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Collecting locally : Walker Evans's photographs of Alabama in Alabama institutions

Mallory Lapointe Taylor
Ryerson University

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Collecting Locally: Walker Evans's photographs of Alabama in Alabama Institutions

by

Mallory LaPointe Taylor

B.F.A., Savannah College of Art and Design

Savannah, Georgia, 2007

A thesis

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Photographic Preservation and Collections Management

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2010

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Collecting Locally: Walker Evans's photographs of Alabama in Alabama Institutions
Mallory L. Taylor
Masters of Arts, Photographic Preservation and Collections Management
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ABSTRACT

Within the United States, the American South can be perceived as its own entity. From the arts to Southern cuisine, the South commands attention with its own history, myths, and culture. Within the history of photography, Walker Evans's photographs of Alabama are arguably some of the most culturally significant images taken of the state and its residents.

This thesis investigates how photographs of Alabama are collected in the same locality. By examining the collecting practices of four Alabama institutions in regards to photographs in general, and Walker Evans specifically, this case study will expand on the question of how photographs, in a Southern cultural context, work to create a sense of place and attachment to local geography.

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I would like to thank my first reader, Sophie Hackett, Assistant Curator of Photography at the Art Gallery of Ontario, for her guidance, encouragement, and support throughout this process. I would also like to thank my second reader, Mike Robinson. I would like to thank the George Eastman House Staff, particularly Alison Nordström, Curator of Photographs and Jamie Allen, Assistant Curator of Photographs who assured me that everything would be OK. I would like to thank Marta Braun and Bob Burley for their overseas support while in Scotland.

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To my family: Mom, Dad, Tripp, Justin, Shai, and Lauren—I wouldn't have made it without your love and support. To my sister, Shai, who has endlessly edited my papers since I was in high school—thanks sis. I would like to thank my family in Toronto, the Cummings family: Chris, Katherine, Emily Kate, Jack, and Sarah for allowing me to become part of their family. I am forever thankful for your love, support, and spare bedroom.

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Lastly, I would like to thank the state of Alabama for giving me the opportunity to flourish in a place rich in culture. I would particularly like to thank the Burroughs, Fields, and Tingle families for their strength and humility.

I left the South on a journey and, like a wanderer in Greek mythology,
my travels brought me back to the place where I began.

William R. Ferris, *A Sense of Place*.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Within the United States, the American South can be perceived as its own entity. From the arts to Southern cuisine, the South commands attention with its own history, myths, and culture. Many individuals from the South, or Southerners as they are commonly known, take pride in their history and heritage. Having their own identity, how have Americans and Southerners alike come to visualize a place so distinct from the rest of the country? In *Picturing the South: 1860 to Present*, Curator of Photography at the High Museum of Art, Ellen Dugan discusses the role of photography as the main form in which we have come view the American South stating that photography “has arguably had the most sustained, wide-ranging, and indelible role in chronicling how the region has perceived itself and been understood.”¹ We might ask why has photography become the medium that is credited with creating this sense of place more than any other. Photo Historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau states, “Phenomenologically, the photograph registers as pure image, and it is by virtue of this effect that we commonly ascribe to photography the mythic value of transparency.”² Unlike paintings and sculpture, the photographic medium has a way of portraying truth and reality. From Mathew Brady’s photographs of the Civil War to Walker Evans’s nostalgic imagery of dilapidated wooden houses and farmers, these images and others have come to characterize the American South. If photography has come to shape the way in which the South and the rest of

¹ Ellen Dugan, introduction to *Picturing The South: 1860 to Present* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), 14.

² Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 98.

America views itself, questions arise as to what photographs have helped form this perception and where they may be found.

Public institutions, being one common place where individuals can see photographic collections, help form the way we view images and their role within our culture. As Susan Pearce explains, “Collections are an important part of the way in which we construct our world.”³ Furthermore, collecting institutions construct ways in which objects are used and interpreted. How objects are used and interpreted identifies the importance of objects within the collection, and how we view them. There are two main institutions where objects are collected: a museum and an archive. Their roles are similar, as they can be state or federally regulated and serve the public. According to the International Council of Museums, “Museum collections reflect the cultural and natural heritage of the communities from which they have been derived.”⁴ Similarly, archive collections reflect the cultural and natural heritage of their communities. Since museums and archives alike reflect the cultural heritage of their community, collecting locally relevant photographs could further construct the way Southerners view their world.

To investigate the concept of collecting locally relevant photographs within public institutions, I have chosen to examine the holdings of Walker Evans’s photographs in Alabama collections. Evans has produced some of the most culturally significant images of the state and its residents. By examining the collecting practices of four Alabama institutions in regards to photographs in general, and Walker Evans specifically, this case study will expand on the question of how photographs, in a Southern cultural context,

³ Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 38.

⁴ International Council of Museum, “Code of Ethics for Museums,” <http://icom.museum/ethics.html> (accessed June 6, 2010).

work to create a sense of place and attachment to local geography.

With the crash of the stock market in 1929, the United States quickly sank into its lowest economic state, which led to the Great Depression. President Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted the New Deal in 1933 to help promote economic growth. One of the ways he did this was to create various government regulated economic reform programs, such as the Resettlement Administration (RA), which eventually collapsed and became the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

The FSA, under the United States Department of Agriculture, was created in 1935 to assist farmers who were impacted by the Great Depression. Included in the FSA was a photography unit, whose main focus was to record images by photographing the agricultural communities most considerably affected by the declining economy. Roy Stryker, head of the photography division, began searching for photographers whose technique and skill could contribute to this project.

In 1935, photographer Walker Evans (1903-1975) began working for the FSA. During his employment with the program, Evans spent much of his time documenting the rural South. He photographed buildings and individuals that had been affected by the Great Depression. In 1936, in collaboration with writer James Agee, Evans traveled to Hale County, Alabama to photograph three tenant farmer families for *Fortune* magazine. At the time, *Fortune* was producing a series entitled “Life and Circumstances” about the struggle of impoverished Americans during the Depression.⁵ For the assignment, Agee and Evans were to create a verbal and visual account of their stay in Alabama. For several weeks, Evans and Agee documented the families and their homes. Evans made

⁵ William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 261.

individual and family portraits, and photographed the interior of their homes. The assignment for *Fortune* was never published, though several years later in 1941, Evans and Agee published their accounts in a book entitled *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The first edition included thirty-one untitled photographs, placed at the beginning of the book, after which followed roughly 500 pages of text. The book was not very successful during its first edition, though in 1960 after Agee's death, a second edition was released with an additional thirty photographs and soon became a literary classic.

Though the book did not receive much attention until 1960, Evans's photographs were celebrated from their inception. In 1938, prior to the publication of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Evans had a solo exhibition entitled *American Photographs* at The Museum of Modern Art. *American Photographs* debuted Evans's work made during his time with the FSA and included images of Alabama from the *Fortune* project. These images continued to gain recognition and during the 1970s and beyond, scholars and others alike began to examine the impression Evans's images from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* left on American culture. In *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, author William Stott writes of Evans,

His work has come to characterize the thirties for us because it expresses the culture that we imagine to have dominated American life, the culture of poverty. We accept Evans' vision of America as the essential image of the Depression years because we believe ourselves, our people, our land, then to have been poor.⁶

In 2007, Tom Rankin, Director of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, echoed Stott's statement, writing, "Evans's images, the most iconic made

⁶ William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 276.

during his time in Alabama with James Agee, continue to define the cultural landscape of the American South for many.”⁷

Literature Review

I have focused on several areas that are germane to my topic including collections, documentary photography in the 1930s, the biography of Walker Evans focusing on his travels to Alabama, Evans’s contribution to the publication *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, and photography in the American South.

Interpreting Objects and Collections, edited by Susan M. Pearce, examines how we interpret objects and collections. Pearce explores how, over time, objects acquire different meanings in “Objects as meaning; or narrating the past.” She also discusses the interaction between a viewer and an object and how this interaction creates new meaning. In Chapter 22, “The urge to collect,” Pearce discusses objects in terms of use in the collection. She also expresses the difficulty in defining why we collect or what, stating collecting is “too human” and “too complex” to define.⁸

Another book of Pearce’s, *Museums, Objects, and Collections*, is also an essential source when considering the theory and practice of museums, objects, and collections. Pearce considers every aspect of these three topics and each chapter is valuable to my research. Pearce discusses the “slipperiness” of objects and the broader terms of objects and their materiality. She states, “The materiality of objects means that they occupy their own space, and this is how we experience them.”⁹ Chapter 10, “Objects in Action,” discuss the social life of objects and discusses not the history of the objects, but how

⁷ Tom Rankin, “The Injuries of Time and Weather,” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 9.

⁸ Susan M. Pearce, *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (London: Routledge, 1994), 159.

