5-1995

Mule racing in the Mississippi Delta, 1938-1950

Karen Marie Glynn
University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/1965

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
MULE RACING IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA, 1938-1950

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Mississippi

Karen Marie Glynn
May 1995
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Karen M. Glynn entitled "Mule Racing in the Mississippi Delta, 1938-1950." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Southern Studies.

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Charles R. Wilson
William Davis
Thomas M. McElroy

Accepted for the Council:

Dean of The Graduate School
STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's degree at the University of Mississippi, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of the source is made.

Permission for extensive quotation from or reproduction of this thesis may not be granted by my major professor, or by the Head of Interlibrary Services. Any copying or use of the material in this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature: [Signature]

Date: May 3, 1995
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Racing and Gambling in the South</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mules and Racing in the South</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. An Annual Event: Mule Racing in the Mississippi Delta</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Story of Sparkplug and the Levee</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conclusion</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Afterword</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BIBLIOGRAPHY | 105 |

APPENDIXES | 112 |

A. Greenwood Racing Guide | 113 |
B. Home Movie Inventory & Description | 124 |

VITA | 133 |
CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The cultural values of white planters and the African-American community converged during the public performance of mule racing in the Mississippi Delta. Afraid of being humiliated in public by unskilled black riders representing their plantations on unpredictable mules, planters spent time and money to find fast mules and talented hostlers. The planters' overt behavior acknowledging skilled African-American hostlers transcended the Sambo-style stereotype of mule racing promoted by the white community. Thus, they temporarily allied their values with those of the African-American community, which interpreted the races as a celebration of the skills of black farm hands.

This research paper pieces together the relatively unknown story of mule racing in the Mississippi Delta towns of Greenwood and Rosedale during the 1930s and 1940s. Though white men raced mules at agricultural exhibitions and county fairs all over the country, in the plantation regions of Mississippi the racial code prohibited them from riding the animals. This social taboo reflected the strong symbolic

1 The terms African-American and black are used interchangeably.
association of mules and blacks in the plantation areas of Mississippi. African-American farm hands raced the mules at events organized by members of the planter class and other prominent residents. The races spoofed thoroughbred racing down to the inclusion of a "Gentlemen's Jockey" and a sweepstakes wreath of cotton bolls.

Planters scheduled the races during layby, after the cotton had been chopped and before the start of picking season. Substantial pre-race publicity, novelty races, and pari-mutuel betting attracted large crowds to the races. Money raised through entrance fees and betting filled the coffers of the Greenwood Junior Auxiliary and paid for the upkeep of the Rosedale country club.

These two races offer an unusual opportunity to study a racially mixed community event during segregation from the point of view of both black and white participants. This project uncovers and examines extant historical materials and integrates them with first-hand accounts to render a more complete picture of the mule races. As the races occurred in the recent past, it is possible to interview the people who attended as well as study the events on home movie footage. This work is interdisciplinary. First, mules and mule stories are an integral part of the folklore of the pre-mechanical,

---

2 Videotape of the home movies is located in the Documentary Projects office of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi.
agricultural South. People enjoy the opportunity to reminisce and talk about the animals. This non-political, non-threatening topic often serves like a skeleton key opening doors into the closed world of Delta society and culture. Second, the mule races provide a window to observe social relations between the races outside of the traditional workplace environment. Third, home movie photographers filmed mule racing in the Delta. This historical record of Delta society in the pre-World War II era provides a previously unavailable text for analysis and interpretation. The motion picture footage allows viewers to see what the races actually looked like; it answers logistical questions about the number of animals that ran in a race, the number of individual races that comprised an event, and the size and composition of the crowd. The use of home movie footage as an historical document evokes numerous questions.

This paper examines authorship, social position, the filmmaker's agenda, and the representation of African-Americans.

The mule race footage is stunning due to the novelty of the event, and the unexpected appearance of individual black farm laborers dressed in ordinary clothing racing mules across the screen. Motion picture footage of African-Americans in the South prior to World War II is rare. The material that does exist often casts African-Americans in stereotypical locations such as cotton fields and with stereotypical props such as watermelons and mules. Footage of individual, animate blacks
not working in an agricultural capacity nor eating watermelon is extremely rare. National newsreel companies which covered popular culture and current events from the 1920s through the late 1960s seldom depicted African-American life in America. The world of southern black farm workers, isolated on individual plantations, made even fewer appearances on motion picture footage. Occasionally planters let reporters onto the plantations to film stories about the annual cotton crop. Otherwise the plantations closed their borders to outsiders who might disrupt the farming activities of the African-American labor force.

The national visual culture did not include images of African-Americans until the Farm Security Administration photographers went to work in the mid 1930s. Even then, few photographs of black Americans appeared before the public eye. The published images revealed very little about black Southerners beyond their apparent poverty. Nicholas Natanson captured the issue in a quote about tenants from the 1937 Texas correspondence between Dorothea Lange and Roy Stryker. Lange had written Stryker for clarification about photographing black and white tenant farmers. Stryker replied: "I would suggest that you take both black and white, but place the emphasis on the white tenants, since we know that these will receive much wider use." The pragmatic

3 Nicholas Natanson. The Black Image in the New Deal. p. 4.
nature of Stryker's reply reveals the reformist goals of the Farm Security Agency, not a racist agenda. Still, the policy decision restricted the number of African-American images recorded.

Footage of the American South, often shot by the Federal Department of Agriculture, included black farm workers, but the camera portrayed them as part of the landscape of the plantation, a piece of property just like a tractor or a barn. Or photographers shot the workers as a group, rarely focusing on the individuals that comprised the group. The motion picture footage did not reveal dialog or engagement between photographer and subject; the mask presented to the white world never slipped to expose the parallel black world. In summary, the scarce images of pre-World War II black Southerners offered little information about the photographed people.

The mule race home movie footage is unusual because it revealed the heretofore hidden world of the southern African-American farm worker. It documented African-Americans as active individuals skillfully riding their mounts on the track and through the predominantly white crowd. The public mask slipped revealing a vitality and spark never presented in professional film footage. The filmmakers had recorded an inversion ritual which temporarily celebrated the talents of black men. The home movie footage survived and transgressed the liminal nature of the event. When the film was taken from
the private sphere and exhibited publicly it lost its (original) accompanying cultural context. Viewers unfamiliar with Delta society see an the unusual event of African-Americans racing mules and are encouraged to wonder: Who were these men? Why were they racing mules? Did they choose to? What kind of event was this?

As a professional documentary film researcher, I am interested in the answers to those questions. I am especially interested in exploring the link between home movies and historical memory. I believe that home movies supported by oral histories from the community can provide a clearer understanding of life in the South under Jim Crow.

Annual mule races began during the Depression when large Delta plantation owners invested federal Agricultural Adjustment Agency payments into tractors. And Federal Emergency Relief Administration payments to displaced tenants and sharecroppers loosened planter control of the labor pool. The mule race ritual reinforced the pre-mechanical social order by placing blacks at the bottom of the hierarchy, reassuring whites of continued social and political control.

