and Blue* contained stories about upcoming movies, editorials on etiquette during the movies, and advertisements for the YMCA Picture Show. I stopped in 1928 because a local commercial theater bought out the college picture program in 1927. This is also an important time in film history as it marks the move from the silent era to the sound era in motion picture production and exhibition.

A major problem with the *Orange and Blue* collection is missing issues. To account for the months of May through August as well as missing issues in the *Orange*

and Blue archives, the *Opelika Daily News* is also utilized. The *Opelika Daily News* was a daily newspaper from the neighboring city of Opelika, which is 10 miles from Auburn and the campus. The *Opelika Daily News* is also on microfilm at the university library. The *Orange and Blue* and *Opelika Daily News* are easily accessible and provide information about Auburn's film history. However, additional primary sources from the library's Special Collections and Archives Department are also utilized in this research.

Special Collections & Archives

The Special Collections and Archives Department is located on the ground floor of Auburn University's Ralph Brown Draughon library and houses manuscript collections and university records. Before entering the archives, researchers have access to the descriptions of the archives and finding aids on the department's website.⁶³ On the web, researchers can use a keyword search or look through alphabetical listing of the manuscript collections and university records. The results from the key word search take the researcher directly to the finding aid. The alphabetical listing search takes the researcher to a brief description of the record with a link to the finding aid.

Within the Special Collections and Archives Department are useful resources for locating primary sources. One is the finding aid, which provides a description and an itemized list of everything within a collection. The finding aid allows researchers to evaluate whether or not they should research a particular collection. Another invaluable resource is the employees who are familiar with and knowledgeable about the archives. However, the large amount of records makes it impossible for the archivists to know everything housed in the archives. For example while researching Auburn's motion picture history, an employee told me that looking in the archives would be a waste of my

time. Yet, I found several primary sources that provided detailed information about Auburn's film history.

While a useful tool, the website has drawbacks. First, some titles appear to be linked to finding aids but when the title is clicked on the user receives an error message that the file has been lost. Second, the Internet finding aid is not as detailed as the original paper finding aid. Keywords and important information about the finding aid are omitted in some of the Internet finding aid files. For example, one of my sources, a taped interview with a former API projectionist George Alfonso Wright, does not mention motion pictures anywhere in his Internet finding aid. The Internet finding aid concentrates more on his amateur photography and does not mention an itemized list of movies he projected, which is clearly labeled in the paper version. Fourth, the online finding aids only provide the call number for the record (e.g. RG 539). However, the accession number is also needed because it gives the exact location of a file within the archive. Employees cannot locate the record without the accession number, which requires the original finding aid. In sum, researchers should not rely solely on the Internet finding aid because it is not as detailed as the paper version, which is easily accessible in the Special Collections and Archives office. Researchers provide a name or collection title to the archivist, and the archivist retrieves the paper finding aid for them. However, the Special Collections and Archives website does provide useful information about their policies, services, contact information, and hours of operation.

Yearbooks, Interviews, and Memoirs

The Glomerata, the API yearbook, is a useful resource. The 1913 and 1914 editions contained advertisements for the YMCA Picture Show that tell readers the

proceeds from the picture show benefit student activities. Another helpful source was issues of *The Auburn Alumnus*, published by API alumnae. *The Auburn Alumnus* had several articles about the YMCA Picture Show and its success on the API campus. The 1913 September issue of *The Auburn Alumnus* remarks the YMCA Picture Show “adds quite a little sum to its funds.”⁶⁴ Editions of *The Glomerata* are located on a reference shelf in the Special Collections and Archives Department and volumes of *The Auburn Alumnus* are in the department’s Alabama Collection.⁶⁵ The Alabama Collection can be accessed without an accession number but still requires departmental assistance to retrieve materials. Although *The Glomerata* and *The Auburn Alumnus* were helpful sources, George Alfonso Wright and William Askew’s memoirs filled in important gaps in Auburn’s film history. George Alfonso Wright was a projectionist at API from 1915-1917, and his collection included a taped interview and a list of all the movies he showed at Langdon Hall. In the interview, Wright discusses his work as a projectionist, and memorable movie events such as *The Birth of a Nation* screening on campus. William Askew’s memoirs also detail *The Birth of a Nation* debut and its impact on API students. Access to Askew’s and Wright’s memoirs requires an accession number and departmental assistance to locate the materials.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The *Orange and Blue*, *Opelika Daily News*, *The Glomerata*, *The Auburn Alumnus*, and personal memoirs of George Alfonso Wright and William Askew provide critical information about Auburn’s motion picture history. In this thesis, I analyzed these primary sources using Allen and Gomery’s model. Analyzing through economic, technological, aesthetic, and social aspects, demonstrates the significant contributions

Auburn's film history makes to the larger history of film, the communication discipline, and Auburn's cultural history.⁶⁷

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- ¹² Kathryn Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 8.
- ¹³ Ibid., 27.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 5.
- ¹⁵ Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 26.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 193.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 202.
- ¹⁹ J. A. Lindstrom, "‘Almost Worse than the Restrictive Measures’: Chicago Reformers and the Nickelodeon," *Cinema Journal* 39 (1999) : 97-98.
- ²⁰ Jeffrey Klenotic, "‘Like Nickels in a Slot’: Children of the American Working Classes at the Neighborhood Movie House," *Velvet Light Trap* 48 (2001) : 20-33.
- ²¹ Ibid., 24.
- ²² Waller, *Main Street Amusements*, 72.
- ²³ Ibid., 95.
- ²⁴ Michael Aronson, "The Wrong Kind of Nickel Madness: Pricing Problems for Pittsburgh Nickelodeons," *Cinema Journal* 42 (2002) : 71-96.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 73.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 88.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 104.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 101-102.
- ²⁹ Fuller, *At the Picture Show*, 27.
- ³⁰ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 23.
- ³¹ On page 26, Gomery states in 1911, the population of Milwaukee was less than 400,000 and more than 200,000 went to the movies weekly.

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- ³² Ibid., 28-29.
- ³³ Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 193.
- ³⁴ Ibid, iv.
- ³⁵ John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press), 3.
- ³⁶ Anthony Brundage, *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1989), 14.
- ³⁷ Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 3.
- ³⁸ Jules Benjamin, *A Student's Guide to History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 2.
- ³⁹ Richard Marius and Melvin Page, *A Short Guide to Writing About History*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2002), 5.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 14.
- ⁴¹ Thomas Felt, *Researching, Writing, and Publishing Local History* (Nashville: American Association for State & Local History, 1976), xi.
- ⁴² Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 61.
- ⁴³ Benjamin, *A Student's Guide to History*, 8.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Marius and Page, *A Short Guide to Writing*, 25.
- ⁴⁶ Brundage, *Going to the Sources*, 14-15.
- ⁴⁷ Benjamin, *A Student's Guide to History*, 49.
- ⁴⁸ Felt, *Researching, Writing, and Publishing Local History*, 20.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 57.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 59.
- ⁵² Ibid., 61.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 59.
- ⁵⁴ Benjamin, *A Student's Guide to History*, 8.
- ⁵⁵ Brundage, *Going to the Sources*, 18.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 60.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ John O'Connor, ed., *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film & Television* (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1990), ix.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.
- ⁶⁰ Michael Emery, "The Writing of American Journalism History," *Journalism History* 10 (1983) : 38-43.
- ⁶¹ Richard Butsch, "Popular Communication Audiences: A Historical Research Agenda," *Popular Communication* 1 (2003) : 15-21.
- ⁶² In 1923 the name of the newspaper changes from the *Orange and Blue* to the *Plainsman*.
- ⁶³ Special Collections and Archives Department's web address:
<http://www.lib.auburn.edu/sca/>
- ⁶⁴ *The Auburn Alumnus*, September 1913, 61.
- ⁶⁵ The Alabama Collection can be accessed during all hours of operation in the department.

⁶⁶ These collections are accessible Monday through Friday from 7:45 AM to 4:45 PM. To have access to these materials on nights or weekends requires advance notice.

⁶⁷ Butsch, "Popular Communication Audiences," 15; Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 202.

IV. ANALYSIS

Moving pictures arrived on the API campus in November 1905. The *Orange and Blue* reported, “The marvelous moving picture entertainment at the auditorium of the A. P. I. last Wednesday night was thoroughly enjoyed by all present;” the audience watched “St. Louis [E]xposition scenes, Illustrated Songs, the Frenchman, Murder and Hanging at Cripple Creek and Russo-Japanese Battle.”¹ Mention of moving pictures disappeared from the *Orange and Blue* until 1912 when the YMCA Picture Show was established. After 1912, moving pictures became a permanent fixture in Auburn; as students easily incorporated moving pictures into their extracurricular activities.

Although Auburn was a rural town, API had plenty of extracurricular activities, which provided students an escape from school and enriched their college education. At least once a year, the *Orange and Blue* reminded students that they needed to spend time away from studying; extracurricular activities helped students to become well-rounded people. The three most popular pastimes at API were sports, academic/social organizations, and amusements.

A highly popular pastime at API was sports, especially football. Students flocked to the games. During football season the newspaper printed the words to football cheers in order for students to learn them and to show team spirit at the games. For away games, the *Orange and Blue* provided information regarding train schedules and information about the cities. If students missed the home game or were unable to go

to the away games, the *Orange and Blue* gave extensive details about each game.² Moreover, near the end of the season, the newspaper had a special football issue full of season highlights and information about the players.

At API, football was a year-round event. Every year before the start of the football season, mass meetings were held in Langdon Hall, the student auditorium. The purpose of these meetings was to motivate the players and fans. During the meetings, coaches rallied student support, the band played, and school spirit was aroused through cheers. The mass meetings served as a kickoff to the football season. In the fall, the college team played, but in the spring the college classes played against each other. Football was an important part of student life. For example, after President Roosevelt visited Tuskegee in 1905, the *Orange and Blue* reported, “Now that the President’s visit is over, the newspaper will have more space for football;”³ Roosevelt’s November visit was right in the middle of football season. Although football was the most popular sport at API, students attended other athletic events such as baseball and track.

Besides sports, students dedicated their free time to academic organizations such as honor societies, literary societies, and clubs affiliated with their majors. Two popular literary societies at API were the Websterian Literary Society and the Wirt Literary Society. Both societies held weekly meetings in which members debated on current issues. For example, the 21 November 1894 issue of the *Orange and Blue* reported the last two Websterian debates were on women’s suffrage and the South’s seceding from the Union.⁴ The Wirt and Websterian Literary Societies competed against each other annually in a Thanksgiving debate. In addition from 1894-1899, the Websterian and Wirt Literary Societies published the *Orange and Blue*.