⁹ Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 16.

objects make history.¹⁰ Additionally, websites such as the Association of American Museums and the International Council of Museums proved to be vital sources when identifying the museum's role in collecting culturally significant objects.

In *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, author William Stott analyzes documentary photography's influence on American culture in the 1930s and early 1940s. Stott dedicates part four solely to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, and Chapter Fourteen to Evans's photographs. In Chapter 14, "The Photographs" he discusses Evans's prolific work. Stott discusses how Evans's images of the Great Depression left a lasting impression on American culture, and have come to define the way we view poverty during the 1930s.¹¹ Furthermore, Stott's discussion and examination of Evans's documentary style helped formulate the notions of Evans's images creating a sense of place.

While there have been several hundred biographical publications on Walker Evans, for the purposes of my research I have concentrated on publications that highlight Evans's travels to the South, particularly Alabama. Belinda Rathbone's *Walker Evans* is a biography that focuses on Evans's excursions to the South and his extended visit in Alabama, which eventually led to the publication *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. In chapter four, entitled "South," Rathbone accounts in detail Evans's trips made to the South and into Alabama and his purpose for being there. Rathbone allocates chapter five, "Three Families," solely to Evans's time spent in Alabama and his interactions, or lack thereof, with the three sharecropper families: the Burroughs, Fields, and Tingles. The

¹⁰ Ibid., 211.

¹¹ William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 276.

families were given pseudonyms in the book to protect their identities, and the Burroughs became the Gudgers, the Fields became the Woods, and the Tingles became the Ricketts family. In chapter eleven, Rathbone briefly discusses Evans's return to Alabama in 1971 with photographer William Christenberry, to Tuscaloosa at the University of Alabama. This information formed a timeline in which I could account for Evans's travels in Alabama and how he spent his time there.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, with text written by James Agee and photographs by Evans, is considered one of the literary masterpieces of the 1930s. The text offers great insight to Agee's stay and connection with three tenant farmer families. Agee extensively writes about the three families, the Ricketts, Woods, and Gudgers, and their day-to-day life and activities. His style of writing is unique, and his compassion for the families is also expressed throughout the text. Evans's sixty-one photographs depict various portraits of the families and their homes, architectural images of the surrounding towns, and assorted images of dilapidated rural structures. Additionally, the book helped me form notions about how the book might be viewed in Alabama today.

In the publication *Southern Folklore Reports, Number 1*, "Images of the South: Visits with Eudora Welty and Walker Evans," Bill Ferris interviews Evans about his time spent in the South, particularly in Alabama. In this interview Evans discusses his personal experience in rural Alabama and his time spent with the families there. Evans states, "...I had almost a blood relation to what was going on in those people, and an understanding and love for that kind of old, hard-working, rural, southern human being. They appeal to me enormously from the heart and the brain."¹²

¹² Bill Ferris, "Images of the South: Visits with Eudora Welty and Walker Evans," *Southern Folklore Reports*, no.1 (Memphis: Center for Southern Folklore, 1977): 31.

“Walker Evans: An Alabama Record” is an exhibition catalogue that was produced to coincide with the exhibition at The J. Paul Getty Museum in 1992, written by the Associate Curator of Photographs, Judith Keller, now the Senior Curator of Photographs. The catalogue describes Evans’s travels to Alabama and his experience there while photographing for the FSA and *Fortune Magazine*. This exhibition signifies the importance of Evans’s photographs of Alabama.

Picturing the South: 1860 to the Present, a book produced to accompany an exhibition at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia. This book and exhibition extensively discuss photography in the South. It examines Southern culture alongside photography and describes Southerners’ views of the photographic image, which predominately understand photography to represent reality.

In the summer of 2007, the magazine *Southern Cultures* produced “The Photography Issue.” This issue included various articles connecting Southern culture with photography. “The Injuries of Time and Weather” by Tom Rankin, and “Interview, Walker Evans, 1974,” by William R. Ferris proved to be vital sources. “The Injuries of Time and Weather” offered an overview of photography in the South, and also discussed Evans’s role within the South, providing information on his views of the South and how it defined him as an artist.

The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture touches on essential topics, such as poor whites during the Great Depression, photography in the South, Southern nationalism, sense of place, and attachment to local geography. All of these themes connect the ways in which Southerners view Walker Evans’s photographs of Alabama.

In the introduction of *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, co-editors James R. Ryan and Joan M. Schwartz examine the connections between photography and place and identity. In addition to these connections, Ryan and Schwartz discuss how photographs of a particular place can create a mythical perception of that place. This source was vital in understanding the realities and myths surrounding the photographic landscape.

Methodology

I selected four institutions within the state of Alabama to conduct my case study. I began with resources such as the *Index to American Photographic Collections* to locate Alabama institutions that hold Evans's photographs. The Birmingham Museum of Art and the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art were the only two institutions listed within this source.¹³ Investigating further, I identified collecting institutions within Alabama's four largest metropolitan areas, including Birmingham, Montgomery, Mobile, and Huntsville, and the only state archive. Additionally, I contacted the newly established Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Huntsville Museum of Art, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, and the Mobile Museum of Art. The Mobile Museum of Art does not have a photographic collection. The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts holds one Evans photograph, "Sidewalk Scene, Selma, Alabama, December 1935" and the Huntsville Museum of Art also holds one Evans photograph, "Steel Mill and Workers' Houses, Bessemer, AL 1936." Due to scheduling conflicts, I was not able to visit The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the Huntsville Museum of Art, and thus they are not included in the discussion of collecting practices, but they

¹³ Andrew Eskind, "Evans, Walker," *Index to American Photographic Collections*. 3rd ed. (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996).

are discussed later in the analysis section of this study. The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art and the Alabama Department of Archives and History both also hold photographs of Alabama by Evans. These four institutions hold the most material by Walker Evans and this is why I have chosen these institutions to study. In the end three art institutions and one state archive offer a diverse range of collecting practices.

After the selection of the institutions was made, I contacted each institution to schedule appointments to view its Evans collection. During one week in February, I visited the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History.¹⁴ I went through object files and took notes on each photograph. I scheduled another visit in May to view all the institution's Evans holdings and created five questions regarding each institution's collecting practices. I asked each institution five questions about its Evans holdings. The questions are as follows:

1. How did your institution acquire Walker Evans's photographs of Alabama?
2. How does this acquisition fit within the institution's mission statement or mandate?
3. How are the images organized within the collection?
4. How do these images function within the collection and how frequently are the images viewed? (estimate)
5. Does your institution feel these images represent a cultural heritage of Alabama?

These questions allowed me to analyze the different collecting practices in each institution. Most importantly, the questions will reveal how each institution uses and interprets Evans's photographs of Alabama.

¹⁴ It was not until after my first visit that I contacted the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art.

Once I visited each institution, I noticed that several of the same images are held in the different institutions. The various ways the institutions have created, misspelled, or used a descriptive title to identify a photograph added difficulty when searching for information. To distinguish which photographs were recurrent I used the Library of Congress's F.S.A. online database to confirm titles and variants.

Since the FSA was a government regulated agency all work made during this period is property of the United States Government. Today, all of Evans's negatives made in Alabama are located at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. At the time when Evans was working on the assignment for *Fortune* Magazine, he was still gainfully employed as a photographer for the FSA. Therefore, all of the images from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* also reside in the Library of Congress, alongside the remaining FSA collection.

In many sections concerning the Birmingham Museum of Art there will be extensive information compared to other institutions. This is largely due to the fact that Suzanne Stephens, Photography Guild Liaison and Database Administrator, went above and beyond to answer any questions concerning the BMA's photography collection. I also had the opportunity to speak with past curator of the BMA, David Moos, who held the position from 1998 to 2004.

Chart 1

Institution	Walker Evans' photographs of Alabama	Walker Evans' photographs outside of Alabama
Birmingham Museum of Art	3	3
Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art	45	0
Sarah Moody Gallery of Art	2	0
Alabama Department of Archives and History	3	0
Montgomery Museum of Fine Art*	1	0
Huntsville Museum of Art*	1	0
Mobile Museum of Art*	0	0

* Contacted, but not included in case study

CHAPTER 2 Description

The Birmingham Museum of Art

The city of Birmingham has a population of 229,424 and is the largest metropolitan city in the state.¹⁵ The Birmingham Museum of Art (BMA) is located in downtown Birmingham in the cultural district. The BMA's mission is, "to provide an unparalleled cultural and educational experience to a diverse community by collecting, presenting, interpreting, and preserving works of art of the highest quality."¹⁶

The Birmingham Museum of Art was founded in 1951 and has over 24,000 objects in its permanent collection.¹⁷ The BMA's collection ranges from Pre-Columbian to Asian Art. The Asian Art collection is the "largest and most comprehensive in the Southeast."¹⁸ The photography collection includes works by William Henry Fox Talbot, Sally Mann, Robert Frank, and a large collection of Alabama artist/photographer William Christenberry. According to Suzanne Stephens, Database Administrator, who has been working at the BMA for twenty-one years states, "Collecting photography did not become an established priority until around 1985. At that time, staff and board members expressed interest in building a collection, and a support group was formed in 1987. The approach to collecting was to build a history of photography."¹⁹ The phrase 'to build a history of photography' suggests creating a canonical collection of the most regarded photographs or photographers according to established histories of photography, such as

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, "Birmingham (city), Alabama," U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/01/0107000.html> (accessed May 10, 2010).