Chapter two addresses the general history and role of horse racing and gambling in the South. Passionate about gambling, and horses, Southerners frequently attended quarter horse matches often betting huge amounts on the outcome. The paper examines the social function of gambling in developing societies. Court records of colonial Virginia reveal
the intersection of class, racing, and gambling. The law, defined and enforced by the planters, used competitive sports and gambling to stratify the emerging society. They placed horse racing at the top of the social hierarchy of sport designating it the domain of the richest planters.

Slaves often rode in the quarter horse races. By the eighteenth century the wealthiest planters, following the British lead, began breeding thoroughbred horses that could compete in distance races. They built tracks and established exclusive Jockey Clubs which held regular racing seasons. As in the quarter horse races, slave jockeys rode the thoroughbreds. Blacks continued to ride thoroughbreds professionally until the beginning of the twentieth century when discrimination closed the profession to them.

Chapter three addresses the introduction of the mule to the American colonies. It locates George Washington's Mount Vernon plantations as the site of the mule's official debut in the new country. Popular demand for the draft animal led to the development of major trading areas in Missouri, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The increasing number of animals supplied to the southern market correlated with the increasing numbers of slaves and new land under cultivation. The mule population in the United States peaked in 1925 when the introduction of tractors precipitated their decline.

Tennessee hosted the first known mule races in 1835. Slave jockeys rode the animals. Agricultural exhibitions and
county fairs throughout rural America scheduled mule races, harness races, and running races from the late twentieth century until the great Depression. Blacks and whites rode in these events except when racism intervened.

Chapter four examines mule races in the Mississippi Delta towns of Rosedale and Greenwood using oral histories, newspaper articles, and home movies. Three distinct perspectives emerge from the research materials. The memories of white informants differ from those of black informants, and both differ from media coverage of the mule races. The cultural values of the black and white participants converge for the duration of the races, transcending the inherent racism of the ritual.

Chapter five is a case study of the story of Sparkplug, a legendary rider who symbolizes the divergent needs of the black and white communities. The sixth chapter concludes the paper by recounting the main points. Finally, an afterword describes the discovery of the footage and the path of my research.
CHAPTER 2
Racing and Gambling in the South

This chapter briefly traces the intersection of gambling, horse racing, and African-Americans from the early Virginians to twentieth century Mississippians. It establishes the passion of southern colonists for games of chance, sports, and betting. The social stratification of sports and gambling documented through Virginian court records reveals the crucial role of the horse in accruing and maintaining social status. The records disclose that large landowners tried to monopolize horse culture and gambling by using their political positions to turn horse racing into an exclusive privilege of the landed gentry. Throughout the frontier culture of competition and risk, slaves performed as jockeys on the quarter horse track. Colonists bought the first slaves in 1619, a year before the arrival of the first successful shipment of horses. The career of African-American horsemen began with that boat load of animals and continued into the early twentieth century when racism excluded black jockeys from professional competitions.

Colonists began their gambling careers when they decided to become pioneers and sail across the Atlantic ocean in small wooden ships to make their fortune in the new world.
They fought the native inhabitants, cleared the land, planted tobacco and food crops, and competed among themselves for more and better lands, crop prices, labor, and status. Frontier life was full of risks, raising a single cash crop was a seasonal gamble that farmers assumed every agricultural cycle.

Fortunes, credit ratings, and social status hung in the balance season after season as farmers successfully harvested or lost their crop due to market fluctuations, competition, war, uncontrollable acts of nature, illness, pests, and the availability of labor. As time and settlement patterns transformed wilderness frontiers into settled villages and towns social behavior altered to meet the new demands. The pioneers on the Southwest frontier in nineteenth century Mississippi faced many of the same risks as the seventeenth-century Virginia settlers. And they responded in a similar manner to the pressures of living on the edge and striving to establish a fortune.

Performance sports and gambling relieved the tension of frontier life and channeled the aggressive competitiveness of the ruthless, empire-building pioneer into socially constructive rather than destructive behavior. A man's honor could be challenged whenever he ventured into the public sphere from the privacy of his lands. Male settlers constantly tested each other and gambled on the outcome, gaining and losing material wealth, social status, and body parts in the process.
"The wager," as T. H. Breen wrote, "whether over cards or horses, brought together in a single focused act the great planters' competitiveness, independence, and materialism, as well as the element of chance." Colonial Virginians, like their English ancestors, and later Delta pioneers were passionate gamblers and bet on whatever struck their fancy. As David H. Fischer relates:

Virginians were observed to be constantly making wagers with one another on almost any imaginable outcome. The more uncertain the result, the more likely they were to gamble. They made bets not merely on horses, cards, cockfights and backgammon; but also on crops, prices, women and the weather.5

By 1752, concern about excessive gambling and the violence and disruption it generated in the community was so widespread that the governor asked the gentlemen of the legislature to exert their influence to curb the practice.6 Gambling was a socially stratified form of entertainment practiced among peers. The law, represented by the wealthiest members of society, upheld gambling debts where "... money had been staked down, or a formal contract drawn up ... and the subject of the wager was not destructive of public morality,

---

or injurious to other people's property. According to David Hackett Fischer the law created and actively supported a hierarchy of sports by penalizing all transgressions. Public sporting events defined one's social position in the community. A court document from York County dated September 10, 1674 clearly describes the stratification of society and the penalties for daring to break ranks:

James Bullocke, a Taylor, having made a race for his mare to runn w'th a horse belonging to Mr. Matthew Slader for twoe thousand pounds of tobacco and caske, it being contrary to Law for a Labourer to make a race, being a sport for Gentlemen, is fined for the same one hundred pounds of tobacco and caske.

Horse racing, the most exclusive and popular sport, became the domain of Virginia's parvenu planters, who W. E. B. DuBois later described as "cursing, whoring, brawling, gamblers." Within this group, upwardly mobile men jockeyed for social position by the amount they would risk losing on a horse race, and by who would join them in the wager against the other horseman. The drama of "deep play," men risking more than they could afford to lose, their livelihood, on a bet, is analyzed by Rhys Isaac:

---

8 Fischer, Albion's Seed. p. 345.
Important Virginia social values were asserted in forms of deep play, where persons, closely watched by all the company, would make bids for acceptance at high valuation. To be forced to cry out “King's cruse” to save the sight of one's eye (or one's manhood itself) in a bout of wrestling; to be unhorsed and rolled in the dust at the start of a quarter race;...in short, to lose in a world where personal prowess was of great consequence—would mean a momentary taste of annihilation. In this pre-humanitarian age, where chattel slavery was an unquestioned fact of life, people came to these events as much for the excitement of seeing some laid low by defeat, as they did for the pleasure of exulting in identification with the winners.1

A rare animal in seventeenth-century Virginia, the horse was extremely desirable as a source of agricultural power, a mode of transportation, and a symbol of social status. The first animals arrived in 1610 but a famine forced the settlers to butcher and eat them. In 1620 a shipload of twenty mares arrived, "beautiful and full of courage."2 By mid-century, wealthier settlers arrived in the new country with their own horses. These animals became multi-use horses, sharing the heavy work of bulls and cows. They pulled plows, cleared stumps, hauled wood, carried farmers to meetings, and performed on the quarter horse tracks. The role of the horse

1 Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, p. 119.
2 Hervey, Racing in America 1665-1865, p. 16.
on the farm supports Breen's assertion that, "a horse was an extension of its owner; indeed, a man was only as good as his horse." Working horses were a clear asset in the competition to attain, clear, and farm land. While all men could buy and ride horses, only the gentry, their servants, and their slaves could race them publicly on the quarter mile tracks. Virginians bought their first African slaves in the year 1619. New scholarship revealing the presence of a vigorous horse culture in parts of West Africa raises the possibility that such experiential knowledge may have influenced the desirability of West African slaves in the mid-Atlantic market. Slaves frequently rode as jockeys in the quarter horse races. By omitting this information in descriptions of colonial quarter horse races many authors infer that white farmers always rode their own horses in these races. The following passage by Rhys Isaac is a case in point:

The race was a violent duel that tested not only the speed of the horses but also the daring and combative skill of the riders . . . each might be free (depending on agreed rules) to use whip, knee, or elbow to dismount his opponent or drive him off the track.