The literary societies were not the only student organizations. The dramatic club performed several times a year, and other performance-centered organizations included the Glee Club, band, and orchestra. Another important organization was the YMCA, which provided students with spiritual guidance as well as study and reading rooms for their schoolwork. Students also joined organizations affiliated with their major such as the Agricultural Club, Engineering Society, Chemical Society, and Veterinary Club; at meetings, students listened to guest lecturers. Finally, students were members of honor societies and professional and social fraternities. All of these organizations occupied students' free time outside of class. However, another pastime for students was amusements.

Throughout the year, different amusements came to Auburn. One of the most popular was the circus, which the *Orange and Blue* described as a "bigger day than Christmas."⁵ When the Ringling Brothers circus came to Opelika in 1905, API professors excused students from class.⁶ While the circus was a very special event for students, other amusements were a routine part of student life. Dances were a common source of entertainment for students. Dances were held on Friday and Saturday evenings and were sponsored by various organizations. However, the university-sponsored dances were the most popular and were held throughout the year. The opening year dances were called the Sophomore Hop, and the midyear dances were the Junior Prom. Dances at the end of the school year were called the Senior Dance.⁷ Dances remained a traditional and popular amusement for students. In 1924, API issued regulations for the dances, which included rules such as attendance and location. For example, the rules stated "All invitations to young ladies to be present and to participate in the dances shall be approved

by the Social Director of the Faculty . . . no other visiting young lady shall be permitted except by special permission.”⁸ Moreover, the Student Social Committee was in charge of arrangements for the dances, which had to be approved by the Student Council.⁹

A final source of student entertainment was lectures. Fraternities and student organizations such as the YMCA and the Engineering Society brought in guest speakers. The Lyceum Series was a favorite among students; it was an annual event sponsored by API. Throughout the year, students attended concerts and performances, but the majority of the events in the Lyceum Series were lectures, which the *Orange and Blue* described as “pleasure and entertainment for the student body.”¹⁰ Students had the option of buying a season pass or paying for individual performances. In 1905, students paid one dollar for a season pass and a quarter for each lecture; by 1920 the price was three dollars for the season or one dollar for each event. Before moving pictures, students had many extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, dances, and the Lyceum series, which provided entertainment for the student body.

High Class Pictures

Although API students watched moving pictures in 1905, moving pictures did not have a permanent venue in Auburn until 1912. On 2 November 1912, the *Orange and Blue* ran an advertisement, “Did you know that there will be moving pictures under the auspices of the Y. M. C. A. at the School Auditorium at least once a week. Watch the dates. The auditorium will be open at 7 p. m. prompt.”¹¹ Admission was a dime for adults and a nickel for children, and each performance lasted forty minutes.

In 1912, the YMCA Picture Show was the only source of moving pictures in Auburn. If Auburn residents wanted to see moving pictures they had to go to the YMCA

show on campus or travel ten miles to Opelika, home of the Elite Theatre. The Elite Theatre ran advertisements in the *Orange and Blue* and was the “home of high-class pictures . . . nothing cheap but the price-10c.”¹² The Elite promised continuous performances from 3:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. In addition, the *Orange and Blue* ran advertisements for the Walton Theatre, also located in Opelika. The Walton Theatre claimed to be “New, Modern, and Up-to Date . . . Showing Three Reels . . . of the Newest and Best in Photoplays.”¹³ The Walton showed moving pictures daily from 3:00 P.M. to 10:30 p. m. and Saturdays were bargain day at the Walton and audiences watched four reels of moving pictures.¹⁴

Although ten miles separated the YMCA Picture Show from the Walton Theatre both competed for audiences in the *Orange and Blue*. For example, on 25 October 1913, the YMCA Picture Show advertised six reels of film, and the Walton Theatre advertised three reels of film daily and four on Saturday.¹⁵ Subsequent advertisements for the Walton Theatre not only mentioned six reels but also the admission price and coming attractions.¹⁶ Moreover, Mondays were “Button Day” at the Walton Theatre, in which patrons to the Walton received a button.¹⁷ The major difference between Opelika theaters and the YMCA Picture Show was hours of operation. Opelika theaters operated six days a week with continuous shows whereas the YMCA Picture Show operated only on Friday and Saturday evenings. However after 1916, advertisements for the Walton Theatre and Elite Theatre disappeared from the *Orange and Blue*, and the only advertisements for moving pictures were the YMCA Picture Show.

See it in Auburn: Clear this time

The *Orange and Blue* promoted the YMCA Picture Show through features and advertisements. The newspaper informed students “the moving picture shows that are given by the Y. M. C. A. every Friday and Saturday evening are very interesting and educational and well worth the time and price spent.”¹⁸ Occasionally the *Orange and Blue* reported coming attractions on the front page and updates on the picture show. For example, on 15 February 1913, the *Orange and Blue* reported on the front page the newest movie, *At Napoleon’s Command*, and the projector had been fixed “so that the pictures will be clear this time.”¹⁹ The *Orange and Blue* encouraged students to go to the picture show, “Bring your friends to Auburn’s picture show. A laughable evening.”²⁰

The advertisements for the picture show listed dates and movie titles as well as slogans to attract the readers’ eye. One ad read, “A Few of the Things You Get for a Dime at the Picture Show,”²¹ “‘Col. Heeza Liar’ Expects You Around to See Him Saturday Night,”²² “You Risk the Money But the Laugh’s on Us,”²³ and “See It In Auburn First.”²⁴ Col. Heeza Liar was a popular moving picture character during this period, and the YMCA showed several of his movies. In addition to the latest moving pictures, the YMCA Picture Show also ran a Charlie Chaplin film every Friday night and a cartoon on Saturday nights. If the picture show received a well-known film, the *Orange and Blue* wrote an article about the movie. When *Carmen* came, the newspaper told readers, “‘Carmen’ is a masterpiece of historic conception-the most beautiful, most exciting and most artistic photoplay ever produced.”²⁵ In addition, residents from Opelika came to see *Carmen*, “A number of Opelika citizens spent Saturday evening in Auburn for the purpose of seeing Geraldine Farrar in *Carmen*.”²⁶

The YMCA Picture Show was a profitable source of revenue for the YMCA. After a few months in operation, the YMCA treasurer reported in April 1913 the moving picture show generated \$108.01 for the YMCA.²⁷ The YMCA Financial Report from September 27, 1913 to June 12, 1914 stated the picture show generated \$449.80 for the YMCA.²⁸ Because of the picture show profits, the YMCA was “enabled to subsist from the mercenary viewpoint.”²⁹ The YMCA wanted to maintain the popularity of the picture show and told students “Criticisms of both kinds will be greatly received by management as it is your show and we are striving to please your taste.”³⁰

Keen Interest in Movies expands

The YMCA Picture Show was a popular pastime with students. Student organizations listed their meeting times in the *Orange and Blue* and guaranteed their meetings would be over before the picture show started. For example, a description for the Wirt Literary Society meeting stated, “The society meets every Saturday night at 7:30, and meetings last only one hour giving plenty of time to attend the picture show.”³¹ The Agricultural Club had a guest speaker at their Friday night meeting but still made sure their members could attend the picture show, “Dr. Ross will address the club next Friday night at 7:30 . . . Meetings last not more than one hour, giving plenty of time for the picture show.”³²

In an attempt to recruit members the Engineering Society claimed, “its members do not propose to introduce any uninteresting subject. Quite a number of ‘movie’ programs have already been secured, and an enjoyable year is practically assured.”³³ The Engineering Society had an increase in membership because of motion pictures, but attendance only increased during meetings with moving pictures. The *Orange and Blue*

commented that “If the same interest were manifested in the ‘student night’ meetings the Engineering Society would not have trouble in taking the place in Auburn that it holds in other Technical schools.”³⁴ Yet the Engineering Society continued to use motion pictures to attract students and current members to their meetings.³⁵

Besides attracting members, the Engineering Society used moving pictures during their meetings for educational purposes. Generally these films demonstrated an engineering process such as the excavating iron ore, creating steel piping, or manufacturing an automobile. The *Orange and Blue* praised the Engineering Society for their use of moving pictures, “Keen interest was evidenced in this new form of entertainment and the Engineering Society are to be congratulated on the success of their show.”³⁶

Educational films were not the only unique moving pictures shown on the API campus. Occasionally, the YMCA Picture Show had moving pictures that were special events. On Friday 21 January 1916, patrons of the picture show watched *The Eternal City*. For this nine-reel film, admission price was fifteen cents instead of the standard ten-cent admission. A few months later on 25 February, the picture show had *The Battle Cry of Peace*, a war drama and “One of the greatest pictures ever shown in the South.”³⁷ *The Battle Cry of Peace* was a picture show special event because the film was shown on a Tuesday evening and admission was twenty-five cents. However the greatest special event for the YMCA Picture Show was *The Birth of a Nation*.

The Birth of a Nation

The Birth of a Nation is an epic historical film about the rejoining of the divided United States once again into a nation. The film traces historical events such as slavery,

the abolitionist movement, the Civil War, General Lee's surrender, the assassination of President Lincoln, and most importantly to the movie, the formation of the Ku Klux Klan. A fictional drama is mixed with American history as director D. W. Griffith tells the story of two families, the Southern Cameron family and the Northern Stoneman family, who are torn apart by the Civil War. Additionally during the war, Ben Cameron, the eldest son of the Cameron family and Rebel Colonel, falls in love with Elsie Stoneman, the eldest daughter in the Stoneman family. The film dramatically presents the trials and tribulations of the Cameron family during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The hero, Ben Cameron, not only fights fearlessly in the Civil War but also saves the South from Northern carpetbaggers, scalawags, and ferocious "evil minded" Blacks when he forms the Ku Klux Klan to protect the Southern Whites from post war atrocities.