¹⁶ Birmingham Museum of Art, "Annual Reports 2006-2007," <http://www.artsbma.org/about-the-museum/annual-reports> (accessed March 23, 2010).

¹⁷ Birmingham Museum of Art, "Museum Overview," <http://www.artsbma.org/about-the-museum/overview>. (accessed May 10, 2010).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Suzanne Stephens, email message to author, May 24, 2010.

Beaumont Newhall's *The History of Photography*. Stephens mentioned that the BMA recently acquired a William Henry Fox Talbot print to fill "a gap within the history of photography," particularly of works from the nineteenth century.²⁰

There are currently six Walker Evans photographs in the collection. Out of those six images, three depict Alabama.²¹ "Store in Alabama" was acquired in 1978 with the use of funds provided by Mrs. Louise McSpadden, Crawford Johnson, and Coca-Cola Bottling Company.²² In a recent interview, Stephens discussed how the image entered the collection, "It was mainly motivated by the subject matter (the Coca Cola sign), and paid for by the local Coke bottling company owners."²³ This acquisition comprises relevant topical subject matter, the Coca-Cola sign, produced by Walker Evans, a central figure within the history of photography, which fulfills the BMA's goal of collecting a "history of photography." It further suggests that the photograph will hold greater resonance for visitors, since the image depicts a local business and structure.

The photograph "Minstrel Showbill" was acquired in the year 2002. The photograph was purchased using museum funds by then curator David Moos. Stephens mentioned that "Minstrel Showbill" has never been removed from the mat it was purchased in, and the photograph has never been exhibited. The third print, "Child's Grave, Hale County, Alabama" was purchased in 2004, with funds provided by Dr. and Mrs. David Sperling in honor of their friends.

²⁰ Suzanne Stephens, conversation with author, February 17 2010.

²¹ The other three photographs are "Fragments of Sculpture, The Mall, Washington D.C.," "Barbershop, New Orleans," and "An Unemployed Worker's Home, West Virginia."

²² In 1971 this acquisition noted funds provided by Mrs. Louise McSpadden, Crawford Johnson, and Pepsi Cola Company. Only recently was this changed to Coca-Cola Bottling Company.

²³ Suzanne Stephens, email message to author, May 24, 2010

The three photographs are all gelatin silver prints, and “Store in Alabama” bears the “Lunn Gallery” stamp on the verso, and is numbered 11 of 114. In 1974, George Rinhart and Tom Bergen acquired prints from Walker Evans’s studio. The Lunn Gallery, in turn, purchased 5,500 prints from Rinhart and Bergen. During this time, Evans was too ill to sign a substantial number of prints, so the Lunn Gallery produced an “Estate Stamp,” approved by Evans to authenticate the prints.²⁴ “Minstrel Showbill” and “Child’s Grave, Hale County” are mounted to thin board, and their original provenance is unknown. When asked if the BMA would be interested in acquiring digitally-produced prints from the Library of Congress, Suzanne Stephens stated, “ No, we are only interested in collecting prints made by the artist.”²⁵ In this instance, the object itself outweighs image content.

The BMA’s photography collection numbers roughly 1,000 photographs, and is housed in archival clamshell boxes in the prints and drawings vault. The photographs are rotated annually for various exhibitions, with the exception of “Minstrel Showbill,” which has not been shown since it was acquired in 2002. The number of times the photographs have been used for exhibition purposes is unknown. However, Stephens states, “I can say that the Store and the Child's Grave have been the most seen Evans photos, and that is definitely due to their topical subject matter.”²⁶ Stephens also spoke about the significance of “Store in Alabama” indicating that it, “is probably one of the best loved photographs in the collection, and it has been shown in rotations in the American Gallery regularly throughout all of the years we have owned it. It also has been

²⁴ Judith Keller, *Walker Evans: The Getty Museum Collection* (Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1995), 17.

²⁵ Suzanne Stephens, conservation with author, February 17, 2010.

²⁶ Suzanne Stephens, email message to author, May 24, 2010.

in Museum publications.”²⁷ The BMA has published the “Store In Alabama” photograph on the front of an invitation for guest lecturer Dr. William R. Ferris, who was presenting a lecture at the BMA entitled, “Memory and Sense of Place in Southern Culture.” I will further delve into the use and interpretation of this image later in the analysis section.

“Child’s Grave, Hale County” has been shown on numerous occasions, particularly alongside William Christenberry’s contemporary adaptation of the image. Suzanne Stephens states, “We have shown the Child's Grave numerous times in rotations in the American Gallery—placed with other works by Evans, with other WPA era works, and paired with the Christenberry's [sic].”²⁸

While many documentary photographs are shown alongside Evans, it would be impossible not to mention Alabama native William Christenberry, as his photographs are directly influenced by the images produced in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*; some are even adaptations. Christenberry began taking color photographs around 1960, after the release of the second edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. In *Of Time & Place: Walker Evans and William Christenberry*, Curator of Photographs at the Amon Carter Museum, Thomas Southall closely examines the two photographers and their work made in Alabama. According to Southall, “Christenberry was captivated by Evans’ photographs, which clearly defined the terrain and encapsulated the conditions and texture of the Alabama he knew.”²⁹ Christenberry is not only a native of Alabama, but was born in 1936 in Hale County, connecting the two artists by time and place. Moreover, Evans’s photographs depicted Christenberry’s home town, and connected the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Thomas W. Southall, *Of Time & Place: Walker Evans and William Christenberry* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1990), 8.

notion of place and identity. Similar to Evans's landscape images, Christenberry's work mainly focuses on architectural landscapes. Southall states, "He is interested in these buildings as social constructions, and in the space around them because architecture becomes an integral part of the landscape."³⁰ Christenberry's work resonates the same as Evans, Southall writes, "Christenberry's photographing in the style and tradition we associate with Evans and the Great Depression...."³¹ Evans's influence on Christenberry could be credited with the concept of Southerners attachment to place and the ways in which these photographs create a sense of place, which I will discuss later in the analysis section.

Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University

The city of Auburn has a population of 51,906, of which the student population makes up approximately 24,000.³² The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art (JCSM) at Auburn University is located on the university's campus on College Street. The JCSM mission states, "Art changes lives. Our mandate within the larger mission of Auburn University is to preserve, enhance, research and interpret the collections entrusted to us. Through the presentation of compelling exhibitions and programming to our diverse audiences, we foster the transformative power of art."³³ A section of Auburn University's mandate in part states, "Auburn University's mission is defined by its land-grant traditions of service and access. In the delivery of educational programs on campus and

³⁰ Ibid., 23.

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² Auburn University, "Auburn University enrollment tops 24,000 students for first time," <http://wireeagle.auburn.edu/news/199> (accessed March 19, 2010).

³³ Auburn University, "Policies and Procedures," http://jcsm.auburn.edu/the_museum/2009_09_policies_and_procedures.php (accessed May 20, 2010).

beyond, the University will draw heavily upon the new instructional and outreach technologies available in the emerging information age.”³⁴

In 1948 Auburn University acquired paintings by artists Ben Shahn, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jacob Lawrence, and others with the intention of building an art collection. In 1992, the University received a substantial donation of John James Audubon prints. It was not until 1998, when Hebert Smith, an Auburn graduate, donated three million dollars towards the construction of the museum.³⁵ The museum was named in honor of Mr. Smith's wife, Jule Collins Smith, and opened in 2003.

The JCSM acquired forty-five inkjet prints of Evans's images, digitally-produced by and purchased from the Library of Congress in 2008. The forty-five prints are selected images from the first and second editions of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. JCSM arranged to have the prints created specifically for an exhibition. According to the wall label text, “The images were made by the Department of Prints and Photography of the Library of Congress using scans from either the original negatives or from photographic prints from original negatives by Walker Evans in their archive. They were scanned at just under 48 megapixels and then printed using photographic inks on acid and lignin free, mould made watercolor, digital fine art paper.”³⁶ When asked how the images were acquired, Marilyn Laufer, Director of the JCSM stated, “We opted to acquire this entire collection with a specific exhibition in mind and to have for future outreach. We felt that the group of images by Evans created in collaboration with James Agee for

³⁴ Auburn University, “Statement of Vision and Mission,” http://www.auburn.edu/administration/rustees/policymanual/vision_and_mission.html (accessed March 19, 2010).