These events were keenly followed and had intense meaning, for the riders in the quarter races were known to the spectators in terms of their family histories, life stories, and individual character traits. Riders and spectators would have

---

14 Lynn S. Renau. Racing Around Kentucky.
to live together in a world shaped by their own
dramatic performances.¹⁶

Since the family histories, life stories, and individual character
traits of slaves were not relevant to white Virginians, the
reader is led to believe that the horse riders are prominent
white landowners. In his chapter entitled "Popular Diversions-
-Horse Racing," Philip Alexander Bruce uses Virginia County
Court records to describe colonial racing practices. More than
half way through the chapter, after describing a particularly
unusual race, Bruce notes that, "Each of the principals seems to
have acted as his own jockey." He goes on to say, "Probably
most owners of race-horses during the seventeenth century, if
very young men, were always ready to mount their own steeds
for a heat."¹⁷

Actually, Bruce's work shows otherwise. In the
seventeen specific races cited, he named the owners of the
horses as riders in only three races; in nine races it is unclear
who rode; in five races jockeys rode, named and unnamed.
Bruce identified one of the jockeys as the servant of the horse's
owner though he did not state the race of the jockey. In all of
the races, Bruce named the race track, the horses and their
owners. Either he considered identification of the riders
unimportant, or it was not a part of the depositions in the
County records. Neither situation justifies his claim that the

¹⁷ Bruce, Social Life of Virginia, p. 208.
owners normally rode their own horses nor proves that only white jockeys rode in the races.

According to Alexander Mackay-Smith, an authority on quarter horse racing, "Most of the jockeys were black, usually slaves, but in some cases free negroes." Isaac Weld, Jr., an Englishman traveling in North America from 1795-1797, described quarter horse races he observed in Virginia:

They usually run for purses made up by subscription . . . . the horses are commonly rode by negro boys, some of whom are really good jockeys.

A distinctive feature of the quarter race was that the jockeys called the start of the race themselves. Organizers cleared parallel paths a quarter of a mile long and placed posts at the start and finish. Designated men tended the posts to ensure a fair start and conclusive finish, but the jockeys, often slaves, initiated the actual beginning of the race. A race could not start until the riders guided both horses into position. No hand but the jockey's touched the horse; the two riders jostled each other and circled their horses at the starting post until they were both in position to run. They called back and forth to each other while maneuvering their mounts until they both declared themselves ready at the same precise moment. At that instant they started. A successful start required great skill.

---

19 Mackay-Smith, *The Colonial Quarter Race Horse.*
and was crucial to winning, as lost ground could not be recouped on a quarter mile course.

Colonial quarter horse racing was not like contemporary thoroughbred racing where the highly trained horse performs on a professional track in a controlled environment, and a common adage is, "You could put a monkey on its back, and it would win." The following account of a quarter horse race in Dobbs County, North Carolina, circa 1772 in the American Turf Register, illustrates the popularity of the sport, the possible size of wagers, as well as the significance of the rider in the outcome of the race. The winning jockey, a slave named Austin Curtis, owned by Willie Jones of Halifax Town, North Carolina, weighed fifty pounds at the time of the race:

'The fame of the horses; the high reputation of the gentlemen who made the race; the great wager staked on the issue [the main bet amounted to 147,000 lbs. of tobacco]; all united to collect a large crowd. They lined the paths as a solid wall the whole distance. All eyes were turned towards the start as the riders mounted. They made two turns, but did not come. At the third they passed the poles with the velocity of lightning. All was silence; not a man drew breath; nothing was heard but the clattering of the horses. They passed with the noise and speed of a tempest; all saw it was a close race, and that both horses and riders exerted themselves to the utmost.

Mr. J saw, as they passed, that his rider had one foot out of the stirrup, rode down, meeting his rider, he asked how that chanced. "No chance at all, sir," said Austin, "We made two turns, and could not

---

start. I saw old Ned did not mean to start fair. The Big Filly was as cool as a cucumber. Paoli beginning to fret. You know, sir, we had nothing to spare; so I drew one foot, to induce Ned to think I was off my guard. Paoli was in fine motion. Ned locked me at the poles. Away we came; both horses did their utmost, and the loss of the stirrup won the race.**2 1

Quarter horse racing required skill and courage. The unpredictableness of the start placed vital decision making powers in the hands of the jockey. In order to win the rider needed to know his horse, the competitor's horse, and the racing paths. The accounts of such races celebrate the talent of the jockey as well as the power and speed of the animal. Slaveowners gambled enormous sums on these events, indicating trust in the skill of their slaves and the quality of their horses. Quarter horse racing remained popular in the seaboard colonies even as it crossed the Appalachians with the pioneers. "Racing in the early West was the most vigorous of frontier sports." Thomas D. Clark found that in early nineteenth century Kentucky, "Quarter horse races were organized and run at any time and place where there were as many as two horses that could run, and two riders who were willing to ride them."**2 2

As the farmers amassed wealth in the form of land and slaves they moved into the planter class and began acquiring the sporting habits of the British aristocracy. They sent their

---

**2 1 Mackay-Smith. The Colonial Quarter Race Horse.
**2 2 Thomas D. Clark. The Rampaging Frontier. p. 226.
sons to school in England and they returned with "the manners of the Georges and more developed and subtle notions of class." These notions of class, expressed through the premise, *blood will tell*, are interwoven throughout the culture of thoroughbred horse raising and racing. Unlike the quarter horse which was a useful working animal as well as a racing horse, the thoroughbred was a luxury animal used for running and breeding. The expense of keeping a non-working, high maintenance animal limited the number of planters able to afford the sport of kings. Those planters began breeding their best quarter horses with imported, English blooded horses in order to produce animals with stamina as well as speed. Some scholars claim that slaveholders also bred slaves to produce small jockeys. Eminent historian Winthrop Jordan has never seen convincing documentation. Enthusiastic planters formed Jockey Clubs, which held annual purse races, followed by Jockey Club Balls, that quickly became an important part of the landed gentry's social season.