Generally the YMCA Picture Show was held in Langdon Hall on Friday and Saturday evenings and only cost ten cents. However, *The Birth of a Nation* was a special event that required an increase in admission and a different venue. The screening was to take place on Monday, 1 May 1916 in the gymnasium at 3:00 p. m. and 8:00 P.M. Although the gymnasium was API's newest building, the YMCA Picture Show used this building for another reason. The YMCA Picture Show could not show *The Birth of a Nation* at Langdon Hall because of the admission price. Admission cost up to two dollars, which was well above the usual ten-cent fee. According to George Wright, a student projectionist from 1915-1917, Langdon Hall had stipulations regarding admission prices, "The money for Langdon Hall was provided by Mister Langdon provided you

never showed anything that required more than twenty five cents. . . so that's why we showed it in the gymnasium.”³⁸

The Birth of a Nation screening was a major event; the *Orange and Blue* and the *Opelika Daily News* publicized the film. The *Opelika Daily News* had the first advertisement for the film on 13 April 1916 and claimed *The Birth of a Nation* was the “Most Thrilling Photoplay Produced . . . the big treat of the year.”³⁹ The *Orange and Blue* told readers not to miss this opportunity “as many of us will not have another in some time . . . it is well worth the time and money.”⁴⁰ Both newspapers warned their readers to reserve their tickets early because tickets were selling fast.

On 21 April 1916, the *Orange and Blue* dedicated most of its space to *The Birth of a Nation*; the newspaper promised readers the API showing would be exactly the same as the screenings in New York City. This issue contained a synopsis of the film, and claimed *The Birth of a Nation* covered “a wide range of American history . . . The decisive battles of the Civil War are reproduced in faithful detail . . . this work is epoch-making.”⁴¹ There were also articles about director D. W. Griffith and his production techniques, a list of the cast, and the history of the Ku Klux Klan. The next issue on 28 April had three pictures from the movie: a Civil War battle scene, the Ku Klux Klan, and actor Henry Walthall (the Clansman).

Everyday, the *Opelika Daily News* mentioned *The Birth of a Nation* screening through advertisements and in the “Tersely Told” column. The advertisements had relevant information for the screening such as date, time, location, admission price, and where to buy tickets; for Opelika residents the YMCA came at least once a week to sell tickets at Thomason’s Drug Store.⁴² The advertisements called D. W. Griffith the “Eight

wonder of the world,” and informed audiences to see “The rise of the Ku Klux Klan . . . The Coming of the Prince of Peace.” In addition, the advertisement stated the film had 5,000 scenes, used 18,000 people, cost \$500,000, and used 3,000 horses.

Generally, the “Tersely Told” column reminded readers several times throughout the column to buy their tickets for the API screening. For example, on 21 April 1916, the column read, “Don’t Be disappointed- seats selling fast . . . reserve seats for Birth of Nation at Auburn, Monday, May 1st.”⁴³ Six paragraphs later the column read, “Look what’s coming! Birth of a Nation at new gymnasium.”⁴⁴ The column provided the same information as the advertisements as well as details about the screening. In 1916, there were twenty-two traveling exhibitors with *The Birth of a Nation*. The API screening in Auburn was the first stop in a three-city tour; after Auburn, the company went to Columbus and West Point, Georgia. The local newspaper called this company “the finest of all the . . . companies . . . because it carries the same orchestra that played for eight months together at the Colonial Theater in Chicago.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the column had information about the Jitney Bus; the Jitney Bus had two cars available to take residents to Auburn for the show. The cars left Opelika at 1:00, 2:00, 6:00, and 7:00 P.M.; round trip fare cost forty cents during the day and fifty cents for the evening.

The Birth of a Nation screening was an important event for Auburn and the surrounding communities. Unfortunately, the *Orange and Blue* did not print any information about the big event in their 5 May issue. However, the *Opelika Daily News* mentioned the success of the event, “Large crowds of Opelikians took advantage of the beautiful day yesterday and nearness to the College City to go to Auburn to see the Birth of a Nation . . . hundreds of people from all over East Alabama were thrilled.”⁴⁶ On 3

May, the newspaper published a letter from A. E. Hayes, manager of the YMCA; Hayes thanked “the people of Opelika for their generous attendance of the Birth of a Nation Picture Show.”⁴⁷

Although the *Opelika Daily News* reported on the success of the screening, the newspaper did not report that the event almost resulted in a riot. William Askew, a student at API who attended the movie screening recounts,

As the picture unfolded yells of hatred and racism and revenge came from many sections of the room. Then when a Negro man chased a young white girl up an incline to a ledge of rocks from which she jumped to her death a number of irate students quickly made their way to the exits where they formed a band to wreck its revenge upon any black that could be found. They raced past Main Building to meet at Toomer’s Corner.

Police Chief Ben Smith and a number of men he had pressed into service, and a group of town and college leaders had cleared the streets of blacks and would stop a raid on Drake Town.⁴⁸

Although the local police and a talk from the football coach, Donahue, prevented the API students from their pursuit of revenge, Askew states that for days after the film, “only the old, trusted blacks were found on the streets.”⁴⁹

After *The Birth of a Nation*, the YMCA Picture Show returned to its normal schedule of Friday and Saturday evening shows and continued to bring the latest moving pictures and equipment to Auburn. During the fall of 1916, the picture show acquired “two new machines. No more ‘between reels’ waits. Two complete shows Fridays and Saturday.”⁵⁰ In addition, the picture show had the college orchestra perform during the

shows. Although not as large as *The Birth of a Nation* screening, the picture show occasionally had special moving picture events. For example in November 1916, the YMCA Picture Show had a special feature, which was shown on a Wednesday and Thursday evening.⁵¹ Furthermore, the YMCA Picture Show provided a film every year for College Night, which was the first student meeting of the year. At College Night, the students listened to speeches from the football coach, API President, and representatives from various student organizations; the evening concluded with a movie. The YMCA also provided refreshments and the latest moving pictures for College Night.

Not in Keeping with the Auburn Spirit

One problem at the YMCA Picture Show was audience behavior. During the movies, students whistled and yelled at the screen. The *Orange and Blue* thought this behavior was inexcusable, and rudeness at the picture show was a recurring topic. On 21 January 1916, the *Orange and Blue* wrote, “We seem to forget that through our show of ignorance and lack of culture, that we not only make the show unpleasant for many, but too often we place some one in a very embarrassing situation.”⁵² The following week, the *Orange and Blue* reported a decrease in the rude behavior but there was room for improvement.⁵³ However in the fall, whistling at the picture show resurfaced, “Fellows let’s . . . do away with all unnecessary noises at the picture show . . . it’s most embarrassing to the ladies present . . . any visitor might consider these utterances rather strange. Men it is not in keeping with the Auburn Spirit.”⁵⁴ The whistling resulted from actresses wearing bathing suits on the screen.

Whistling and rude noises at the picture show remained a constant problem for the YMCA Picture Show. On 26 September 1917, the *Orange and Blue* warned students

their rude behavior must be stopped or the picture show would take action, “Do you want every film you see censored and clipped to pieces before you see it?”⁵⁵ The article also mentioned how the whistling was a problem last year but had been eliminated. The *Orange and Blue* attributed the rudeness to the new students because “No Auburn man would make himself so obnoxious intentionally.”⁵⁶ The Auburn men once again lost their spirit in January 1919; the *Orange and Blue* reminded students, “Usually there are ladies present at the picture show to whom we owe the utmost respect. It is not a pleasant place for them to go if they are embarrassed.”⁵⁷ The newspaper also thought the rude behavior was unintentional, “Not a man in Auburn does it with forethought, but usually without thinking. No man would do this intentionally because if he is an Auburn man he is a gentleman.”⁵⁸

Ill-Bred Hooter

Although rude behaviors at the picture show was a recurring problem, the *Orange and Blue* never mentioned punishment for the students such as being thrown out or banned from the show. On 31 October 1919, the *Orange and Blue* explained how students misbehaving at the picture show were punished, “It has long been the policy among the students to attempt reforms by appeal to the better feelings of Auburn men, and it is to their credit that this method has always succeeded except for one instance.”⁵⁹ The one instance was “the ill-bred hooter” of the picture show. Apparently, appeals to the hooter’s Auburn spirit did not work, and the newspaper suggested force as a means of punishment, “What form the force will take must be left to the student body. . . reform ought to take the form of force until the last of this disgrace to the college is ousted.”⁶⁰

Open Records and the College Picture Show

By 1919, the only mention of the YMCA Picture Show was stories of rude behavior; advertisements and stories of upcoming films were absent from the *Orange and Blue*. However, on 1 May 1920, an article appeared about the ownership of the picture show. Rumors had been circulating on campus that the picture show was privately owned and operated, but the article in the *Orange and Blue* set the record straight, “The College Picture Show. . . is run entirely by the College and for college interests. . . the profits realized from this show are practically all utilized towards keeping up and improving the College YMCA.”⁶¹ The article told students that the records for the picture show were open to any authorized parties.

This article provided information regarding the picture show besides ownership. First, the article refers to the picture show as the College Picture Show instead of the YMCA Picture Show. Second, the picture show has a new manager, Professor A. L. Thomas. Third, the picture show had gone up in admission price since the last advertisements. Instead of ten cents, the admission costs ranged from fifteen cents to twenty-five cents.

After this article, information about the College Picture Show returned in the *Orange and Blue*. The newspaper published the titles of movies shown at the picture show each week. In 1920, the Picture Show expanded from Friday and Saturday evenings to Friday, Saturday, Monday, and Wednesday evenings. However, the *Orange and Blue* only listed the dates and movie titles. Usually, this information was located on the second page, but occasionally the *Orange and Blue* placed College Picture Show information on the front page. Moreover, the *Orange and Blue* cited the College Picture

Show as a detractor from students' studies, "Some students . . . unintentionally let numerous side issues like picture shows, fraternities, societies, etc. absorb too much time."⁶² The article told students to make academic and not extracurricular activities their main priority.

During the winter of 1921, students watched free moving pictures courtesy of the Military Department; the military films were shown once or twice a week after the College Picture Show. The films were "instructive in nature, explaining the different movements of the drill and will give the rookie a good idea of how things ought to be done."⁶³ Students watched films such as *Squads Right* and *Pistol Firing*. Moreover, advertisements for other movie theaters and articles about picture show behavior resurfaced. The advertisements were for the Grand Theatre in Montgomery, which was 50 miles from Auburn. The Grand Theatre had matinee and evening shows all week as well as the latest films. For example, on 15 October, the advertisement stated "Worth a Trip From Auburn to Montgomery. An opportunity to see the most able actor of the stage in the photoplay production of his successful play."⁶⁴ The film was *Disraeli* starring George Arliss; and the Grand Theatre had advertisements for two weeks in the *Orange and Blue* for this film. A few weeks later, the newspaper had an advertisement for Thanksgiving in Montgomery, which included a list of three movie theaters and the films at each.⁶⁵

Besides advertisements, the newspaper once again discussed the topic of picture show behavior. For example, the *Orange and Blue* had an ironic article titled, "Rules on Picture Show 'Etiquette'" and included helpful tips such as "It is best to read the titles out loud. This shows that you are educated and helps those around you to understand the

picture better” and “When the picture shows an actress in a bathing suit always whistle. It shows that you are a fast young man indeed and the actress may see you if you whistle loud enough.”⁶⁶ On 17 December, the *Orange and Blue* commented on picture show etiquette,

Complaints incessantly coming into this office necessitates some comment on the conduct of the students in Langdon Hall during picture shows. It is a pathetic state of affairs when a college student. . . is not mature enough to stand the sight of silk hosiery without instantaneous outbursts. . . .