³⁵ Auburn University, “History of the Museum,” http://jcsm.auburn.edu/the_museum/history.php (accessed May 20, 2010).

³⁶ Wall label from exhibition, “American Classics: Selected Images of Alabama by Walker Evans” at JCSM

what later became the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was historically significant and well as visually electrifying.”³⁷ These photographs were acquired for an exhibition entitled *American Classics: Selected Photographs of Alabama by Walker Evans*. The exhibition included all 45 prints from the JCSM, as well as gelatin silver prints on loan from University of New Mexico Art Museum and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. The gelatin silver prints were hung beside an inkjet print. According to the wall label text the reasoning behind this was, “to augment the JCSM versions and provide comparison with images produced using modern technologies.”³⁸ The photographs are currently stored in frames in the prints and drawings vault. They are matted and framed in 16 X 20 frames. These photographs are part of the larger collection at the Museum, where individuals from the community may access the prints following the museum’s policies.

The Sarah Moody Gallery of Art at The University of Alabama

The city of Tuscaloosa has a population of 83,052 and is the location of Alabama’s oldest university, The University of Alabama.³⁹ The Sarah Moody Gallery of Art, otherwise known as the Sarah Moody, is located in Garland Hall, which is situated in the heart of The University of Alabama’s campus. The Sarah Moody’s mission states, “The gallery provides artistic and cultural enrichment for the university and West Alabama communities and is committed to representing a diverse range of artistic practices primarily through exhibition and lectureship.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Marilyn Laufer, email message to author, April 21, 2010.

³⁸ Wall label from exhibition, “American Classics: Selected Images of Alabama by Walker Evans” at JCSM

³⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, “Tuscaloosa (city), Alabama,” U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/01/0177256.html> (accessed May 23, 2010).

⁴⁰ The University of Alabama, “Gallery Mission,” <http://art.ua.edu/site/galleries/sarah-moody-gallery-of-art/gallery-mission/> (accessed May 21, 2010).

The Sarah Moody was founded in 1950 and is part of The University of Alabama's College of Arts and Sciences. The permanent collection includes photographs, prints, drawings, sculpture, and paintings.⁴¹ The Sarah Moody has two Evans photographs, which both depict Alabama; "Roadside Store, Vicinity Greensboro" and "Office Building, Vicinity Tuscaloosa." These photographs were acquired in 1974 from the artist with the use of private funds. Both photographs are matted and framed, and have never been removed from their support. The only acquisition records have been adhered to the back of the frames, indicating that the photographs were purchased from the artist.

The Sarah Moody Gallery of Art is the only institution that holds photographs signed by Evans. The Sarah Moody most likely purchased the photographs framed. In Belinda Rathbone's biography of Evans, she discusses Evans' final trip to Alabama in 1971, when Evans drove down with William Christenberry to speak with students and present a lecture at The University. The photographs were acquired around that time and since Evans drove down, it is feasible that the photographs were already framed. The matting style of the two photographs is also different; "Roadside Store" is mounted with Evans signature on the bottom right corner with another mat over with a half inch border to show the signature. While the "Office Building" photograph has one mat with a signature below the image on the mat.

Currently, "Roadside Store, Vicinity Greensboro" is being shown at the Sarah Moody in its permanent collection exhibition, highlighting selected works from the collection.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The Alabama Department of Archives and History

The city of Montgomery is Alabama's state capital and has a population of 201,998.⁴² The Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) is located in the heart of downtown Montgomery across from Capitol building. ADAH was established in 1901 and is the first state department of archives and history in the United States. The mandate of the ADAH states, "We tell the story of the people of Alabama by preserving records and artifacts of historical value and promoting a better understanding of Alabama history."⁴³ The ADAH acquired thirty-one photographs from the FSA; the majority are by photographers Arthur Rothstein and Dorothea Lange. ADAH currently holds three gelatin silver photographs by Evans. Each photograph has a stamp located on the verso appearing,

Please credit
F.S.A.
Farm Security Administration
Photo by: Evans

Each photograph measures 8 x 10 inches, having a ferrotyped surface treatment, consistent with the photographic print finishing of the period. I believe these images are vintage prints, compared to the "printed later" photographs from the other institutions in this study. All three images depict Alabama: "Minstrel poster on the wall of a brick building in Alabama," "Roadside store near Selma, Alabama," and "Cast ironwork on a porch in Mobile, Alabama."

According to the Archivist the prints were acquired most likely during the 1930s when the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Alabama Writers' Project (AWP) was

⁴² U.S. Census Bureau, "Montgomery (city), Alabama," U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/01/0151000.html> (accessed April 25, 2010).

⁴³ Alabama Department of Archives and History, "Defined Scope of the Collection," http://www.archives.alabama.gov/scope_of_collections2.pdf (accessed June 6, 2010).

created. The ADAH wrote, “The function of the Alabama Writers’ Project was to provide employment for journalists, free-lance writers, and college instructors. One of the activities performed by the project was to record images for use as illustrations. The series consists of photographs taken or acquired for use in Alabama Writers’ Project publications, most notably, the Guide, Alabama Hunter, Fish are Fighters in Alabama.”⁴⁴ These photographs are housed within the Alabama Writers’ Project boxes at the State Archives storage facilities. There are a total of five boxes that encompass the photographic collection of the Alabama Writers Project. Within each box are several folders, indicating either subject matter or a specific region. For example, “Cast ironwork on a porch in Mobile, Alabama” can be found in Box 4 in Folder 5, “Photographs: MOBILE, scenes of,” while “Minstrel poster on the wall of a brick building in Alabama” and “Roadside store near Selma, Alabama” can be found in Box 1, Folder 7, “Photographs: Alabama Buildings & Houses in profile.” This procedure of storing the photographs according to subject matter differs with the other three institution’s method of storing photographs by maker.

In addition to the three Evans photographs, ADAH holds a first edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The ADAH is the only institution that holds any edition of the book. In addition to being reproduced in publications, “Minstrel poster on the wall of a brick building in Alabama” and “Roadside store near Selma, Alabama” were both added into the second edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1960.

⁴⁴ Alabama Department of Archives and History, “Works Progress Administration files, 1936-1943,” <http://216.226.178.202:81/vwebv/holdingsInfo?searchId=3588&recCount=10&recPointer=6&bibId=22993> (accessed February 26, 2010).

CHAPTER 3

Analysis

In Chapter 2, I described each institution and its collecting practices. However, these descriptions are only cursory. In this chapter, I will examine each institution's practices in relation to larger questions of the history of collecting photography in Alabama, the use of the photographs, the relationship of the photographic image and object, Walker Evans' place in Southern Culture, and how images function as cultural heritage. This analysis will reveal how photographs depicting Southern imagery have come to shape the way Alabamians view the Southern landscape.

History of Collecting Photography

In order to understand the history of collecting photography in each institution, it is important to consider the type of establishment in which these histories were set forth. The four institutions represented in this case study include three art museums and one archive. Art museums and archives differ when considering their foundations and their role within the public sphere.

According to the Alabama Department of Archives and History, an archive is a place, "where original and one of a kind documents and records are kept. An archive stores the first and sometimes only copy of an important document."⁴⁵ Along with the Alabama constitution, ADAH considers photographs to be important document records. Since photographs are considered 'important documents,' ADAH dictates what type or genre of photograph enters the collection where, "All objects donated to or collected by the Alabama Department of Archives and History must have a clear and well defined

⁴⁵ Alabama Department of Archives and History, "What is an Archive?" (audio file) Alabama Department of Archives and History. http://www.archives.alabama.gov/tours/what_is_an_archives_photostory.wmv (accessed June 3, 2010).

association with the history of the state or with individuals from or representing the state of Alabama.”⁴⁶ As previously discussed, the Alabama Department of Archives and History is the first department of history and archives in the United States. ADAH was founded on three cultural interests. According to ADAH, “The progressive movement, then spreading across the United States reflected an interest in improved education, which would foster a better-informed and more civic-minded citizenry. The second interest was the desire to preserve the material documenting service to the state in the Civil War. The third interest in the creation of the department was the need to preserve the materials necessary for understanding our history.”⁴⁷ In other words, ADAH collects materials that foster education and the understanding of the history of Alabama. Furthermore, this foundation allows ADAH to collect photographs that contribute to Alabama history.

The role and purpose of an art museum can include a diverse range of responsibilities. According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM); “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”⁴⁸ Like archives, museums may opt to collect materials for the purposes of education. However, this is only one component of the broader term mission. Museums may collect materials related to humanity for

⁴⁶ Alabama Department of Archives and History, “Defined Scope of the Collection,” http://www.archives.alabama.gov/scope_of_collections2.pdf (accessed June 6, 2010).

⁴⁷ Alabama Department of Archives and History, “History of the Alabama Department of Archives and History,” <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/intro/adah.html> (accessed June 6, 2010).