The register of a Jockey Club formed in Philadelphia in 1766 listed jockeys and described their proper attire as "... a neat Waistcoat, Cap, and Half Boots." John Hervey provides this information in *Racing in America 1665-1865* and goes on to

---

name the jockeys. "Among those whose names are given we find Colson, J. McLean, A. Craig, Peachey, Gay, Joe Wilson (who rode for DeLancey), David Miller, Metcalf and various "black boys," named and unnamed, that were obviously slaves."\[27\]

Here Hervey, perhaps following the custom of the times, chooses not to provide the names of the various "black boys" who rode for the Jockey Club. The identification and role of black jockeys were thus "structured out" of the historical record.\[28\] The South Carolina Jockey Club, though formed in 1856, dates its turf history much earlier:

The earliest record that exists of any public running, appears in the South Carolina Gazette, February 1st, 1734. . . . The race was run on the first Tuesday in February, 1734--mile heats--four entries. The horses carried ten stone--white riders.

*This was one of the stipulations of the race. This race took place on a green on Charleston Neck, immediately opposite a public house, known in those days as the Bowling Green House. . . .

In the following year, (1735), owners of fine horses were invited, through the newspapers, to enter them for a purse of L100. This year a Course was laid out at the Quarter House, to which the name was given of "The York Course," after, it may be presumed, the *Course of York*, in England, which was then attaining celebrity as a Race Ground.\[29\]

Black riders must have been very common if authorities banned them from the first advertised distance race held in colonial South Carolina. (Perhaps the plantation owners wanted

to be able to pretend that they were actually at the races in New Market, or Hyde Park in London). Rule number ten of the South Carolina Jockey Club, written in 1824, clearly stated that blacks rode as jockeys in the annual Charleston races on the Washington Course during Race Week.

... and if any Rider shall presume to cross, jostle, strike, or use any foul play whatever ... such Rider shall be prohibited from riding thereafter, for any of the purses given by this Club; and the master, owner, or person employing such Rider, shall not receive such purse, should he win it; but the same shall be given to the second horse in the race. 30

Though blacks continued to ride thoroughbreds in competition as they did quarter horses, the official listings of the events did not acknowledge their performances. John Hervey notes the changes in thoroughbred racing at the beginning of the nineteenth century: "... the gentleman rider was being superseded by the professional ... In the South, being slave lads, they were ignored, but while in the North black riders were not uncommon, whites were preferred. 31

John B. Irving's history of the South Carolina Jockey Club recounts horse races in detail by date, owner's name, horse's name, horse's age and pedigree, weight carried, distance, and time. The riders are rarely mentioned except as poundage.

30 Ibid., p. 193.
31 Hervey, Racing in America 1665-1865, p. 249.
The following entry from the 1833 Sweepstakes race is typical:

Col. J.B. Richardson's b.f. Julia, 3 yrs. old, by Bertrand, dam Transport, 87 lbs., 1 1
Col. W.R. Johnson's b.c. Herr Cline, 3 yrs. old, by Sir Archy, dam by Gallatin, 90 lbs., 2 2

As recorded, one loses all sense of the presence and skill of the jockeys; the weight could as easily be a sack of potatoes. There is no information in the above entry that 87 lbs. and 90 lbs. represent people.

The society thus excluded jockeys, especially African-Americans from the public presentation of the world of racing. In describing one close race Irving praises the performance of a horse's rider by comparing him to the top three jockeys in England whom he names, though he does not name the black jockey whom he is saluting.\(^2\) While Irving does not acknowledge African-American participation in the races, white owners are written about as if they mounted and rode the horses themselves:

We confess, we have been much struck this season by the fact, and deem it of happy augury to the future interests of the Club, that we have so many young men of the good old Carolina stock making their debut upon the turf. Who has not read with pleasure the names of the two young Singletons, Lowndes, Sinkler, Heyward? Young men of fortune and of honor, who will doubtless walk in

\(^2\) Irving, *South Carolina Jockey Club*, p. 56.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 100.
the footsteps of their fathers, and pursue this popular pastime of racing, not merely for filthy lucre, but con amore.\textsuperscript{3 4}

The passion of pre-revolutionary Americans for distance racing coincided with a distancing between themselves and their slaves. Physically, as the planters' wealth increased, they built larger homes with separate slave quarters. Culturally, the intimate relationship between planter and slave jockey necessitated by the negotiated nature of match races on the quarter horse track was lost to the formalized rules of thoroughbred racing. Organized distance racing on prepared tracks with official starters and rules eliminated the unpredictable elements of quarter horse racing which had showcased the rider's skill. Rule XVI of the South Carolina Jockey Club reveals the loss of stature of the jockey:

The duties of the Stewards shall be as follows: To weigh all Riders just before notice is given for mounting, and to keep an eye on them till started; to receive the riders as soon as they pull up, on coming in, and have them in their possession till weighed. Four of the Stewards to be posted round the Course as to detect any foul riding . . . \textsuperscript{3 5}

Horse breeding and racing, interrupted during the Revolutionary War, resumed with vigor at its close. As the country recovered and celebrated its victory it continued to expand its territory to the south and west. Americans built

\textsuperscript{3 4} Ibid., p. 102.
\textsuperscript{3 5} Irving, \textit{South Carolina Jockey Club}, p. 195.
roads for wagon and carriage use which lead to carriage races, and eventually harness racing. In the North, African-Americans found themselves competing for stable and racing jobs with a growing number of European immigrants. As racing evolved into an organized, regulated and increasingly expensive sport in the settled parts of the country, race tracks established by associations and jockey clubs flourished in the frontier towns of the southwest.

Joan E. Cashin wrote that men reveled in the ability to "live like a fighting cock" on the southwestern frontier, far from the reciprocal obligations of family and the social decorum required of life in the settled seaboard communities. Mississippi Delta pioneers followed the tradition of aggressive competition in sport and gambling practiced in the early Virginia colonies: "Planters gathered in gambling dens . . . termed "hells" . . . playing billiards or poker, betting thousands of dollars on the turn of a card." Slaves accompanied these pioneers clearing the land, planting the crops, attended the stables, and racing the horses. The outbreak of the Civil War disrupted the evolution of the sport of kings in America.

Racing resumed at Jerome Park, New York, in 1866, one year after the end of the Civil War. W. S. Vosburgh, writing in 1922 for the American Jockey Club, noted the types of positions which employed blacks: "In those days a considerable

---

37 Ibid., p. 104.
proportion of the stable attendants, cooks, rubbers, and some
trainers, were colored people. Though he does not mention
jockeys, they are described as, "the dark-skinned youth of
Africa" in a poem written as a tribute to an 1869 thoroughbred
race in Cincinnati.

In her dissertation on the Kentucky Derby, Jeanne Harrah-
Conforth found, that "... only one white jockey ran in the first
Derby [1875]. Black jockeys won over half of the Derby races
until 1911. At that time Derby jockeys became almost
exclusively white."

Frontier life in the Virginia colonies encouraged fierce
competition and gambling at sporting events. Players wagered
huge amounts in order to gain public stature, increase their
estates and destroy their competition. The cultural values
expressed in these social arenas: personal honor, independence,
materialism, and competitiveness appeared on each successive
frontier as Americans fought to make their individual fortunes
and establish themselves in the emerging societies.