These demonstrations in Langdon Hall are directly responsible for the management not booking numerous good pictures that could be gotten if it were not for the manner in which they are accepted by the students.⁶⁷

The article also asked students to refrain from hooting and whistling during the picture shows.

In 1923, advertisements for the College Picture Show returned. The advertisement for the picture show stated, “A Show Every Night Except Sunday. Four Programs Per Week. The Best Pictures booked soon after Release Date. . . Reasonable prices. Be Considerate and Courteous.”⁶⁸ In addition, *The Plainsman* (formerly the *Orange and Blue*) reported the College Picture Show was responsible for thirty-six students’ education, “Thirty six boys who could not attend college without financial assistance have been given work in connection with the picture show which will enable them to complete their courses.”⁶⁹ The Picture Projection Department was in charge of the College Picture Show, and in the fall of 1923, the picture show received a face-lift. Repairs were made in

Langdon Hall, which included a new screen and a major overhaul to the projector.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the picture show had two showings at 7:15 p. m. and 8:15 p. m. The picture show ran every night except Sunday and admission was fifteen and twenty five cents.

Besides exhibiting motion pictures, Auburn was the subject of a newsreel. On 5 May 1923, Pathe News, the American division of the French owned Pathe film company, came to town to cover the annual May Day festivities and the Queen of May coronation. *The Plainsman* reported, "The Pathe News man was there with his camera, and made moving pictures of the ceremony. These pictures will soon be shown in theatres throughout the country, giving great publicity for Auburn."⁷¹ The newspaper claimed the Pathe cameraman did an excellent job of covering the event and "attracted as much attention to himself as any of the regular numbers did."⁷²

After the excitement of the Pathe News cameraman, news regarding moving pictures went back to picture show behavior. *The Plainsman* warned students that family members of students and faculty were present at the picture show and "We are due them some consideration. It would be extremely embarrassing to us were we to have our sisters present at some of the pictures here. Remember that some man's sister is present at all times."⁷³ A few months later *The Plainsman* addressed the problem again, "We are troubled for some time at moving picture shows. What benefit we ask ourselves does the average undergraduate hope to derive from uproariously greeting each acquaintance as he or she-usually she appears on the screen?"⁷⁴ *The Plainsman* said the rude

behavior caused the young women present at the picture show to “respond with the faintest of maidenly blushes.” As in past articles, the newspaper tried to appeal to the students’ Auburn spirit in order to stop the rude picture show behavior.

During the 1924-1925 academic year, the picture show had four programs a week, which started at 6:15 P.M. and ran continuously until 9:30 P.M.⁷⁵ A ten piece student orchestra accompanied the films and all the picture show employees were API students. The College Picture Show had a change in admission price. Depending on the film, admission cost from ten cents to thirty cents.⁷⁶ The advertisements for the picture show included the date, film’s title, genre, and the name of the production company. For example, on 26 September 1924, an advertisement for the picture show read, “Saturday Night, Sept. 27 A Paramount Picture ‘*Unguarded Women*’ Comedy, ‘Call of Game’ Admission 10 and 25 cents.”⁷⁷ Starting in October, the advertisements also included a synopsis of each film.⁷⁸ On 12 December 1924, *The Plainsman* reported a special event at the picture show sponsored by the Real Silk Hosiery Company local student representative. Students watched an educational film on the manufacturing of Real Silk Hosiery followed by a comedy. In addition, two audience members won a pair of Real Silk hosiery.

In 1925, audience members at the picture show were subjected to obnoxious behavior. On 6 February, *The Plainsman* reported, “Every year there is a complaint in regard to the conduct of students at the picture show. . . . We are glad that it is only a few that indulge in. . . cat calling, and other things that tend

to make an undesirable place.”⁷⁹ The newspaper appealed to the students’ Auburn spirit and “the sake of other patrons of the show, the student body, yourself as a gentleman, and for the sake of Auburn” to cease the rude behavior.⁸⁰ A few weeks later, the newspaper reported the behavior had improved because the newspaper had petitioned their Auburn spirit. On 3 March, *The Plainsman* wrote the picture show was the only place of amusement in Auburn and students should not ruin this by yelling suggestive comments or spitting tobacco juice on the floor and walls. The newspaper stated the rude behavior reflects poorly on the student and the school.

Tiger Comes to Town

On Monday 6 September 1926, the Tiger Theatre opened in Auburn. The theatre was located in downtown Auburn and a block north from Langdon Hall. F. A. Rogers, owner of the Tiger Theatre, claimed the Tiger changed programs daily, and *The Plainsman* described the new theatre, “modern in every respect. . . the seats are so arranged that the screen may be clearly seen from all angles.”⁸¹ The Tiger had over four hundred seats, a pipe organ, a fireproof operating room, and the Arctic Cooling System, which circulated cool air throughout the building. After football season, Rogers promised to secure an orchestra to play during the evening movies.⁸² According to *The Plainsman*, the films at the Tiger were “First run pictures. . . shown at all time. . . contracts for exclusive rights having been closed with Paramount, Metro, Producers Distributing Corporation, and Warner Brothers Company.”⁸³ The admission price for the newest theatre was fifteen cents and twenty-five cents depending on the time of the screening. The Tiger

Theatre had continuous performances from 2:00 P.M. to 11:00 P.M. every day except Sunday. Furthermore, Rogers said, “All I ask is that they [the students] preserve order and help me in maintaining the attractive appearance of the place.”⁸⁴

After this article, *The Plainsman* carried movie listings for the College Picture Show and the Tiger Theatre. The ads were on the front page and included information regarding the title, time, and admission price at each theater. The listings were placed on the bottom right and left corner of the newspapers, and every week the Tiger Theater and College Picture Show listing switched places. In addition, the College Picture Show had a large advertisement on the last page of the newspaper each week.

The Tiger Theatre was the only local competition that the College Picture Show had since its inception in 1912. The Tiger Theatre and College Picture Show competed for audience members through the movie listings in the local paper. The Tiger Theatre operated six days a week whereas the College Picture Show had motion pictures on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday evenings. The Tiger Theatre admission ranged from fifteen and twenty-five cents and the College Picture Show cost ten cents and twenty-five cents. In addition, the College Picture Show advertisements promoted a ten-piece orchestra. On 2 October 1926, the College Picture Show had two advertisements on the last page. The first ad reminded readers about the coming attraction, *The Sea Beast* starring John Barrymore and the first installment of the serial *The Fighting Marine*.

However, the other advertisement reminded readers what the College Picture Show did for Auburn and the benefits of attending the show.

The advertisement listed several benefits that the College Picture Show had for Auburn. The profits from the show supported the student band and orchestra and provided the Glee Club, band, and orchestra with music sheets. The advertisement declared the College Picture Show was responsible for making the Auburn band the best in the South.⁸⁵ The picture show donated \$1,000 annually to the YMCA and YWCA. In addition, they paid \$4,200 in academic scholarships to the student employees at the picture show. Furthermore, the money from the College Picture Show went into the student activities fund.⁸⁶

Besides providing information about the benefits of the picture show does for Auburn, the advertisement also listed the benefits of attending the College Picture Show. The advertisement claimed the College Picture Show received, “The best pictures first. . . . The leading ‘day and date’ news service. . . . The outstanding super productions.”⁸⁷ The picture show also had “Plays of the most famous writers-produced by the world’s greatest actors-enhanced by the world’s best music.”⁸⁸

Following the 2 October College Picture Show advertisement, the Tiger Theatre listing on 23 October stated twenty percent of the profits for the 26 October film *Capital Punishment*, starring Clara Bow, went to the Auburn Band. Moreover, on 8 January 1927, *The Plainsman* reported the Tiger Theatre had built a new front for the theatre over the holiday break and in a few months would receive an electric sign. The article also reported the owner F. A. Rogers wanted

to offer “employment to several students who depend on their income for their college education.”⁸⁹ In this same issue, the newspaper reported the Monday movie, *Big Parade*, at the College Picture Show cost up to \$1.50 but benefited the Auburn Band. In addition, the College Picture Show had a special Tuesday night moving picture *The Prince of Tempters*, and *The Plainsman* had a detailed story encouraging readers to see this film.

On Monday evenings, the Tiger Theatre had Amateur Night. The winner received five dollars and on the fifth Monday night the winners from previous weeks competed against each other for twenty-five dollars. The College Picture Show did not have an amateur night, but on 23 February 1927, audience members at the picture show watched *Ben Hur*. According to *The Plainsman*, the film cost four million dollars to make and admission cost up to \$1.50. *Ben Hur* had a 3:00 P.M. matinee and 7:00 p. m. evening show; and students were able to purchase tickets for the event days in advance. Profits from the film benefited the band and athletic scholarships.⁹⁰

The increasing popularity of the Tiger Theatre worried some and on 19 February, a letter to the editor stated, “It seems that when a business devotes its time and money to the best interests of the Auburn students, it should also receive the undivided support of the Auburn student body.” The anonymous letter argued the College Picture Show benefited the Auburn Band, A (Athletic) Club Scholarship Fund, and student employees and “pictures being shown at the college show are the very best. . . the student can’t go wrong attending the

College Show. He's helping our band, and he's providing scholarships for the Auburn Tigers.”⁹¹

The College Picture Show underwent a major change in February 1927; the A Club acquired the rights to the picture show. The purchase of the rights to the picture show cost over \$1,000 and the A Club agreed to share the profits with the Auburn Band. Although A Club members were in charge of the day-to-day operations of the picture show such as projection and ticket sales, professor A. L. Thomas remained a part of the picture show by booking the pictures.⁹² The A Club intended to use the profits from the picture show for athletic scholarships; the band used their share of the profits to purchase new instruments. Under the new ownership, the College Picture Show had matinees with lower prices on Saturdays and encouraged student requests with a “Special Showing Upon Request” slip, which was published in *The Plainsman*. The A Club officially took over the College Picture Show on 25 February.⁹³

The A Club and the band held a mass meeting in March to promote the College Picture Show and its benefits to the student body, “In order that the students might realize the necessity of supporting the College Picture Show, and to acquaint them with the advantages to which the money derived is used.”⁹⁴ Although the profits benefited the band and the A Club, the A Club declared that while they would survive without the picture show money the band could not. At the end of the meeting, the A Club and band provided a movie.