⁴⁸ International Council of Museum, “Code of Ethics for Museums,” <http://icom.museum/ethics.html> (accessed June 6, 2010).

education, study, and enjoyment. This definition opens a large window for each institution to interpret, and each institution's mandate is a reflection of this interpretation. As previously discussed, ICOM believes museum collections reflect the heritage of the communities where they were founded.⁴⁹

The three art museums in this case study are fairly new, considering many American museums were established during the early nineteenth century. In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, contributing author Sharon A. Sharp explains, "The growth of all types of museums in the South accelerated in the 20th century, although more slowly in the Deep South."⁵⁰ Taking into account that Alabama is part of the Deep South, this statement could be considered true since the Sarah Moody and the Birmingham Museum of Art were both established during the early 1950s, and the Jule Collins Smith Museum even later in 2003. It is important to note that none of these institutions strictly collects photography.

Now that the context of how these institutions has been examined, it is important to delve into each institution's history of collecting photography, considering that none of the institutions strictly collects photography, while also discussing each institution's mandate, which is the premise for how photographs entered the institution's collection.

It is unclear when exactly the Alabama Department of Archives and History began collecting photographs, though ADAH has a substantial photographic collection ranging from Civil War era photographs to images from the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The Alabama Department of Archives and History's mandate states, "We tell

⁴⁹ International Council of Museum, "Code of Ethics for Museums," <http://icom.museum/ethics.html> (accessed June 6, 2010).

⁵⁰ Sharon A. Sharp, "Museums," *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1989), 646.

the story of the people of Alabama by preserving records and artifacts of historical value and promoting a better understanding of Alabama history.” Provided ADAH’s mandate, photographs of Alabama and its residents is one way to better understand Alabama history, through a visual exploration of architecture, anthropology, or aesthetics.

ADAH is the only institution in this case study to collect Walker Evans’s photographs in the 1930s. Additionally, Evans’s work from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is vital to telling the story of the people of Alabama. The photographs not only show tenant farmers from the Great Depression, but tenant farmers from Alabama during the Depression era. ADAH is the only institution within this case study that has collected the book format of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The book particularly holds value, as it provides a visual and textual account of native Alabamians during the Great Depression. In this case, the text is as important as the photographs. It is unclear when ADAH acquired the book, though it is likely that it was collected during 1941 when it was first published.

The Jule Collins Smith Museum opened in 2003, and prior to this it did not have a place to store objects. The history of collecting at JCSM revolves around one purchase and the evolving gifts and donations to the University. Since the JCSM opened recently, the museum has not had the opportunity to build a collection of photographs beyond the Evans purchase. The museum hopes to continue to collect photographs within its mandate, according to its collecting policy, “While fine art of any genre and origin is of enormous value to the mission of the museum, the heart of its collections concerns the history, evolution and on-going progress of American and European art. Thus, we anticipate that this area of 19th- through 21st-century American and European art will

continue to grow with gifts and acquisitions of the highest quality.”⁵¹ As previously mentioned, the JCSM’s mission is part of the larger mission of Auburn University, and a section of Auburn’s mission is to “draw heavily upon the new instructional and outreach technologies available in the emerging information age.”⁵² This component of the mandate could suggest why the JCSM elected to collect digitally-produced prints from the Library of Congress. Certainly, these prints are more affordable than prints made during Evans’s lifetime, and this, along with the museum’s and university’s emphasis on access, overtook the standard practice in many museums of collecting period prints.

It is unclear when the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art began acquiring photographs, but it definitely collected photography by the 1970s, when it purchased two photographs directly from Walker Evans.⁵³ The gallery does have a much smaller collection of photographs than the other institutions. A section of the Sarah Moody’s mandate is to “provide artistic and cultural enrichment for the university and West Alabama communities.”⁵⁴ The two Walker Evans’ images fit within the mandate because they enhance a cultural awareness of this certain area and West Alabama communities by providing images of artistic quality and local subject matter. Other works in the collection that feature such subject matter include photographs from Sally Mann’s *Deep South* series and a substantial collection of William Christenberry photographs.

The Birmingham Museum of Art has the most documented and deliberate development of their photography collection. According to Suzanne Stephens, the BMA

⁵¹ Auburn University, “Policies and Procedures,” http://jcsm.auburn.edu/the_museum/2009_09_policies_and_procedures.php (accessed May 20, 2010).

⁵² Auburn University, “Statement of Vision and Mission,” http://www.auburn.edu/administration/rustees/policymanual/vision_and_mission.html (accessed March 19, 2010).

⁵³ Sarah Moody Gallery’s records indicate that the photographs were purchased from the artist.

⁵⁴ The University of Alabama, “Gallery Mission,” <http://art.ua.edu/site/galleries/sarah-moody-gallery-of-art/gallery-mission/> (accessed May 21, 2010).

began collecting photographs in 1985, though the BMA had already acquired several photographs during the 1970s prior to this decision. Stephens states, “The approach to collecting was to build a history of photography. Since photography was then and still is a relatively young medium, it seemed possible to create a collection that reflected its entire history.” The BMA began to collect on that concept, and in 1988 in collaboration with the *Birmingham News*, the *Birmingham News* hired six prominent photographers, including Robert Frank, Bruce Davidson, William Christenberry, Gordon Parks, Duane Michals, and Phillip Trager to document Birmingham in honor of its centennial. The photographs from this series were all acquired into the newly established photographic collection.

When David Moos, curator from 1998 to 2004, entered the institution, he had several goals in mind. According to Stephens, Moos’s curatorial plan was, “to collect artists connected to Alabama (who either lived or worked here), to collect artists in depth, and to build on the works we already had in the collection.”⁵⁵ The first step was to collect works that were locally relevant. Moos identified the gap within the collection, and chose photography as a way of filling that gap. When asked why he purchased the “Minstrel Showbill” photograph he said, “There should be something tangible and explicit about this place.”⁵⁶

Each institution’s mandate has allowed for the acquisition of Walker Evans photographs of Alabama. Evans entered the ADAH, not because of who he was, but because his work depicted Alabama. The FSA and AWP images are key visual documents of Alabamians during the Great Depression, and therefore the photographs

⁵⁵ Suzanne Stephens, email message to author, May 24, 2010.

⁵⁶ David Moos, conversation with author, June 21, 2010.

entered the collection on this basis. The other three institutions collected Evans's work based on the photographer's place in the history of photography, but also for its topical subject matter. However, it is important to note that all three art institutions acquired Evans's photographs in the second edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* that were published in 1960, and after the second exhibition of *American Photographs* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1962. These factors would have drawn new attention to Evans and his work, as William Stott states, "until 1960, his reputation was limited, esoteric,"⁵⁷ and may have influenced the three art institution's decisions to acquire Evans work.

Use

In Chapter 2, I discussed the basic use of the photographs for publication and/or exhibition. Now, I will further delve into the reasons I believe the photographs were used.

The Birmingham Museum of Art has used "Store in Alabama" for publication and exhibition purposes. The BMA published the "Store in Alabama" photograph on the front of an invitation for guest lecturer, Dr. William R. Ferris. Ferris was the director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. Ferris is well respected in the field of Southern culture and Folklore, and from 1997 to 2001 was the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has also contributed over 100 publications in the fields of folklore, American literature, fiction, and photography, and was co-editor of the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. In an article adapted from the lecture entitled "A Sense of Place," Ferris speaks of his life growing up in Mississippi and his reflections of growing up in the American South. He discusses William Faulkner's idea of "little postage stamp of native soil." Ferris explains, "Each of you

⁵⁷ William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 268.

carries within yourself a “postage stamp of native soil,” a “sense of place” that defines you. It is the memory of this place that nurtures you with identity and special strength that provides that Bible terms “the peace that passeth understanding.” And it is to this place that each of us goes to find the clearest, deepest identity of ourselves.”⁵⁸ With this statement, Ferris establishes a context in which to view this photograph and points to a deeper meaning that Alabamians associate with place and by extension with this particular image. The deserted shack is a telling image of the Depression, and Coca-Cola signs represent a prominent Southern company. The idea of ‘sense of place’ is central to how Southerners view photographs. In the book entitled *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind*, author Stephen A. Smith states, “The symbolic relationship between people and the land remains important in the contemporary South, even in the urban South. It has survived changing systems of settlement, transportation, and communication, and, though somewhat less provincial than in the past, it remains important in the South’s perception of reality.”⁵⁹

We might ask why photographs may communicate a greater ‘sense of place’ than other media. In an article in the journal *Southern Cultures*, Director of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, Tom Rankin states, “I doubt any region of America has been photographed more, and for many Americans their idea and image of the South is derived as much from the photographic record as from any other source.”⁶⁰ Because the South has been photographed extensively, southerners have come to strongly relate photographs and a sense of place, at times conflating the two.