The Virginians used the legal system to make horse
racing the privilege of the wealthy, automatically focusing the
competitive aspirations of the excluded, and turning the race
horse into a symbol of social status. As slaves and then as
freed men, African-Americans worked on the frontiers and

---

38 W. S. Vosburgh. Racing in America 1866-1921. p. 11.
39 Ibid., p. 80.
participated in the evolution of horse culture until racism excluded them from competition.

By 1850, the black population in the Mississippi Delta outnumbered the white population five to one. Wealthy settlers brought their families and slaves to the rich alluvial Delta plain after the one crop system had depleted the soil of their native states. Settling the Delta was an enormous gamble. Pioneers risked disease, wild animals, unpredictable weather, and annual floods to cultivate the land. They needed access to money and credit to expand their holdings and absorb their losses until they could produce enough cotton to make a profit. The planters bought slaves and mules to clear, drain, and cultivate the rich, forested, swampy region.

Heavily populated by blacks before the Civil War, the fertile soil, proximity to the river, and low white population of the Delta, attracted freed slaves who wanted their own farms. Rumors that the federal government would distribute land and live stock to freed people fueled their dreams. The aspirations of the former slaves clashed with the needs of the large planters seeking to secure a stable labor force to work their huge plantations. Without money or resources to attain land, freedmen and women contracted with anxious planters to farm plots of the plantation in exchange for supplies and a share of the crop. By the 1880s, labor was abundant and black farmers lost much of their leverage to negotiate labor contracts with planters. Reconstruction was over. The political tide had
turned against the republicans, blacks were disfranchised, and the Delta elite took power. While some African-Americans owned land, it was generally marginal and in undesirable areas. Increasing land prices throughout the 1880s took even the poor land out of the reach of black farmers.

According to James C. Cobb, "Farm tenancy in Mississippi was widespread... As of 1910, 92 percent of the area's farms were operated by tenants... approximately 95 percent of the Delta's tenants were black." While thousands of African-Americans escaped the Delta during the great migration in the early twentieth century, the rich land and promises of good crops constantly replenished the supply of labor attracted from the hill country of the state. There were very few opportunities for blacks in the Mississippi Delta under Jim Crow. The situation remained the same when the mule races began in the early 1930s.

---

CHAPTER 3

Mules and Racing in the South

As the draft animals of choice, the mule population parallels the growth of the slave population and the increase of arable land under cultivation. The long, rich history of the mule in the American South, is culturally, politically and economically intertwined with the African-Americans who commonly worked them in the plantation regions. As the deep alluvial topsoil of the Mississippi Delta was suited to the greedy, soil depleting cotton crop, Southern farmers supplied mules to their black labor force rather than horses or oxen because they believed, among other things, that: "... mules were much hardier under careless treatment by Negroes and tenants." Mules and blacks became synonymous in the socio-economic world of the Mississippi Delta. Mated by slavery followed by the onerous system of share cropping, African-Americans and the denigrated mule, shared a similar destiny of unending labor in the plantation economy of the Delta.

Planters often used their labor and stock to build the levee after the cotton crop was in. During his research on the music and life of muleskinners in the Delta levee camps Alan Lomax

---

42 Robert Byron Lamb. The Mule in Southern Agriculture. p. 82.
interviewed a retired crew foreman. "We levee contractors created a billion dollars worth of land and property . . . " , the foreman continued, "But it took a type of people that knew how to handle a nigger, because the biggest part of the work was done with mules and there's nobody on earth can handle a mule like a nigger muleskinner."\textsuperscript{43}

Mule racing in the black belt areas of Mississippi reflects this linkage. Only blacks rode the animals. The social caste system made it a taboo for whites to ride mules in public. Elsewhere in the state and country white and black farmers rode their own mules in local competitions, county fairs and agricultural exhibitions. The duration of the cultural association between mules and African-Americans in the South, continued into the twentieth century. The premier program of the Sam 'n' Henry radio show, later renamed Amos 'n' Andy, begins with two black men riding a mule to Birmingham to catch a train north. "As the dialogue began, an impatient Sam exclaimed, 'I hope dey got faster mules dan dis up in Chicago.'"\textsuperscript{44}

Though New Englanders raised mules for export prior to the Revolutionary War, George Washington's breeding activities with imported stock from Spain and Malta after the war aggressively introduced the animal to American agriculture. Washington received his first jack from the King of Spain in

\textsuperscript{43} Alan Lomax. The Land Where the Blues Began. p. 229.
\textsuperscript{44} Melvin Patrick Ely. The Adventures of AMOS 'N' ANDY. p. 2.
1785. The animal, Royal Gift, netted Washington $678.64 dollars in fees on its first stud tour of the South. In 1786 the Marquis de Lafayette sent him two jennets and a jack from Malta. A stud advertisement placed in a Philadelphia paper in 1786 by Washington's overseer, John Fairfax, explains the general's faith in the mule:

'Royal Gift.—A Jack Ass of the first race in the kingdom of Spain will cover mares and jennies (the asses) at Mount Vernon the ensuing spring. . . . The advantages, which are many, to be derived from the propagation of asses from this animal (the first of the kind that ever was in North America), and the usefulness of mules bred from a Jack of his size, either for the road or team, are well known to those who are acquainted with this mongrel race. For the information of those who are not, it may be enough to add, that their great strength, longevity, hardiness, and cheap support, give them a preference of horses that is scarcely to be imagined . . . .

Washington bred the imported asses with horse stock in different combinations until he established two lines of mules with distinct characteristics: "... the Maltese jack, which had been named Knight of Malta, was best fitted for the breeding of saddle or light carriage mules; Royal Gift was better suited for the breeding of mules for heavy draft work." From the

---

45 Lamb, Southern Agriculture, p. 6.
46 Ibid.
auspicious debut of mules in this country, planters understood that selective breeding provided a wide choice of sizes and character traits. Farmers could order just about what they wanted. Vicksburg livestock trader Ray Lum preferred a henny for riding:

There's two ways to get a mule. If you take a jack and a mare horse and put them together, you get a mule. That's what you call a jack screw. If you breed a saddle mare with a jack, you'll get a mule that'll ride awful good. It'll take after its mother. It'll have more of the mare in it than it has the jack. Now then, if you want to go the other way, you put a jenny under a stud horse and get a henny . . . . I'd just as well have a henny. They get to weigh a thousand pounds, and they are awful pretty. They're shaped like a good round horse. I saw one yesterday. A fellow had it in Hazelhurst, and he was riding it. He just fox-trotted him like a horse. Oh, it was nice.47

Washington's breeding work produced a line of riding mules as well as draft animals. Perhaps the descendants of Knight of Malta competed against those of Royal Gift at the mule races which started in this country as early as 1835. Lamb states that, "Much of the jack stock and many of the mules bred in the nineteenth century can be traced back to... animals produced by George Washington." He claims that the

quality of Washington's draft stock can be gauged by the prices farmers paid for the animals after his death. "Three teams of mules brought $400 each. Knight of Malta, at the age of eighteen years, brought $320, while all the remaining jacks sold for $200 to $250."[48]

Washington was not alone in his advocacy of mules. John S. Skinner, as editor of the American Farmer, promoted mules as superior draft animals until the middle of the nineteenth century. Thomas Jefferson also used them, though, according to Lamb, he bought them in Kentucky rather than breeding his own.