Meanwhile the Tiger Theatre continued to promote their advantages over the College Picture Show such as air conditioning, “we manufacture our own

weather- 20 degrees cooler inside than outside.”⁹⁵ In the same issue, the Tiger Theatre had an advertisement. If students spent fifty cents at select retailers, they received free tickets to the Tiger Theatre; the tickets were good for matinee or evening shows on Tuesday or Thursday at the Tiger.⁹⁶

The End?

In the last issue of *The Plainsman* for the 1926-1927 academic year, the College Picture Show did not have a listing for upcoming shows. Instead, the picture show thanked their patrons, “It has been our aim to offer you attractive and entertaining programs. Your support has demonstrated your loyalty. We appreciate your patronage.”⁹⁷ On 8 September 1927, *The Plainsman* reported API no longer had a College Picture Show. During the summer, the Tiger Theatre purchased “the equipment and operating rights of the College Picture Show. The operation of the later has been discontinued.”⁹⁸ The newspaper also reported the Tiger Theatre was not large enough for audience demands and the owner F. A. Rogers planned on building another theater in Auburn.⁹⁹ The Tiger promised to continue the best selection of movies at popular prices.¹⁰⁰ For the remainder of 1927, *The Plainsman* carried listings for the Tiger Theatre. Ironically, some of the pictures shown during the fall at the Tiger were ones the College Picture Show had shown months earlier such as *The Big Parade* and *Ben Hur*.

Conclusion

The year 1927 would mark a major change in motion picture history as the “talkie” would burst upon the cinematic screen and forever drown-out the magnificent silent age. Film had exploded onto the cultural landscape in the late

1800s and by the late 1920s it had established itself as the premiere form of commercial mass entertainment in the U. S. and much of the world. In 1927, the Golden Age of Cinema was dawning and the foundation of the economic system that would rule the epoch was well established.

References

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- ¹ *Orange and Blue*, 14 November 1905, 5.
 - ² During football season, the last game played was a front-page story in the *Orange and Blue*. Usually these stories continued unto another page.
 - ³ *Orange and Blue*, 4 November 1905, 3.
 - ⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 November 1895, 1.
 - ⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 November 1894, 3.
 - ⁶ *Ibid.*, 16 November 1905, 2.
 - ⁷ API had school dances for many years, but in 1924 the school made these distinctions. For more information see *The Plainsman*, 9 May 1924, 2.
 - ⁸ *The Plainsman*, 9 May 1924, 2.
 - ⁹ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁰ *Orange and Blue*, 19 October 1905, 3.
 - ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2 November 1912, 4.
 - ¹² *Ibid.*, 28 September 1912, 4; 19 October 1912, 4.
 - ¹³ *Ibid.*, 19 April 1913, 8.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 October 1913, 4.
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 November 1913, 4; 29 November 1913, 6.
 - ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 December 1913.
 - ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 November 1912, 4.
 - ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1912, 1.
 - ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 October 1913, 1.
 - ²¹ *Ibid.*, 5 November 1914, 4.
 - ²² *Ibid.*, 22 October 1914, 4.
 - ²³ *Ibid.*, 15 October 1914, 4.
 - ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 November 1914, 4.
 - ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 November 1915, 1.
 - ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 December 1915, 4.
 - ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 April 1913, 8.
 - ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 November 1914, 4.
 - ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 October 1915, 4.
 - ³⁰ *Ibid.*
 - ³¹ P. O. Davin, "Wirt Literary Society," *Orange and Blue*, 1 October 1915, 3.
 - ³² R. E. Cammack, "Agricultural Notes," *Orange and Blue*, 8 October 1915, 4.
 - ³³ H. L. P. King, "Engineering Notes," *Orange and Blue*, 8 October 1915, 4.
 - ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 March 1916, 2.
 - ³⁵ *Ibid.*
 - ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3 December 1914, 4.
 - ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 February 1916, 4.
 - ³⁸ George Alfonso Wright, interview by Rebecca Seaman, tape recording, n. d., George Alfonso Wright Collection, Auburn University, Auburn, AL.
 - ³⁹ *Opelika Daily News*, 13 April 1916, 2-3.
 - ⁴⁰ *Orange and Blue*, 15 April 1916, 2.
 - ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21 April 1916, 1:3.

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- ⁴² *Opelika Daily News*, 22 April 1916, 2.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21 April 1916, 4.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 April 1916, 4.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 May 1916, 4.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1916, 4.
- ⁴⁸ William K. Askew, *Class of 1917, "World War I Class": A History 1913-1982* (Auburn: Auburn University, 1983), 29.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30
- ⁵⁰ *Orange and Blue*, 6 October 1916, 4.
- ⁵¹ The advertisements did not list the title of the film for the special feature.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 21 January 1916, 2.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4 February 1916, 2.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 October 1916, 2.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 September 1917, 2
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31 January 1919, 2.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31 October 1919, 2.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1 May 1920, 3.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 22 January 1921, 2.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 29 January 1921, 1.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 October 1921, 4.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 November 1921, 4.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 March 1921, 2.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 December 1921, 2.
- ⁶⁸ *The Plainsman*, 2 November 1923, 3.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 September 1923, 5.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2 May 1924, 1.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 4
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 18 April 1924, 2.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 May 1924, 4.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 September 1924, 2.
- ⁷⁶ It is not clear when the restrictions on Langdon Hall changed to allow an event that cost thirty cents to occur in Langdon Hall.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 September 1924, 2.
- ⁷⁸ For an example of the new advertising format see 10 October 1924 issue of *The Plainsman*. The new advertisement is located on page 2.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 February 1925, 2.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 9 September 1926, 1.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 2 October 1926, 6.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 8 January 1927, 1.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 12 February 1927, 6.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid., 26 February 1927, 1.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 5 March 1927, 6.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., 12 March 1927, 1.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 30 April 1927, 1.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid., 3
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., 21 May 1927, 1.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 8 September 1927, 1.
- ⁹⁹ It is not clear if F. A. Rogers built another theater in Auburn.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The central argument of this thesis is the significant contributions Auburn's film history makes to the larger history of film, the communication discipline, and Auburn's cultural history.¹ This thesis as a historical analysis investigates the social, economic, technological, and aesthetic aspects of Auburn's film history using Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery's model. This analysis has led to a better understanding of motion picture history and the significance of conducting local film histories. Furthermore, it has provided a fuller perspective of the history, society, and culture of rural Alabama in the early twentieth century.

Social Aspects

Social aspects answer questions about the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures such as: Who made films and why? Who saw the films, how, and why? What was seen, how, and why? Allen and Gomery state "the popularity of film as a mass entertainment medium has prompted both film and social historians to regard the movies as a unique source of insight into national cultures."² The YMCA Picture Show/College Picture Show not only supplied students with entertainment but also provided details about Auburn society.

Entertainment

Before moving pictures, API students had other amusements such as sporting events, dances, social clubs, academic organizations, and theatre. When moving pictures

became a permanent fixture in Auburn in 1912, students flocked to Langdon Hall to watch moving pictures. At first moving pictures were a hot fad in popular entertainment on campus; clubs and organizations scheduled their meetings before the picture show in order to keep their members. However, the craze faded and students incorporated moving pictures into their regular activities. In 1912, the YMCA Picture Show had moving pictures on Friday and Saturday evenings. By 1927, the College Picture Show had screenings several nights a week, but never on Sunday. From 1912-1926, the picture show at API was the only source of motion pictures in Auburn. The picture show provided the latest moving pictures and an escape from schoolwork for API students. Moreover, the YMCA/College Picture Show imparts information regarding Auburn society in the early twentieth century.

Behaving at the Picture Show

The biggest problem for the student picture show was audience behavior. The articles in the *Orange and Blue* and *The Plainsman* reveal that certain students could not control their behavior at the movies and would yell and whistle at the screen. The rude behavior provides insight into the societal rules and etiquette for this small rural community. Auburn culture insisted that yelling and screaming were unacceptable behavior for a college student; students should behave like adults and respect the other patrons. Instead of punishment, appeals to the student's Auburn spirit were used in an effort to control the rude behavior. Moreover, the newspaper articles served as a warning for the ill-behaved students to redeem themselves; the articles stated that the rude behavior was the result of ignorant freshman. According to the newspaper, an attack on students' Auburn spirit curtailed the rude behavior faster than any other punishment; the

students' highest honor was their Auburn spirit. Moreover, students were warned not to misbehave at the picture show because of the presence of ladies; a woman at the picture could be the sister of a classmate or a professor's daughter or wife. In Auburn, etiquette and proper respect towards men and women was of the utmost importance for API students, unless the men and women were Black.

The Birth of a Nation and Auburn's African American community

The 1 May 1916 debut of *The Birth of a Nation* on the API campus resulted in a near riot. Throughout the film, the racist stereotypical images and behaviors of the Black characters in the film upset the students, especially the scene in which a Black man chases a White woman off of a cliff. Auburn was not the only city in America to react violently to D. W. Griffith's film. Across the country, the NAACP had a campaign against the film and its racist images. The film was banned in Ohio and the NAACP was able to ban the film in other areas of the country as well.³ Riots occurred in protest of the racist images in the film. For example, at the New York premiere, the NAACP protested the film and "picketed the theater calling the movie racist propaganda."⁴ On 17 April 1915, after viewing *The Birth of a Nation*, a riot occurred at Boston's Tremont Theatre. African American Audience members threw eggs at the screen and stink bombs into the audience in protest of the movie. The Boston police force sent over two hundred officers to the Tremont Theatre that evening because of the protests inside and outside the movie theatre.

The success of *The Birth of a Nation* changed the filmmaking standard and proliferated negative representations of African Americans in film.⁵ The racist stereotypes of African American characters became the Hollywood standard for decades.