⁵⁸ William R. Ferris, “A Sense of Place,” *Humanities* 19, no. 1 (January 1998) <http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/1998-01/ferris.html> (accessed June 4, 2010).

⁵⁹ Stephen A. Smith, *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1985), 131.

⁶⁰ Tom Rankin, “The Injuries of Time and Weather,” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 9.

The Jule Collins Smith Museum acquired its Evans photographs with a specific use and purpose in mind—for the exhibition *American Classics: Selected Photographs of Alabama by Walker Evans*. According to the Director of the JCSM the images, “represent a collection of photographs by a quintessential American 20th c [sic] photographer whose work is seen as informing the entire nation's understanding of an important period of American history.....the fact that they were made in Alabama makes them especially important to JCSM but that was not the only reason to add them to the collection.”⁶¹ If the importance of Evans as a twentieth-century photographer was the key component for the exhibition, the JCSM would have most likely acquired and displayed other important works depicting scenes outside of Alabama that would speak to Evans’s significance as a photographer. Nonetheless, the JCSM purchased forty-five inkjet prints of Alabama subjects, and this number alone speaks to the importance of these photographs in an Alabama context.

As previously discussed, the Sarah Moody currently is exhibiting “Roadside Store,” in their annual permanent collection exhibition. Questions arise about why the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art opted not to exhibit the “Office Building, Vicinity Tuscaloosa” photograph. The structure in the photograph still stands today, and is just a few miles away from the Sarah Moody. There could be numerous practical reasons why “Roadside Store” was selected over “Office Building,” like lighting, exhibition rotation, and the limitations of the size of the gallery.

Similarly to the Sarah Moody, the JCSM has previously displayed Evans’s work during its annual permanent collection exhibition. Since JCSM is connected to Auburn

⁶¹ Marilyn Laufer, email message to author, April 21, 2010.

University, students and faculty may access these images for academic and scholarly purposes.⁶² As part of the JCSM collection policy, “The Museum believes the Collections should be used to advance knowledge and, therefore, will make them accessible to the community for education and research.”⁶³ According to faculty and student disciplines, each could view the aesthetic and/or informational qualities of the images focusing on various aspects such as architecture, the subjects, agriculture, or southern culture.

Andrew Henley, Curator of Education, stated, “Since we’ve acquired the collection only a handful of graduate students have viewed the collection.”⁶⁴ Perhaps since the collection is newly acquired, or since new students are unaware of the collection, the photographs have not been used for these purposes. In addition to faculty and students, the larger community of 51,906 may also access the prints for education and research. The JCSM regularly loans its Evans photographs to local institutions, so each institution has the opportunity to exhibit and discuss the images within their communities. When I visited JCSM in May, several of the photographs were on loan. As previously stated, Director of JCSM stated, “We opted to acquire this entire collection with a specific exhibition in mind and to have for future outreach.”⁶⁵ Along with access come the policies and procedures of access. In order to loan or access the prints, individuals must first go through procedures and receive permission from the Director. In some cases, if the objects are not stable, access could be denied. Since the inkjet prints would be easier to

⁶² Students must make an appointment to view the photographs.

⁶³ Auburn University, “Access to the Collections,” http://jcsm.auburn.edu/the_museum/2009_09_policies_and_procedures.php (accessed May 20, 2010).

⁶⁴ Andrew Henley, conversation with author, May 5, 2010.

⁶⁵ Marilyn Laufer, email message to author, April 21, 2010.

replace than other objects, the JCSM may have deemed these prints better suited to its education and outreach goals, than gelatin silver prints.

The Alabama Department of Archives and History used the images during the 1930s for Alabama publications. Though I was unable to view the publications, the Guide, which is a guide depicting highlights of Alabama, would have most likely used one of Evans's photographs. Since the 1930s the photographs have not been used for publication purposes. However, the photographs today can be used for academic, scholarly, and/or historical research, as they can be found with other images from the Alabama Writers Project.

Topical Subject Matter

After completing my research in each of the institutions, I discovered that four images can be found in more than one of the institutions. I found this to be an interesting coincidence, considering that three of the institutions have three images or fewer and have different mandates and collecting policies. Three of the four photographs are from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. All four images are architectural landscape images. (See Appendix E for a chart of these overlaps.)

While each institution may collect the photographs for varying reasons, it is clear that image content is important. Evans's portraits of the sharecropper families are perhaps the best known of his Alabama work. But I found it interesting that three of the four institutions only hold architectural landscape images – the Jule Collins Smith Museum is the only one to hold any of the portraits. As previously stated in the Methodology section, I did not include the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and Huntsville Museum. However, I believe it is important to mention again that both institutions also hold only

architectural landscape images of Alabama. Thus, even the institutions that were not included in the case study do not hold portraits.

On February 14 and 15, 2006 Sotheby's, New York, held an auction entitled "Important Photographs: From the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including works from The Gilman Paper Company Collection." Six vintage Walker Evans photographs were included in this monumental auction and out of those six, two were portraits, Floyd Burroughs and Allie May Burroughs, from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Alabama Tenant Farmer (Floyd Burroughs) sold for \$307,200, and set a record for the highest price fetched at auction for an Evans photograph sold to date.⁶⁶ The second highest price was achieved by Tenant Farmer's Wife (Allie May Burroughs), which sold for \$132,000.⁶⁷

While cost may play a large role in why portraits are not collected in the majority of Alabama institutions, there may be other reasons. In 1986, journalist Dale Maharidge and photographer Michael Williamson visited Hale County to document the declining cotton industry and to document the legacy of Agee's and Evans's work in the region. Their accounts were soon published in the book *And Their Children After Them*, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1990. The layout of the book is very similar to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The photographs are placed at the beginning with no captions, illustrating portraits of surviving family members and architectural landscapes taken by Evans juxtaposed with new adaptations by Williamson. Following the photographs is a section entitled "Mary Louise." Mary Louise Gudger (Lucille Burroughs's pseudonym) was a

⁶⁶ Sotheby's Art Auction House, "LOT 56," http://www.sothebys.com/app/live/lot/LotDetail.jsp?sale_number=N08165&live_lot_id=56 (accessed June 6, 2010).

⁶⁷ Sotheby's Art Auction House, "LOT 57," http://www.sothebys.com/app/live/lot/LotDetail.jsp?sale_number=N08165&live_lot_id=57 (accessed June 6, 2010).

child when Evans and Agee documented her family. This section discusses her life after Evans and Agee left Hale County. Maharidge and Williamson describe Mary Louise as a bright woman who desired to become a teacher, but never did, and eventually succumbed to extreme depression, committing suicide by drinking rat poison.⁶⁸ At the end of the book, the names of the surviving family members are listed, as well as the acknowledgements, which thank editors, agents, and Harvard professors for their support and guidance. There is no mention, no statement, no thank you to the people who allowed Maharidge and Williamson to document their lives, and eventually make their story, once again, a bestseller.

Soon after *And Their Children After Them*, many journalists and writers felt compelled to track down the surviving members or descendants of the three sharecropper families in Hale County. In 2005, David Whitford wrote an article in *Fortune* entitled, “The Most Famous Story We Never Told.” He traveled to Hale County and first interviewed Charles Burroughs on his opinions of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* stating, “They should have had enough respect to come back afterwards. I know I would have. At least send a copy of the book.”⁶⁹ The article further discusses other family members’ opinions and the personal effects of the publication.

In 2010, Christina Davidson wrote an article in *The Atlantic* entitled, “Let Us Now Trash Famous Authors.” Like Whitford, Davidson tracks down the surviving family members where they discuss the invasion of privacy, and lack of knowledge that their story would become a book. Davidson interviewed Diane Burroughs, Charles’s wife,

⁶⁸ Dale Maharidge, *And Their Children After Them* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), iv.

⁶⁹ David Whitford, “The Most Famous Story We Never Told,” *Fortune Magazine* (2005), http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2005/09/19/8272885/index.htm. (accessed June 5, 2010).

later writing that, “Diane believes the 1989 publication of *And Their Children After Them*..... revived the feelings of exploitation and maltreatment that had just begun to fade 50 years after the release of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.”⁷⁰ For an entire week, Davidson pressured Dottie Burroughs, the youngest child of Floyd and Allie May, to meet with her. Both writers discuss the reluctance each family member had to meet with them. Davidson discusses Dottie’s opinion on journalists commenting that people just come to make a profit off of her family.⁷¹

While many authors have examined the three tenant farmers feelings of exploitation and embarrassment, they often forget the context in which Southerners viewed tenant farmers. Opinions of tenant farmers during the 1930s were harsh. According to the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, “Southerners viewed tenant farmers as a permanent class of lazy, ignorant, immoral subhumans, unfit for a place in normal human society.”⁷² Furthermore, Curator of Photographs at the Amon Carter Museum, Thomas Southall explains, “The poor families that Agee and Evans had made the subject of their study were not regarded as typical or worthy of that kind of attention; the shunning and prejudice against the Tingle family—who, as Agee noted were regarded as particularly dirty, immoral and contemptuous of community standards—continues to this day.”⁷³ As David Whitford stated, “the photographs especially, for all their dignity and truth, do not portray the Tingles or the Fieldses or the Burroughses as you or I would

⁷⁰ Christina Davidson, “Let Us Now Trash Famous Authors,” *The Atlantic* 305, no. 3 (April 2010): 18-19.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷² David E. Conrad, “Tenant Farmers,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1989), 1413.