Three border states dominated the mule trade from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century: Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. The Bluegrass Basin of Kentucky began raising the animals first. The mule population jumped from 800 animals in 1820 to about 5000 animals in 1835. Skinner went there in 1839 to study the animals and the mule trading business. By the 1830s, farmers in the Nashville Basin in Tennessee discovered that it was more profitable to raise stock than to grow crops. By 1860 the Tennessee farmers produced more mules than any other state. Missouri's first mules came from the southwest, driven up the Santa Fe trail in 1823. Mules carried Spanish colonists into New Mexico in the sixteenth century and were abundant by the beginning of the

Santa Fe trade in the nineteenth century. By 1890, forty percent of the farmers in Missouri raised mules placing the state ahead of Tennessee and Kentucky in production. Mule and horse traders traveled to the breeders to buy the animals and shipped them down the river, sent them by rail, or drove them overland to the Southern market.

In 1850 mules comprised ten percent of the draft animals in the South. By 1860 mules comprised twenty percent of the draft animals on the plantations of the Lower South, primarily in the lower Mississippi Delta, the Alabama Black Prairie, the Upper Coastal Plains, and the lower Piedmont of Georgia. By the end of the 1870s, with the revival of the plantation system, and the expansion of cotton planting into Oklahoma and Texas, mules made up one-third of the draft animal population. Their numbers reached 2,468,000 by 1900 and peaked at 4,465,000 in 1925 when the effect of tractors began to be felt in the Southern economy.

In most of the South the mule dealer was "the biggest man in town" according to Lamb, "and his mule barn was the center of trading activity." Ray Lum's mule and horse barn was a key trading institution in Vicksburg, Mississippi, from the early 1900s through the 1950s when he switched to selling cattle. Ray Lum recalled:

---

49 Ibid., p. 15.
50 Ibid., p. 31-45.
51 Ibid., p. 19.
The Delta was a booming place for mules in the 'thirties. If you didn't have mules, you wasn't in the farming business. Those farmers bought them by the hundreds. Some good farmers had a barn that would hold fifteen hundred mules, and they'd ring a big farm bell every morning to call the men to work.\textsuperscript{52}

Home movie maker Emma Knowlton Lytle captured the tolling of the plantation bell on film and used it to regulate the flow of the work day in a documentary on cotton production shot in the 1930s. The first working scene in the film shows black farm hands slipping into the mule corral before dawn to identify and bridle their mule in preparation for the day's labor.

Some Delta towns supported more than one mule barn as well as livery stables that participated in the trading of livestock. Irish gypsies and Black Gypsies and men like livestock trader Ray Lum traveled the southern countryside driving or shipping their animals from place to place, selling, trading, and entertaining as they went. Lum tells an evocative tale of traveling with Irish trader Richard Riley and the possible chicanery involved in trading:

I was with Richard when he swapped with a Dutchman at Temple, Texas. He swapped with this Dutchman and got his pair of pretty white mules, white as driven snow and fat as town dogs. Them

\textsuperscript{52} Ferris, \textit{You Live and Learn}, p. 73.
German people keep their mules fat. They ain't going to have one unless he's fat. So Richard said, "I think I'll paint them damn mules."

See, a mule is born black and gets white with age. Richard just wanted to turn their speedometers back. I went on doing something else, and when I come back, I saw a pair of black mules in the place of them white ones we traded for. Well, that night those mules broke out of their pen, and after a while, here come the Dutchman, the same Dutchman that we got them from. He come up and said, "Boys, two goddamn mules are down there trying to push my gates down."

Richard said, "Well, son-of-a-bitch. Let's go down and get them out of your way."

Richard went right down and got them. The Dutchman didn't know his own mules. Oh, Richard had done a good job. That son-of-a-bitch, he could do anything. Make no bones about it, them mules didn't have a white hair on them. When he got through painting them, they were black as wolf's shit, and that's black.53

From the Depression until World War II the overall mule population declined along with the reduction and concentration of cotton acreage. Throughout the 1930s, with payments from federal programs such as the Agricultural Adjustment Agency, cotton planters bought tractors. Pete Daniel describes the transition from mules to mechanical power:

53 Ibid., p. 112.
Mechanization in the Cotton Belt actually started in the western growing areas and spread east. Oklahoma, Texas, and the Mississippi River Delta mechanized first. The change from mules to tractors proceeded gradually. Large farmers bought tractors to replace old mules, and tractors and mules coexisted. In the late 1930s James Hand, an implement dealer in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, took trades of mules for credit on tractors.\textsuperscript{54}

Daniel adds that the plantation South "lagged behind other areas in tractor purchases; in 1930 only 3.9 percent of southern farmers owned tractors, compared with 13.5 percent for the country at large."\textsuperscript{55} According to livestock trader Ray Lum, "California was the first place to put in tractors. I began to buy mules 'in California 'cause tractors was taking their place."\textsuperscript{56} "As the tractors would come in, the mules would go out . . . . But they were still using mules in Texas and Mississippi, and that's where I went with mine."\textsuperscript{57}

Wherever men worked mules they found time to race them. The earliest citation is the 1835 Maury County fair in Tennessee. On the last day of the fair planters often got up a mule race using their slaves as jockeys. Part of the ritual required spectators to do everything they could to "retard the

\textsuperscript{54} Daniel, Pete. \textit{Breaking the Land}. p. 175.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ferris, \textit{"You Live and Learn"}. p. 169.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 167.
progress of the steeds and make them fly the track."\(^5\) In a story about the race, Old Wash, the rider, boasts about the animal's speed and attributes it to its breeding. The tale explains the dramatic increase in the Kentucky mule population at the beginning of the nineteenth century: "... but you orter seed how cheap thurrerbreds got in Maury county way back in '35. We used 'em es dams fur Tennessee mules, an' dey made de bes mule in de wurl."\(^5\)\(^9\)

In the 1840s the annual Huckleberry Frolic held in Long Island, New York, on the nation's first official race course, the New Market track, listed mule races on its "bill of performance." In ante-bellum Natchez, freed slave William Johnson, an avid turf man, noted in his diary in October 1843: "Shooting match and, Riffle shooting and mule Racing out at the tract this Evening So I am told."\(^6\)\(^0\)

Racing provided the entertainment at many get-togethers in the South from informal bar-b-ques at the turn of the twentieth century to the agricultural fairs during the ante-bellum period to the annual Kentucky Derby which opened in 1875. Mules frequently shared the racing program at the casual social gatherings along with ponies, harness horses and native running horses. County fair premium lists from Kentucky feature mule races among the regularly scheduled

---

\(^5\)\(^9\) Ibid.
events as well as competitions for the best mule stock. The 1880 Exhibition of the South Kentucky Fair Association held near Glasgow, Kentucky, listed prizes of ten dollars for five categories of mule stock from colts to aged, as well as two mule races. On the first day of the fair, authorities awarded a ten dollar prize for the hindmost mule to run one mile. On the second day, the fair awarded ten dollars for the fastest mule to run a mile. The 1885 program of the twentieth exhibition of the Nelson County Agricultural Association of Bardstown, Kentucky, mentions two mule races. The following description is of the mule race on the final day of the fair:

MULE RACE

Fastest mule, any age, to run around the outside track three times, five or more to enter, all to start at the tap of the drum .................................................. $10
The mule winning the first day's race can not enter in this race.\textsuperscript{61}

People bet on the mule and horse races at the county fairs until the Depression of 1929. At that point, harness racing and running horses became too expensive to maintain and racing programs ended at the fairs. Farm boys raced the mules in Missouri. Historian Melvin Bradley interviewed Missourian James Caldwell who "rode a consistently winning" mule:

The times were rough, farm work was hard and mule racing was one of the

\textsuperscript{61} Italicics added.
\textsuperscript{62} Nelson County Agricultural Association, September 1, 2, 3 & 4, 1885. p. 43.
most popular events of a county fair. Every afternoon, at least 25 mules lined up to race at the Shelby or Monroe county fairs during the 1930s... It was an entertaining event. There was more money bet on the mule races than for horses and it was a real crowd roarer.63

Plantations also held mule races as part of larger racing programs put together to provide local entertainment. Tom Wilburn, from east central Mississippi, remembers attending them as early as 1928:

TW It'd be little social gatherings around here. And they'd have these impromptus, just on a straight away, mule race. And then different plantations would bring in their mules and some of the black riders, and it's competitive; local competition among local places.

KG ... when you say social gathering?

TW kind of like a bar-b-que ... Word would be put out that we gonna have some mule racing, bring your mules over.

KG Was there betting?

TW Oh yeah, always betting on the side ... And at the same time, usually the white owners would be riding their horses and there'd be impromptu straight away races.

KG On the same track?

TW Actually, they just select a level piece of ground out on the field

and say, "here's the starting line and here's the finish." And people would just line up along the side. It would just be a straight shot down through there. But you got to remember that at that time, owners took great pride in the horses that they rode. They took great pride in their mules. And it was a kind of competition between the plantations, was what it was.64

The description of the straight away races lined with spectators sounds exactly like descriptions of colonial quarter horse races that took place in Virginia in the seventeenth century. Wilburn stresses that the races were competitions between plantations. Planters regularly matched their stock in performance against each other in these casually organized forms of entertainment, just as they did in the 1600s. In fact, the mule races occurred frequently enough that some planters supported running mules - mules that did nothing but compete on the track. Tom Wilburn explains:

TW ... runnin mules, they were not very big, they were more stream lined and medium sized. And ... they were kept by different places strictly to run. They were never worked.

KG ... the owner of a place would also have a few mules that were not field animals?

64 Tom Wilburn. Tape 19, interview.
TW There weren't hardly one, one or two at the most.

KG And what would those animals, they would pull a buggy?

TW They wouldn't do anything. They'd have them for these races, just like ... keep in mind, a mule that size is kind of like a goat. It doesn't cost anything to keep it.®5

The plantation races at the beginning of the twentieth century play the same role of defining the planter's status among his peers as Isaac and Breen vividly described in their work on the colonial quarter horse races. Whether the planters were racing horses or mules, they invested time and money in presenting themselves well in public. Family lore supports Wilburn's belief that the races began much earlier than the first one he remembers as a boy in 1928:

... probably before I was born they had all types of racing right here on this place and other places, here too, had their own track[s] because they had their own harness horses which they used as buggy horses. Then they had, from what I could gather from what my mother said, they'd have horse races and they'd have mule races. This would go back to 1910 or to the 1900s.®6

Whether whites rode the mules as well as blacks depended on the size of the black population relative to that of the white. In the Mississippi Delta and other black belt areas,

®5 Ibid.
®6 Ibid.
wealthy whites risked ridicule if seen astride a mule in public. The close association with African-Americans automatically designated the mule an inferior mount for whites. Plantation owner Tom Wilburn remembers racing with his playmates, black and white, in the east central part of Mississippi:

KG Did you ever ride a mule in a race?
TW I never did ride a mule in a race but we rode them out here, you know, among, we'd race each other out here . . . . So if you had a horse out there, well immediately, if a gang of us got together, immediately we would say, "lets race." We would go out in the pasture and race. And then we'd say, "all right lets get some mules." And we'd race mules. And then ponies, we'd race ponies . . . . but even as kids we thought it was a little bit inferior to be mounted on a mule . . . . But now, we always had black kids with us, our friends, our playmates. Now they would be mounted on mules.

KG And the whites would not make fun of blacks on mules?
TW Not so much so, the two went together.67

Rural boys, black and white, plantation owners' sons and the sons of sharecroppers, raced mules and other four legged creatures on farms whenever they were in the mood and chanced upon the opportunity. The sons of plantation owners

67 Ibid.
did not race mules publicly: "... for us to get out here among ourselves, not exposed to the public, we would ride them."®

Another planter's son, Thorn McIntyre, raised in the Delta during the 1940s, reiterated more forcefully the same caste code:

The blacks rode the mules and the whites didn't. I don't think, in my recollection it would've been totally unthinkable for a white person to enter a mule race. That was strictly for the blacks; that was their event.6 9

Caste restrictions orchestrated the behavior of blacks and whites in all the possible configurations that might occur whenever the two races met. It was clearly a social taboo "unthinkable" for whites of the dominant class to race mules publicly. An exception, practiced at the Delta mule races, was the "Gentlemen's Jockey". In that race, planters rode their own mules in competition against each other. The concept came from the policy of Jockey Clubs which scheduled "Gentlemen's Races" as a means of presenting club members to the public at the annual racing programs. Of course, in those races the gentlemen rode their own thoroughbred horses, and it is not clear whether they raced or rode them around the track. The Delta mule races turned the caste code upside down when planters succumbed to the entreaties of their women folk to

®* Ibid. Thorn McIntyre. Tape 21, phone interview.
ride the mules for the benefit of charity. One can imagine that betting was heavy when the planters mounted up.

The specifics of the caste code allowed blacks and whites to take turns racing animals on the same track but limited whites to horseback. Blacks could ride mules and probably competed on the planters' horses as well, just as they did in the 1600s. Away from the Delta and the black belt regions, racial stereotypes did not determine participation at the races.

When introduced to this country, mules were highly esteemed, costly, and scarce animals. As they began populating the land, endlessly toiling under the burden of farm work, their status in the eyes of men changed, taking on cultural values. The mule came to symbolize the endless drudgery and manual labor of farmwork. With the development and expansion of the slave economy in the antebellum period, blacks increasingly worked the animals. The career paths of mules and slaves intertwined in the South until one came to symbolize the other, and people of wealth strived to distance themselves from the working animal just as they physically separated themselves from the black laboring population.