Jim Pines argues, “*The Birth of a Nation* succeeded in portraying the deepest of racist fears and obsessions embedded in the American psyche under a single all embracing construct, with remarkable effectiveness. . . grand celebration of anti Black racism.”⁶

Louis Giannetti states the film “caused irreparable social damage. It was widely used throughout the 1920s by the KKK at recruiting rallies.”⁷ *The Birth of a Nation* portrayed African Americans as uncivilized, highly sexualized, and unintelligent.⁸ Vincent Rocchio states “Griffith created a film where identification is reserved for Whites and excludes Blacks. . . deny the very existence of the black spectator.”⁹ Moreover, Rocchio argues a major theme in the film is “Africans themselves are to blame not only for slavery but for the problems that slavery cost White people, problems that will be shown as the film continues.”¹⁰

Although *The Birth of a Nation* is racist film and organizations such as the NAACP protested against the film, it was a box office success. Robert Sklar states, “Griffith’s film had pleased the dominant cultural and political powers of its time.”¹¹ Audiences loved the film and cheered for the Ku Klux Klan, “The final ride of the Klan was an impressive piece of film propaganda. . . . Indeed it was so stirring that audiences screamed in delight, cheering for the White heroes and booing, hissing, and cussing at the Black militants.” The film was popular across the country, and in some areas such as the South, *The Birth of a Nation* ran consecutively for twelve years.¹² For many filmgoers, especially in the South, the portrayals of African American characters did not appear to be racist because of the Jim Crow laws, segregation, and the legally unchallenged lynching of African Americans.

No doubt, the riot in Boston was caused by the same scenes that caused the near riot in Auburn. Only in Boston, Blacks rioted in protest. In Auburn, Whites rioted in reaction to a fictional plot that seemed all too probable to them. Interestingly, this was not the first such event to occur in Auburn. Only a few years before, Auburn White male students had rioted and gone looking for a Black man who had supposedly not shown the proper respect to their comrades at the local train station. It was their intent to whip the Black man in public (as was the custom of whipping slaves who did not obey their masters). A mob of seventy-five students and town citizens went at night to the Black man's house to carry out their plan of whipping him. However, when the Black man would not come out of his home, the mob decided to take him out by force. In defense, the Black man fired a gun into the crowd. The newspaper reported that the mob did not intend to shoot the man, but "they had 'prepared for an emergency' and immediately after the Negro opened fire there was heard a continuous popping of pistols, the noise of which was drowned at intervals by the booming of a Winchester."¹³

During the altercation, about fifty shots were fired, and the city and faculty authorities arrived to stop the riot. The Black man who was supposed to be whipped was shot in the wrist; the newspaper felt "the Negro that did the insulting richly deserved what he got."¹⁴ The API students responsible for the mob were punished according to school rules, which the newspaper felt was highly unfair. The *Orange and Blue* felt the mob was justifiable because the Black man was a "worthless and desperate character."¹⁵ The mob was:

in accordance with the principles governing Southern gentlemen that he should have been summarily punished for his threatening impertinence. Doubtless some

will put on a horrified look and stand aghast at what they consider “a species of flagrant lawlessness, accompanied by wanton cowardice’ but only those who have never seen the growth of negro domination and the concomitant evils.”¹⁶

The newspaper argued the students should not be punished for defending their manhood.

African Americans were second-class citizens in Auburn and not represented truthfully in the student newspaper or in Auburn society. The Wirt and Webster literary societies debated whether or not the “negro should be disfranchised. The Wirts will fight for the suffrage of ‘our brother in black,’ while the Websterians will do their uttermost to send him to political oblivion.”¹⁷ When a string of robberies occurred in Auburn, the newspaper blamed “the shiftless, lazy Negroes that daily congregate on our streets.”¹⁸ The *Orange and Blue* had countless racist jokes about Blacks’ ignorance and stupidity. Even the early football cheers contained racist material, such as “Nigger, nigger hoe potato!”¹⁹ or “Ram! Ram! Bully nigger.”²⁰

In addition to racist jokes, another source of entertainment for API students was guest lecturers skilled in Negro dialect. Polk Miller was a popular entertainer for students, and was known for his Negro dialect songs and “illustrating the evolution of the negro from the old-time slave darkey to the modern educated ‘coon’ were well selected in a manner true to life.”²¹ The *Orange and Blue* described his performance, “Taken as a whole, the audience were treated to a very realistic picture of ante bellum days, which they will long remember with pleasure.”²² For years, Miller visited and entertained API students with his talents.²³ One of his most popular performances included stories about “the wonderful love existing between slave and master, how Christmas was celebrated with slaves, and how great was their joy to receive gifts from their masters.”²⁴

Furthermore, minstrel shows in which White performers put on black face were well liked in Auburn.

In addition to entertainment, African Americans were the topic of many lectures on campus. Organizations such as the YMCA brought guest lecturers to discuss issues such as “the negro problem” and “the negro vs. the nigger.”²⁵ In 1915, the Civic League organized a Committee on Work Among Negroes, which organized meetings on health and sanitation for the African American community. On 30 June 1915, a special film series for Blacks was shown at Frazer hall. The focus of the films was not for entertainment but “to help the educational, health, and any other good cause among the colored people.”²⁶ Admission for these educational films was ten cents. Furthermore, Blacks went to the College Picture Show during the summer.²⁷ The summer picture show was outside Langdon Hall. Benches were placed on the lawn and a white sheet was used as a screen. Whites sat on the front side of the sheet and Blacks sat on the other side, which made it nearly impossible to read the intertitles because they were backwards. In addition, Blacks had to sit on the ground to watch the film.²⁸

On 1 May 1916, *The Birth of a Nation* debuted at API. The racist images in the film, particularly when an African American character in the film chases a White girl off a cliff ignited several API students to band together and seek revenge upon the Black community in Auburn. It is naïve to argue that *The Birth of a Nation* caused racial hatred in Auburn, but it is interesting to see how this epic motion picture was received by its Auburn audience. The resulting tale is one of racist stereotypes working within a young college age group that was already prone to violence against Black citizens. Luckily, the authorities were able to reason with the mob and no violence was reported. However, it

should be pointed out that the authorities did not stop the riot, they merely argued against it. Indeed it was probably the speech by the football coach that made the real difference between life and death for many Blacks that night. This epic film and its premiere in Auburn have historical interest to both the early exhibition of film and to the ongoing discussion of how stereotypes continue to communicate racist ideas and feelings of ethnic hatred. No doubt, the stereotypes are less overt now, but the feelings are just as strong because the culture remains fundamentally racist.

The near riot in Auburn, Alabama triggered by *The Birth of a Nation* screening provides new information to film history, especially when considering the impact *The Birth of a Nation* had on the country. The racist images in the film caused different reactions. In Boston, African Americans protested the racist images in the film. In Auburn, White students rioted in fear of the powerful negative images of African Americans in the film; the behavior of the African American characters against the White characters was unacceptable to the group of API students. Jack Spears states the controversy over *The Birth of a Nation* continues decades after the film's initial release and "the bitterness that it causes has never been erased. Even today it is seldom shown publicly and then mostly to film scholars."²⁹

Technological Aspects

The technological aspect of Allen and Gomery's model examines technologies used in motion picture production and exhibition. Using this model, historians trace the creation and implementation of these technologies. In regards to motion picture exhibition, this Auburn study adds to the body of knowledge because it does not follow traditional film exhibition history. Auburn had moving pictures as early as 1905, which

was during the nickelodeon phase of motion picture exhibition history. However, Auburn did not have a permanent venue for moving pictures until 1912.

As an exhibitor, the College Picture Show was unique. First, Langdon Hall, where the movie pictures were shown, was not devoted entirely to moving pictures. Langdon Hall was used year round for other student events such as pep rallies, concerts, lectures, and ceremonies. At times, the picture show was rescheduled due to the Lyceum series or an official school event that needed Langdon Hall. Second, the profits from the picture show went to student organizations. When the picture show started in 1912, the proceeds went to the YMCA, but within a few years the proceeds went to the API band and the A Club, which gave scholarships to student athletes.

Auburn resisted the historic trend to movie theaters until the 1920s; the Tiger Theater, built in 1926, was the first commercial competition for the College Picture Show. For over a decade, the College Picture Show was the only source for moving picture entertainment, and was successful. Moreover the new Tiger Theater did not follow the current trends in motion picture exhibition at the time. During this period, the studio owned picture palace was the latest venue for motion pictures. However, the Tiger Theater was an independent commercial theater, not a picture palace. Auburn passed over the nickelodeon and picture palaces phases of motion picture exhibition history. Yet, the picture show and Tiger Theatre were two successful motion picture exhibitors nonetheless.

Moreover, this Auburn study brings a unique perspective to rural motion picture exhibition history. Most of the scholarly research about the silent era of motion picture exhibition focuses on urban areas, and there is very little research about motion pictures

in rural areas.³⁰ During this era, urban cities received the best and most current motion pictures while the rural areas received whatever the distributors could or would offer. Auburn's history adds to the body of knowledge. The picture show claimed to have the latest moving pictures; however, *The Birth of a Nation* screening proves that Auburn did not receive the newest moving pictures as early as their urban counterparts. *The Birth of a Nation* premiere occurred on 8 February 1915 in Los Angeles; the Auburn screening was on 1 May 1916. In addition, the Alabama urban cities of Birmingham and Montgomery had *The Birth of a Nation* in theaters months before the May screening at API. Potamianos argues, "the story of film distribution and the ways in which movies penetrated rural America can enhance the story of cinema history."³¹ Auburn's *The Birth of a Nation* screening supplies a new footnote in the larger national story. Auburn's motion picture history supplements film history and provides detailed information on how rural communities differed from their urban counterparts in regards to motion picture exhibition.

Economic Aspects

In analyzing film history, economic aspects inspect "who pays for movies to be made, how, and why."³² Economic aspects also examine "patterns of ownership and organization, in particular. . . strategies of exhibition."³³ From 1912-1926, the only source for motion pictures in Auburn was the picture show. Students and residents could watch movies in the neighboring town of Opelika, but it was ten miles away from Auburn. Because the YMCA/College Picture Show did not have any competitors, it did very well financially. However, all of the profits went to the operation of the picture show and to student organizations. At first, the YMCA sponsored the picture show and

reported profits within a few months of operation. A few years later, the picture show supported the student band and the A Club; the picture show money purchased new instruments and music for the band. Furthermore, student employees of the College Picture Show received free scholarships to API. The picture show both amused and supported the students.

