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James G. Thomas

Class of 2020, M.F.A. in Documentary Expression

Photographs by Andrea Morales, Southern Documentary Project



SOCIAL DISTANCE PORTRAITS WITH 2020 SOUTHERN STUDIES GRADUATES

JAMES G. THOMAS

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Class of 2020

M.F.A. in Documentary Expression

Editor, associate director at the CSSC

James began work at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture as managing editor of the twenty-four-volume New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture in 2003, and he has been the Center's Associate Director for Publications since 2011. Thomas is also the director of the Center's annual Oxford Conference for the Book and the editor of Study the South, the Center's online journal, and the Southern Register, the Center's newsmagazine.



At its core, his thesis project “The Lebanese in Mississippi: An Oral History,” is a project that “documents and interprets the lives of first- and subsequent-generation Lebanese Mississippians whose families immigrated to the state looking for a better life.” James built an extensive online oral history documentary project that includes interviews, narrator biographies, photographs and documents shared by those narrators along with a history of Syrian-Lebanese migration to the state, and a four-part audio documentary.

One of the things that's kept me grounded enough to finish my thesis and to propel me forward in so many ways has been my time spent outdoors, away from the computer and the electric whir of all these devices. I've been exploring some of the forests in Lafayette County surrounding Oxford, watching the world come back to life after a long winter, and that solitude has given me a lot of quiet time to slow down and think, not only about my work and other projects, but about how we chose to live our lives—about what we find important in this world and why. My wife and daughter joining me for some of those walks in nature has reinforced and helped shape the conclusions of those Arcadian musings and ruminations.