⁷³ Thomas W. Southall, *Of Time & Place: Walker Evans and William Christenberry* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1990), 19.

wish to be seen.”⁷⁴

Since Evans and Agee arrived in Alabama almost 75 years ago, it appears that very few individuals have shown much respect for or humility towards these families. Perhaps, like the families, residents of Alabama have grown weary of the outsider looking in. It is possible that these accounts of the families’ feelings of exploitation and embarrassment have influenced Alabama institutions not to collect the portraits. Perhaps, architectural landscapes are most suited for Alabama institutions to collect, as they best represent a ‘sense of place’ for Alabamians, and the portraits do not create that same ‘sense of place.’ As Suzanne Stephens explains, “Southerners often have that same sense of attachment to a place, so I think that showing photographs of Alabama is especially meaningful to the natives.”⁷⁵

Walker Evans and the South

Evans spent much of his time documenting the rural South stating, “It has to do with the romantic instinct—its romanticism and history and heritage.”⁷⁶ Photo historian Naomi Rosenblum further declared, “Evans photographed extensively in the South, engrossed by its “atmosphere.... smell and signs.”⁷⁷ While Evans is not a Southerner, his photographs (some of them at least) have been embraced as representations of the state. When describing his method of photographing the South, Evans stated, “I had an eye and a sense of regional atmosphere, and I automatically recorded it.”⁷⁸ Tom Rankin discusses Evans’s reasons for photographing architectural structures adding, “He was drawn to the

⁷⁴ David Whitford, “The Most Famous Story We Never Told,” *Fortune Magazine* (2005), http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2005/09/19/8272885/index.htm. (accessed June 5, 2010).

⁷⁵ Suzanne Stephens, email message to author, May 24, 2010.

⁷⁶ William R. Ferris, “Walker Evans, 1974,” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 32.

⁷⁷ Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997.), 383.

⁷⁸ William R. Ferris, “Walker Evans, 1974,” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 28.

vernacular structures in most every southern town he visited, always sensitive to buildings that showed use and re-use, the passage of time, spaces that held scars and marks of life and the past.”⁷⁹

In an interview with Dr. William R. Ferris, Evans discusses the Mississippi landscape stating, “You know, to someone who hasn’t been there before, it has tremendous appeal to the eye. I can understand why Southerners are haunted by their own landscape and in love with it.”⁸⁰ Ferris interviewed Walker Evans right before his death in 1974. As the first series of reports published by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, Ferris chose to interview two prominent photographers, Eudora Welty and Walker Evans, who had extensively documented the South during the 1930s. In the foreword, Ferris states his reasons for conducting the interviews: “As the South moves from its rural economy, storytellers, musicians, and craftspeople have become an endangered part of our culture.”⁸¹ In 2007, in a follow-up article about this interview, Ferris is quoted, “The South’s strong sense of place shaped both the images he photographed and his own identity as an artist. ... Walker’s sensitivity to southern people and their landscape is felt in his photographs of farm life, county fairs, and Civil War battlefields through which he unveils an intimate panorama of the South.”⁸²

⁷⁹ Tom Rankin, “The Injuries of Time and Weather,” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 20.

⁸⁰ William R. Ferris, “Walker Evans, 1974” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 33.

⁸¹ Bill Ferris, Foreword to “Images of the South: Visits with Eudora Welty and Walker Evans,” *Southern Folklore Reports*, no.1 (Memphis: Center for Southern Folklore, 1977).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 31.

Conclusion

When discussing the collecting practices of the BMA, David Moos stated, “There should be something tangible and explicit about this place.”⁸³ The architectural landscapes in fact, represent something that Alabamians associate with being real and definite. According to contributing author of the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Raymond Arsenault, “Southerners, more than most other Americans, have tied themselves to local geography. Their lives and identities have been rooted in a particular county, town, neighborhood, or homestead.”⁸⁴ The collecting practices of these four institutions reflect the notion that Evans’s architectural landscapes make a connection between people and place, culture and identity. While Evans’s work in Alabama has shaped the perceptions of how Americans view the Great Depression, Evans’s architectural landscape images in particular have come to define the way Alabama institutions visualize the Alabama landscape: a land filled with wooden structures, bold typographical signs and posters, and streets filled with Ford Model T automobiles.

Along with myths surrounding Southern culture, these images created and continue to create a notion of the Alabama landscape. As co-editors James R. Ryan and Joan Schwartz states in *Picturing Place*, “Photographs, like other kinds of imagery, have material effects for those individuals and social groupings that fashion and appreciate them. A proper concern with the roles of photography in making ‘imaginative geographies’ therefore involves blurring the distinction between real and the imagined.”⁸⁵

⁸³ David Moos, conversation with the author, June 21, 2010.

⁸⁴ Raymond Arsenault, “Air-Conditioning,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1989), 323.

⁸⁵ James R. Ryan and Joan M. Schwartz eds., *Picturing Place: Photography and the*

Photography has continued to perpetuate the imaginative myths surrounding the Alabama landscape.⁸⁶ Walker Evans's architectural landscape photographs of Alabama have come to characterize a place that barely exists today. But, because of the state's strong sense of place and cultural heritage, the images continue to resonate in Southern culture today. By collecting Walker Evan's Alabama architectural landscape photographs, Alabama institutions have helped shape Alabamians view of the architectural landscape as part of their culture, connecting landscape and identity, and creating a sense of place to their local geography.

Geographical Imagination (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), 6.

⁸⁶ James R. Ryan and Joan M. Schwartz. eds., *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006), 5.

Appendix A
Birmingham Museum of Art
Birmingham



Store in Alabama, 1936 (recto)
Courtesy of the Birmingham Museum of Art



Store in Alabama, 1936 (verso)
Courtesy of the Birmingham Museum of Art



Minstrel Showbill, 1936
Courtesy of the Birmingham Museum of Art



Child's Grave, Hale County, Alabama, 1936
Courtesy of the Birmingham Museum of Art

Appendix B

Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University
Auburn



American Classics: Selected Photographs of Alabama by Walker Evans
exhibition at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University.
Courtesy of the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art



Allie Mae Burroughs, wife of a sharecropper, 1936 *
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Frank Tingle, Bud Fields, and Floyd Burroughs, cotton sharecroppers, Hale County, Alabama, 1936 *
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

* Selected images from the collection

Appendix C
Sarah Moody Gallery of Art at The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa



Garland Hall, Sarah Moody Gallery of Art

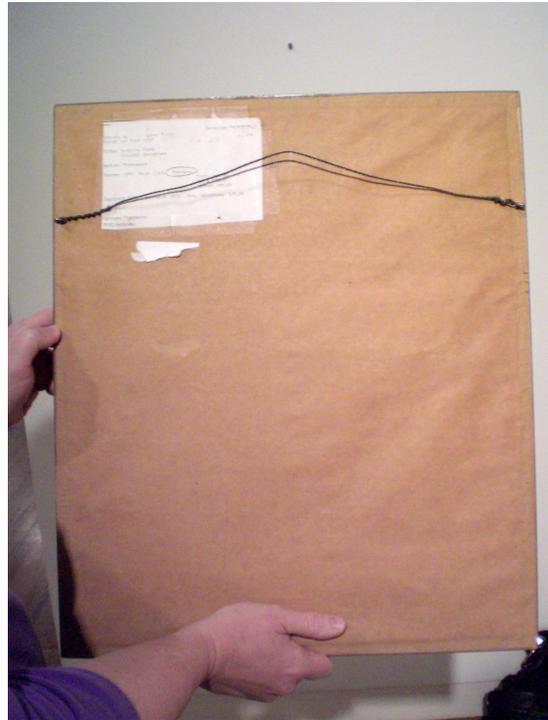


Storage of Gallery



**Roadside Store, Vicinity Greensboro ,
1936 (recto)**

Courtesy of the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art



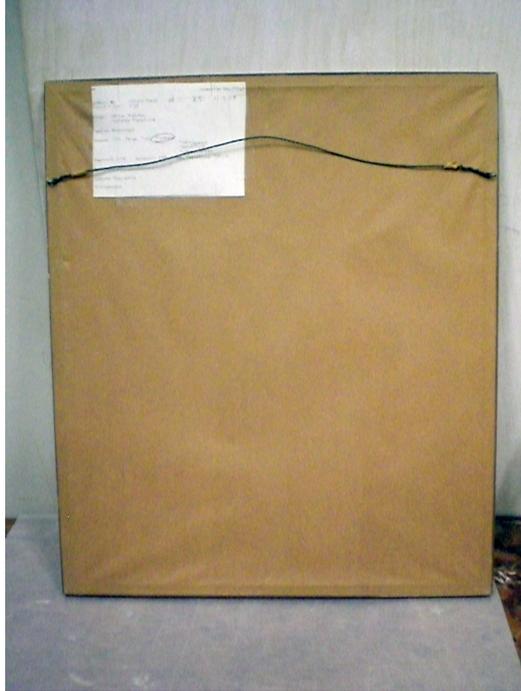
**Roadside Store, Vicinity Greensboro,
1936 (verso)**