In 1926, the College Picture Show finally had some commercial competition. The Tiger Theatre opened in the fall and would change motion picture exhibition in Auburn forever. The Tiger Theatre and College Picture Show fought for audiences in *The Plainsman*. Every week, the newspaper contained the showing times, admission prices, and film titles for each theater. Moreover, the College Picture Show had a large advertisement on the back page of the newspaper. However, the Tiger Theatre was new, opened six days a week, and had air conditioning. The College Picture Show had been in operation for over ten years in the same building, which also was used for other student events. In addition, the College Picture Show operated four days a week and did not have air conditioning. The Tiger Theatre took full advantage of their air conditioning and included it in their newspaper advertisements.

One technique the Tiger Theatre used to attract patrons was donating part of the profits to worthwhile causes such as the student band or the Auburn Grammar School (through the auspices of the Auburn Woman's Club).³⁴ The College Picture Show also appealed to women moviegoers. On 9 May 1927, the picture show had a special mother's day screening in which mothers of students received free admission. The advertisement promised students, "Reserved seats, Flowers, Artistic Decorations, a Most Beautiful Picture-EVERYTHING to make your mother enjoy the evening!"³⁵ In

addition, during the summer of 1927, the College Picture Show had a Red Cross Show every Tuesday night. The films were supplied for free and all of the profits went to flood victims. According to the *Opelika Daily News*, the College Picture Show was one of the theaters across the country participating in this worthy cause.³⁶

The Tiger Theatre and the College Picture Show used *The Opelika Daily News* to attract residents to come to Auburn. Advertisements for both venues promised the citizens of Opelika that their movies were worth the ten-mile trip. One advertisement for the College Picture Show “cordially” invited Opelika residents to see *The Love of Sunya* starring Gloria Swanson.³⁷ Both venues promised the latest moving pictures, and the admission price was roughly the same for each venue, depending on the motion picture.

The battle between the College Picture Show and the Tiger Theatre ended in the summer of 1927 when the Tiger Theatre bought the rights to the College Picture Show. The Tiger Theatre became the only venue for motion pictures in Auburn. In less than a year, the Tiger had eliminated its competition. For over a decade, the College Picture Show was the source for moving pictures in Auburn. However, the College Picture Show could not handle this commercially cooler competition.

Aesthetic Aspects

The last aspect of Allen and Gomery’s model is aesthetic. Although aesthetic aspects include film’s history as an art form, Allen and Gomery define the aesthetic aspect, “much more generally to include the study of all the ways film technology has been used to give sensory (aesthetic) pleasure and to create meaning for audiences since the beginning of movies.”³⁸ During the Nickelodeon Era, narrative films became very popular; production on documentaries and educational films decreased during this

period.³⁹ However, Kathryn Fuller argues non-narrative films remained popular in small towns, and some small towns preferred educational films. In Auburn, educational films were well received. The Engineering Society used industrial films to attract audiences, and their plan was successful. Student attendance was higher at meetings with moving pictures.

Fuller states industrial films were “a promising medium of public education and advertising because of the movies’ ability to bring the factory and its products to life.”⁴⁰

Langdon Hall was used on several occasions for industrial and educational films.

Students watched films about making rubber, panty hose, and military training.

Moreover, different local groups such as the American Legion sponsored these films.

For example, on 25 April 1923, the film *Flashes of Action*, which reproduced actual battle scenes and “pictures of doughboys going over the top at the zero-hour.”⁴¹

Occasionally the local churches sponsored moving pictures at Langdon Hall.⁴²

According to Kathryn Fuller, churches were a popular source for moving pictures in

small towns because “Church shows represented to some social critics. . . a way to

remake the moviegoing experience into a more ‘respectable’ small-town, middle-class

activity.”⁴³ Although mainstream motion pictures were popular in Auburn, students and

residents were able to watch alternative films also.

Conclusions

According to Allen and Gomery, researching local film history can “reshape our thinking on vital questions of economic and social history . . . but can also add to a more

general understanding of a particular city or town.”⁴⁴ Auburn’s film history makes

significant contributions to film history. As a small rural community, Auburn’s film

history does not follow traditional film history in regards to motion picture exhibition. Many cities evolved from nickelodeons to picture palaces, but Auburn did not have either one. Instead, Auburn's only source of motion picture exhibition was through API and the College Picture Show. In addition, Langdon Hall was used for other student events. For over a decade, the picture show was the only venue for moving pictures in Auburn. In 1926, Auburn finally received another motion picture outlet, the Tiger Theatre.

Furthermore, Auburn's screening of *The Birth of a Nation* in 1916 adds significant information about racism and film in the South during this period. Students rioted against the African American community as a result of the racist stereotypes in the film, but the film did not cause the racism. The culture in Auburn was already racist against Blacks. The legacy of mistrust and even hatred by Whites for Blacks was embedded in Auburn's social fabric.

It is interesting to note that the newspaper chided Auburn men for whistling at women on the screen during the picture show, but that violence against Blacks was not deemed important enough to discuss. *The Birth of A Nation* riot was not even mentioned in the paper. It is interesting, but not surprising. The same White hegemonic power that scolded White college men for embarrassing women with rude behavior also glorified and perpetuated a mistrust and violent attitude toward Blacks. This thesis shows not only how Auburn's film history is unique, but also how its culture was status quo in terms of racism against Blacks.

Limitations

There were several limitations in researching information on Auburn's motion picture history. First, primary sources such as the *Orange and Blue* or *The Plainsman*

were incomplete due to missing issues. In addition, the student newspaper was published only once a week, which made it difficult to find more detailed information about certain events such as *The Birth of a Nation* screening. Second, I did not have access to financial records or other financial information regarding operation of the College Picture Show or the Tiger Theatre and its purchase of the College Picture Show. Third, information about alternative films in Auburn was limited to information reported in the *Opelika Daily News* and *Orange and Blue*.

Future Research

In my thesis, I examined Auburn's film history from 1894-1928. However, Auburn's film history does not end there. Researchers need to examine Auburn's film history after this period for several reasons. First, my research only examines Auburn during the Silent Era of motion pictures. In the 1927, the Tiger Theatre bought the rights to the College Picture Show. Due to the overwhelming popularity of the Tiger Theatre, the owner claimed he had to build a second theater. Eventually, the Tiger Theatre received competition in downtown Auburn. Eventually Auburn had three motion picture theaters all within two city blocks of Langdon Hall. A drive in theater opened, ran successfully for years and closed. The advent of a mall multiplex in the 1970s led to the closing of all three downtown theaters. In the 1990s, a state of the art multi screen theater meant the demise of the mall multiplex. Through all of this and continuing today, Auburn's campus has been the site of regular free movies to students. Indeed, Langdon Hall was put back into the free movie business for decades.

Researching local histories such as Auburn's "yield information regarding the history of film, but can also lead to a more general understanding of a particular city or

town.”⁴⁵ The research and analysis on Auburn’s film history provides important historical information and explicates a mostly ignored aspect of the larger history of film.

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- ¹ Richard Butsch, "Popular Communication Audiences: A Historical Research Agenda," *Popular Communication* 1 (2003) : 15; Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1985), 202.
- ² Allen and Gomery, 157.
- ³ Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 58; Jim Pines, *Blacks in Films: A Survey of Racial Themes and Images in the American Film* (London: Studio Vista, 1975), 29.
- ⁴ Donald Bogle, "Black Beginnings: From *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *The Birth of a Nation*," in *Representing Blackness Issues in Film and Video*, ed. Valerie Smith (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 22.
- ⁵ Pines, *Blacks in Films*, 12; Louis Giannetti, *Masters of the American Cinema* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1981), 67.
- ⁶ Pines, 11-12.
- ⁷ Giannetti, *Masters of the American Cinema*, 67.
- ⁸ Vincent Rocchio, *Reel Racism: Confronting Hollywood's Construction of Afro-American Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 50.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ¹¹ Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 362.
- ¹² Giannetti, *Masters of the American Cinema*, 67.
- ¹³ *Orange and Blue*, 6 March 1895, 1. There are two versions of this issue of the *Orange and Blue*. The first version had the story about the riot, but the professors censored the newspaper. The second and final version of this issue does not contain a story about the riot.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 October 1897, 2.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 October 1897, 2.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 November 1912, 1.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 October 1909, 89.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 8 April 1900, 3.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 8 May 1895, 3.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 November 1895, 2.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 March 1913, 3; 8 November 1913, 3.
- ²⁶ *Opelika Daily News*, 26 June 1915, 3.
- ²⁷ It is unclear if Blacks attended the College Picture Show during the school year.
- ²⁸ George Alfonso Wright, interview by Rebecca Seaman, tape recording, n. d., George Alfonso Wright Collection, Auburn University, Auburn, AL.
- ²⁹ Jack Spears, *The Civil War on the Screen and Other Essays* (Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1977), 36.
- ³⁰ George Potamianos, "Movies at the Margins: The Distribution of Films to Theaters in Small-Town America, 1895-1919," in *American Silent Film: Discovering*

Marginalized Voices, ed. Gregg Bachman and Thomas J. Slater (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002, 9-26).

³¹ Potamianos, *Movies at the Margins*, 25.

³² Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 38.

³³ Douglas Gomery, "Thinking About Motion Picture Exhibition," *The Velvet Light Trap* 25 (Spring 1990): 3.

³⁴ *Opelika Daily News*, 17 May 1927, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 May 1927, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 May 1927, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 May 1927, 6.

³⁸ Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 37.

³⁹ Kathryn Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 75.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴¹ *Orange and Blue*, 5 May 1923, 1.

⁴² William J. Askew, *Class of 1917, "World War I Class": A History 1913-1982* (Auburn: Auburn University, 1983), 29.

⁴³ Fuller, *At the Picture Show*, 85.

⁴⁴ Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 193.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

VI. EPILOGUE

In researching Auburn's film history, Auburn University's Special Collections and Archives Department was a helpful resource, especially William Askew's and George Alfonso Wright's accounts of their time watching moving pictures at API. Therefore, I want to add my personal account to assist future research into Auburn's motion picture history. This chapter is not historical research but my personal knowledge about issues relating to film at Auburn University.