Courtesy of the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art

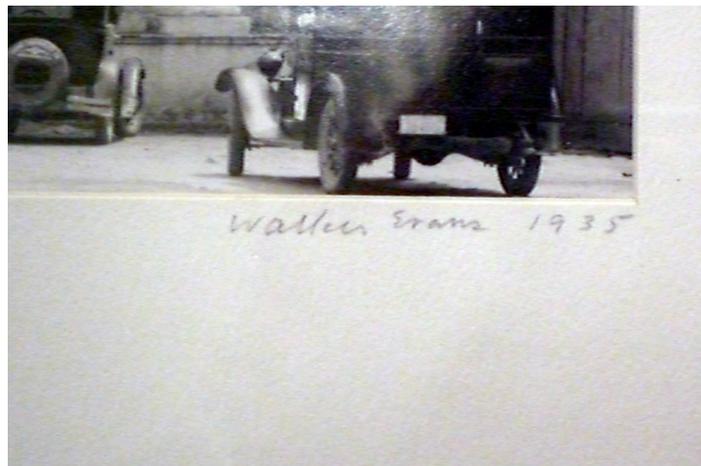
Appendix C (Continued)



Office Building, Vicinity Tuscaloosa, 1935 (recto)
Courtesy of the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art



Office Building, Vicinity Tuscaloosa, 1935 (verso)
Courtesy of the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art

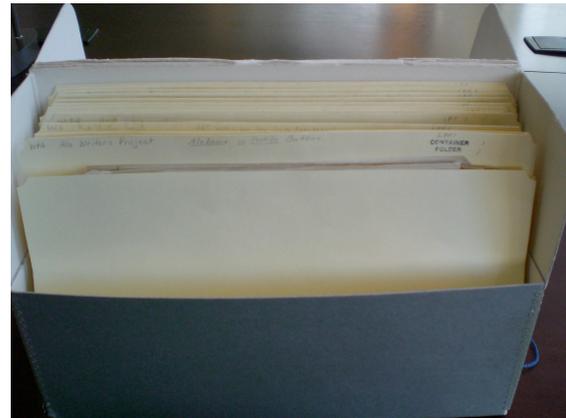


Signed and dated by Evans on mat of Office Building
Courtesy of the Sarah Moody Gallery of Art

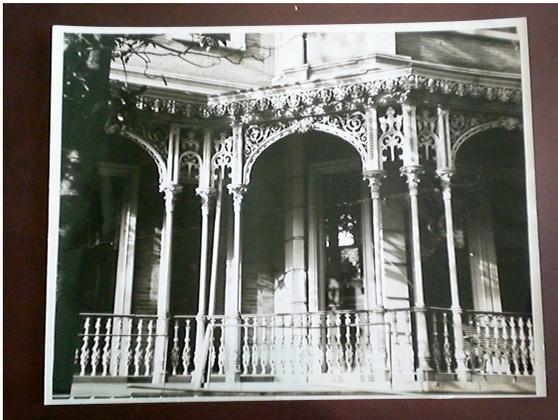
Appendix D
Alabama Department of Archives and History
Montgomery



Alabama Writers Project photographs
*Courtesy of the Alabama Department of
Archives and History*



Housing of AWP photographs
*Courtesy of the Alabama Department of
Archives and History*



**Cast ironwork on a porch in Mobile,
Alabama, 1936 (recto)**
*Courtesy of the Alabama Department of
Archives and History*

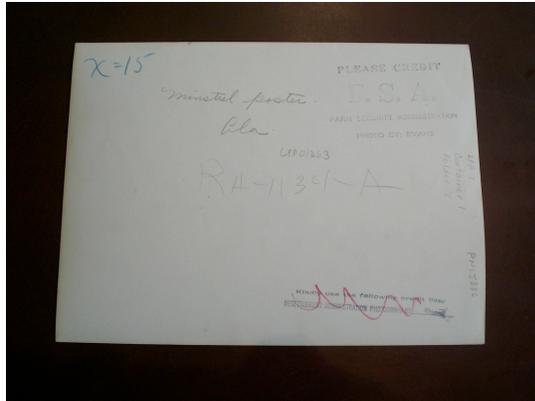


**Cast ironwork on a porch in Mobile,
Alabama, 1936 (verso)**
*Courtesy of the Alabama Department of
Archives and History*

Appendix D (continued)



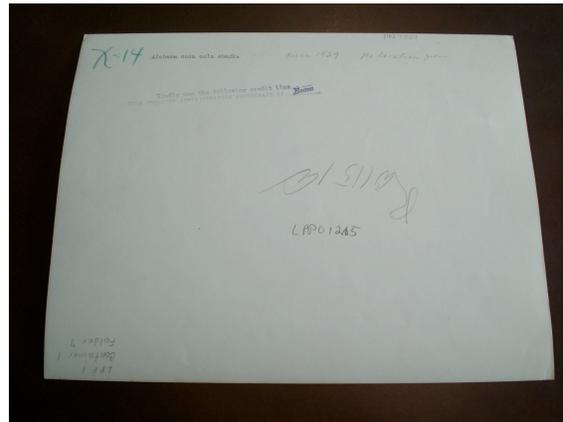
Minstrel poster on the wall of a brick building in Alabama, 1936 (recto)
Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History



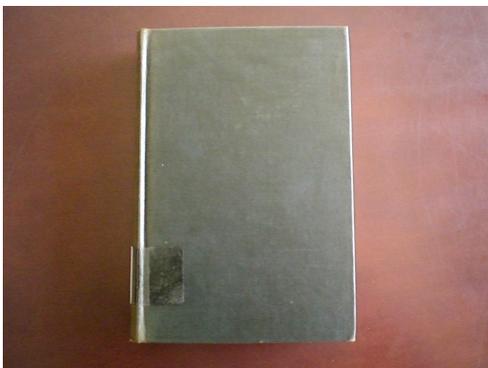
Minstrel poster on the wall of a brick building in Alabama, 1936 (verso)
Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History



Roadside store near Selma, Alabama, 1935 (recto)
Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History



Roadside store near Selma, Alabama, 1935 (verso)
Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History

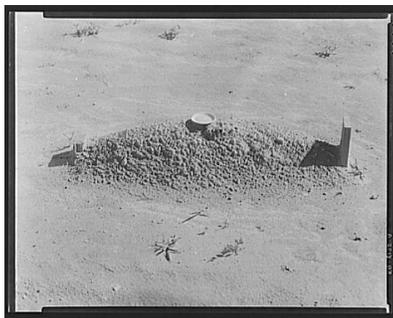


Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, 1941
Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History

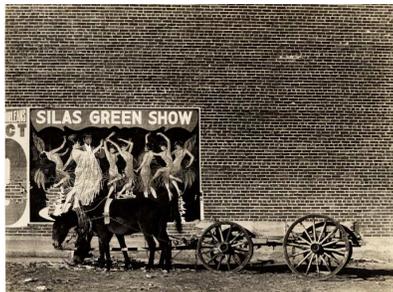
Appendix E
Reoccurring Images



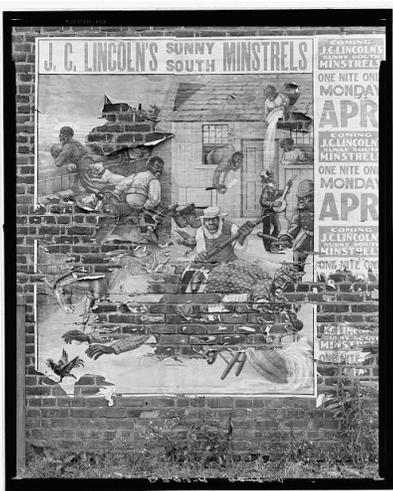
Birmingham Museum of Art
&
Sarah Moody Gallery of Art



Birmingham Museum of Art
&
Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art



Alabama Department of Archives and
History
&
Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art



Birmingham Museum of Art
&
Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art

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