RTVF at Auburn

Jay Sanders

Across the United States in the 1950s, film studies came to colleges and universities, and Auburn University is a perfect example because of Jay Sanders. During his time at Auburn, Sanders was the first person to teach courses in film and mass communication.¹ In addition to championing film studies, Sanders worked in the television industry. Sanders wrote and produced *Cabbages and Kings*, a children's program for Alabama Educational Television network in the late 1950s. Sanders was involved in developing educational television at Auburn and made significant contributions to radio programming in Auburn.² From 1952-1985, Sanders taught over 19,000 students and was monumental in creating film studies at Auburn University. In 1985, the Auburn University Board of Trustees designated Sanders as a professor emeritus; Sanders retired in the spring. On Thursday, 20 December 2001, Sanders passed

away, but his legacy lives on in the annual Jay Sanders Film Festival sponsored by the Auburn Film Society.³

Timothy R. White and J. Emmett Winn

In 1988, Timothy R. White started at Auburn University and advanced the film curriculum. White changed the course Cinema and Society to Introduction to Film Studies. In addition, White created the History of International Cinema course and taught several special topic courses in film; his courses emphasized film studies from a formalist perspective. Moreover, White resurrected the International Film Series. White left Auburn in 1992 and Winn continued White's work in advancing the RTVF curriculum. Winn added a film theory course at the graduate level. However, Winn's greatest advancement for the program was the creation of the Auburn Film Society.

Auburn Film Society

On 1 June 1992, the Auburn Film Society (AFS) was created to bring rare, classic, and foreign films to the Auburn community. The AFS became a chartered organization on 25 July 1993. The AFS specialized in showing films that students could not see at the free movies in Langdon Hall or at the local theater. On 9 July 1992, the AFS showcased their first film, Charlie Chaplin's *The Immigrant*; the film was shown in 1203 Haley Center. The second film was D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* on 6 October. The third film shown on 17 November highlighted German cinema and Werner Nekes' film *Uliisees*. In 1993, the AFS screened international films such as Sergei Eisenstein's *October (Ten Days That Shook The World)* on 19 January, Werner Herzog's *Land of Silence and Darkness* and *Stroszek* on 26 January, and an evening of Czechoslovakian animation on 9 February. From 12-16 April, the AFS and the German

Department cosponsored Five Nights of Austrian Cinema; for an entire week the AFS and the German Department screened Austrian films. The films shown were *A Woman's Pale Blue Handwriting*, *Franza*, *The Quiet Ocean*, *Frau Berta Garlan*, and *Tales From the Vienna Woods*.

In 1994, the AFS film schedule included Rene Clair's *I Married a Witch* on 18 January, John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* on 1 February, Ted Post's *High 'Em High*, and Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris* on 1 March. On 17 May, the AFS presented Maximilian Schell's *Marlene*. In 1995, the AFS showcased Axel Corti's trilogy *Where To and Back* from 22-24 May; on 25 May the AFS screened *Anima-Symphony Fantastique* by Titus Leber. AFS events had free admission and were open to the public, and all of the screenings were 16 mm prints.

In addition to screening classic films, AFS started a Meet the Filmmaker Series in 1999.⁴ The series provided a question and answer session with independent filmmakers. The first Meet the Filmmaker Series occurred on 17 February with film producers Bruce Kuerten and John DiJulio. On 13 April 1999, filmmakers Jeff Weaver and Eric Streit screened their film *Main Street* in Langdon Hall. The 28 April session featured Auburn graduates Emily Carpenter and Jamie Hendrix Collins; they showed clips and discussed their film *Southern Heart*. Hal Hays, an Auburn graduate, and Angie Wilson screened their independent documentary film *Music in Their Bones: The People and Music of Sand Mountain* for the AFS series on 13 May. The film was directed by Norton Dill, a Birmingham filmmaker who has spent many years helping out the AFS.

The last Meet the Filmmaker Series occurred in 2000 with *Lunchbox Blues* directed by Stephanie Watanabe, an Auburn RTVF graduate. Watanabe wrote the script

as an undergraduate.⁵ The narrative focuses on a young girl's struggle with braces and teasing from her peers. The film was shot on location in Opelika, and Montgomery, Alabama for three days in August 1999. Watanabe's crew consisted of professionals and AFS members who volunteered their time for the production. In addition, the film had original soundtrack provided by local Auburn band Spoonful James. The world premiere screening for *Lunchbox Blues* occurred on 11 July 2000 at Auburn University's Ralph B. Draughon Library First Floor Auditorium.

The Meet the Filmmakers Series was replaced with The Not Quite Cannes Film Series.⁶ This series highlighted classic American and foreign cinema. Each screening had an Auburn University Liberal Arts faculty member or Auburn University Library faculty member as the host of the motion picture to provide information about the film and its director. The first film was the Italian film *Life is Beautiful* directed by Roberto Benigni; the host for the evening was Dr. Louise Katainen. On 10 October, Dr. Jim McKelly hosted the French classic *The 400 Blows* directed by François Truffaut. The fall semester of The Not Quite Cannes Film Series concluded with *Antonia's Line* on 14 November hosted by Dr. Susan Brinson. Guest host Dr. Tom Nadar kicked off the spring semester on 16 January 2001 with the German film *Run Lola Run*. The final two films for the 2000-2001 series were Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* hosted by Robert McDonald and Federico Fellini's *8 ½* hosted by Jim Gravois. The 2001-2002 series included the films *Regret to Inform*, *All About My Mother*, and *Strictly Ballroom*, and *Katharina Blum*; the guest hosts were Dr. Susan Brinson, Jim Gravois, Barbara Bishop, and Dr. Tom Nadar. *Katharina Blum* on 12 February 2002 concluded the Not Quite Cannes Film Series.

In 2003, the AFS cosponsored a Fall Diversity Film Festival; the films presented in this series are about ethnic identity, American history, racism, gender and immigration.⁷ The films shown were *The Language We Cry In*, *A Strong Clear Vision*, *The Shadow of Hate*, and *The Color of Fear*.

For years, the AFS brought unique films to the Auburn community. However due to the increasing popularity of DVDs, the films showcased by the AFS were now easily accessible. In 1997, the AFS changed direction and decided to showcase the work of student filmmakers.

Jay Sanders Film Festival/Movie Gallery Student Video Competition

The AFS named the student filmmakers' festival after Jay Sanders in honor Sanders and his contributions to film studies at Auburn University. At first, the entries in the film festival were from Auburn students; but within a few years, the AFS received entries from across the country. In 2001, the Movie Gallery Corporation made an endowment to the AFS to fund the film festival. In gratitude, the contest was renamed the Movie Gallery Student Video Competition, but the finalists from the competition are showcased at the Jay Sanders Film Festival. Joe Malugen, cofounder and CEO of Movie Gallery and his Auburn alum wife, Dena Malugen, were instrumental in this endowment. Further, Jonathan Ahern of the Auburn University Development Office helped greatly in securing the endowment. Because of the Movie Gallery endowment, winners now receive \$1,000 for first place, \$600 for second place, and \$275 for third place.⁸ In 2004, the Movie Gallery Student Video Competition received over 165 entries from the United States as well as Canada, Australia, and Malaysia.⁹

Although the Jay Sanders Film Festival occurs every spring, the Movie Gallery Student Video Competition is a yearlong event. In the fall, the AFS sends flyers for the contest to high schools and colleges. In addition, the information is placed on the AFS website and in Movie Gallery stores. The deadline for entries is early February, and pre-screening judges screen all of the entries. The pre-screening judges are comprised of faculty members from the Department of Communication and Journalism and other departments across campus. The pre-screening judges determine which films make it to the semi-finals. Another panel of judges watches the films in the semi-finals; the films accepted by the judges are placed into the final round, the Jay Sanders Film Festival. At the film festival, the judges determine the winners; the judges for the final round are comprised of professionals in the film and television industry.¹⁰

Since 2000, I have served as President of the AFS; my major responsibilities have been the Jay Sanders Film Festival and Movie Gallery Student Video Competition, primarily as a pre-screening judge. For the 2003 and 2004 competition, I was the screening chair; the screening chair is responsible for coordinating the pre-screening judges and making sure all of the entries are screened. Moreover for the 2004 competition, I was the Associate Director of Jay Sanders Film Festival.

AFS Presidents: Past and Present

President 2004-2005: Silas Zee

President 2001-2004: Danielle Williams

Presidents 2000-2001: William McGee and Danielle Williams

Presidents 1999-2000: Jessamyn Saxon and Amber Jackson. Jessamyn graduated from Auburn and became a production supervisor for Auburn's Educational Television Studio.

President 1998-1999: Stephanie Watanabe: received her MFA from the American Film Institute in Los Angeles and continues to make independent films.

President 1995-1998: Russ Wright: went on to become a martial arts expert consultant for films and television programs.

President 1993-1995: Bryan Galatis: went on to a very success career at the American Movies Classics channel based in New York.

Presidents 1992-1993: Bryan Galatis and Jeff Gary

Free Movies at Langdon

Since at least the early 1970s, Auburn University has provided free movies for students at Langdon Hall.¹¹ From Thursday through Sunday, students went to Langdon to watch current films. The free movies at Langdon Hall were a student tradition at Auburn. However, in the late 1990s, the free movies were offered only on Friday through Sunday evenings. In 2002, the movies moved from Langdon Hall to Foy Union because of building code violations.¹² Currently, the Auburn University Program Council sponsors the free movies at Foy Union as well as a free drive-in movie and an international film series during the fall and spring semesters.

Conclusion

Film at Auburn has a long history. What I have included in this thesis is only the beginnings of the work that is required to tell Auburn's cinematic story. This thesis furthers the argument that local film histories are necessary to understand the larger historical story of American cinema. Auburn's cinematic history highlights a non-commercial local industry that thrived until the late 1920s. But, it is evident that Auburn's non-traditional movie exhibition roots were not killed when the Tiger theatre bought out the College Film Program. The fact that Auburn continues to screen films

across campus in various venues such as the AFS programs is a testament to Auburn's history of non-commercial film exhibition. I've only begun this historical story here, and I am hopeful that others will continue it in the future.

References

¹ http://www.auburn.edu/student_info/film/JaySanders.html

² Ibid.

³ For more information about Jay Sanders see the Jay Sanders Collections located in the Auburn University Special Collections and Archives Department.

⁴ http://www.auburn.edu/student_info/film/schedule.htm

⁵ *The Plainsman*, 12 August 1999.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Before the Movie Gallery endowment, winners received a small sum and a certificate. Today winners receive a cash prize the Movie Gallery Award (MGA).

⁹ http://www.auburn.edu/student_info/film/

¹⁰ For more information about the Auburn Film Society see the Auburn Film Society Collection located in the Auburn University Special Collections and Archives Department.

¹¹ It is unclear exactly when free movies started at Auburn but have been around since at least the 1970s.

¹² Langdon Hall is not equipped with enough smoke detectors for the amount of people watching movies at Langdon.

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