The sheer abundance of mules led to inexpensive entertainment possibilities such as mule racing. Though the mule population in the South peaked in 1925, its decline was irregular throughout the region. In Mississippi, the mule population actually contradicted regional patterns by increasing twelve percent from 1925 to 1930. Between 1930
and 1935 when the first mule race, the Pryor Derby, began in Washington County, Mississippi, the mule population had dropped a barely noticeable four percent.
CHAPTER 4

An Annual Event: Mule Racing In The Mississippi Delta

The thirteen mules got away in a body, after a couple of false starts, and scampered off with prodigious spirit. As each mule and each rider had a distinct opinion of his own as to how the race ought to be run, and which side of the track was best in certain circumstances, and how often the track ought to be crossed, and when a collision ought to be accomplished, and when it ought to be avoided, these twentysix conflicting opinions created a most fantastic and picturesque confusion, and the resulting spectacle was killingly comical.

(Mark Twain)70

Mark Twain's 1883 description of mule racing in New Orleans encapsulates the appeal of the races for Mississippians in the early twentieth century. The earliest confirmed mule races in the Mississippi Delta took place in the 1930s, on the first Saturday after the Fourth of July, at Silver Lake Plantation. The annual events became known as the Pryor Derby, named after Larry Pryor, the Washington County planter who started them. In an article for the Delta Review, Robert Allen Carpenter described Pryor as a "fabled" party

---

70 Mark Twain. Life on the Mississippi. p. 464.
giver and attributed organized mule racing to him. "Pryor first became noted for his parties in the depression years of the 1930's," Carpenter wrote. "He decided, bad times or not, something unusual should be done to commemorate the Fourth of July ... he decided on a mule race." Ada Lee Sanders who lived and worked at Silver Lake plantation from 1936 to 1941, remembered that Pryor had "... big, fine mules, fast mules." The animals only worked in the cotton fields during picking time, as Pryor used tractors rather than mules to make his crop. Sanders recounted that the men who worked on the place rode the mules in the races. The Delta Review article supports this memory: "Mules were common in the Delta at that time, so Larry selected eight of the best and invited his neighbors to enjoy the fun. The animals were ridden bareback by farm hands on a quarter-mile circular track constructed on his plantation, with heavy betting."

The first published reference to the Pryor Derby was in the October 13, 1938, issue of the Bolivar County Democrat. The front-page article promoting the first Rosedale Mule Races mentioned that Larry Pryor's mule, Sharecropper, won the 1938 Pryor Derby and would compete as one of the thirty-seven entries in the Rosedale mule race. This information

3 Ada Lee Sanders. Telephone conversation, November 22, 1993. Conversations as opposed to interviews, were not recorded. Quotes come from field notes in my personal possession.
4 Carpenter, "Dum Vivamus Biberimus et Edimus." p. 26, 27.
implies that the races started by Pryor grew into a larger event in which local planters participated by providing mules and riders to compete against each other. An account from Sara Myers of Mayersville supports this development of the races. Pryor, a hunting companion of Myers' husband, invited him to enter his large, gray mule, Napoleon, in the Derby. Myers entered the mule; however, the animal became distracted by a feed trough, and never made it around the track. This story of local competition supports Tom Wilburn's description of social get-togethers revolving around horse and mule racing at the turn of the century. It also provides a ready model for the more complex mule races that Larry Pryor and Harold Council helped establish in Rosedale and Greenwood at the end of the 1930s.

Fortunately, home movie footage exists of the Rosedale and Greenwood mule races. A total of ten minutes and sixteen seconds of motion picture film provides a brilliant visual context with which to understand and interpret interviews and newspaper articles. Within limits, the motion picture film acts as a reference point identifying what is and is not present, and who is and is not represented. The material represents the point of view of the men and women who shot it, all members of the planter class which organized the mule races. The film footage plays a crucial role in helping to understand the different racial perspectives of the mule

---

6 See Appendix, p. 131.
races. As the majority of the footage comes from the Rosedale races, mule racing in the two towns will be collapsed into an overall description of Delta mule racing from 1938 to 1950. The material falls naturally into two categories: race track and audience. Three films recorded at the 1940 and 1941 events focus primarily on the race track. The last film, shot in 1946, concentrated on the people that attended the mule races. The visual description of the races begins with footage of the race track. Behavior and activities distinctive to Greenwood follow the general description.

The following description is a visual summary of home movie footage of the 1940 Rosedale races taken from two separate family collections. Abbreviation HM1 denotes home movie one and HM2 denotes home movie two.

THE TRACK

The film opens with politicians delivering campaign speeches to a crowd from a platform elaborately decorated with patriotic bunting. Seven speakers are shown including Governor Hugh Lawson White. Men in white shirts, ties, trousers, and hats lounge on the grass while women wearing flowered dresses and hats sit on chairs under tall shade trees listening to the politicians and fanning themselves. Young people sit in groups in the clubhouse drinking beer from long-neck brown bottles. Outside, the camera pans over a canopied concession stand staffed by two busy white women selling refreshments. People line the counter.
A young boy wearing a red satin shirt and cap and carrying a horn rides a pony through a lane of trees. The herald blows the horn as he rides, announcing the official start of the races. The camera pans from the herald to the grandstand covered with a brown pavilion-style tent with red, white, and blue pennants flying from its peaks, reminiscent of descriptions of Medieval jousting matches. The grandstand overflows with people in light colored summer clothing and hats. They mill about in groups along a walkway created by a white rope fence girding the race track and the benches of the seating area. The camera continues its sweeping pan over the grandstand, past a handful of blacks clustered under an isolated grove of trees, to rest on a parking lot filled with automobiles.

Events begin with a bareback mule race. Black farmworkers race the animals clockwise around the track. A man stands on the bed of a truck parked in the middle of the infield announcing the action over the public address system. Spectators and bettors line both sides of the track, though only men appear to be on the infield. Planters, acting as race facilitators, ride their horses onto the track, about the infield, and through the crowd. Everyone else is on foot; the men towering over the crowd on horseback seem like a smiling security force. The number of the race and the names of the competing animals and their owners are posted on a large scoreboard erected to the right of the grandstand.
Photographers snap pictures as the riders come around the curve of the track. A mule crosses the finish line and people turn from the track to cash in their tickets and bet again.

The races alternate between mules and horses. The next recorded race is incomplete. A dark horse with a white rider gallops past the finish line followed closely by a white horse ridden by a white man. A race facilitator, carrying a curved handle cane across his saddle symbolizing his authority, rides into the frame and smiles. People seem to be enjoying themselves whether working, betting, or just watching. Small planes fly overhead between races, probably crop dusters enlisted to augment the festive nature of the event.

Both HM 1 and HM 2 showed the next race between mules. A close up at the starting post reveals six riders who appear black, wearing regular clothing, billed caps, and large numbers on their backs. The official starter, a man standing to the front and side of the mules, drops his arm, and the animals take off. Immediately a very fair-skinned rider takes the lead. The mules wear bridles and some have blankets made from feed sacks on their backs. Both cameras turned around to record the winning animal as it approached the finish line. A gray mule with a black rider wearing a red cap leads, hugging the outside of the track. A man in a white boater appears to check a pocket watch, clocking the gray mule as it passes him. The runner-up passes the camera and the finish line as the third place mule abruptly veers from the inside of the track.
directly across the course at an extreme angle. The rider manages to check his mount before it goes through the fence, but they end up facing the wrong direction and he loses his third-place position.

The next race is a horse race. Six horses participate. A white man wearing the number 88 wins. Then, black riders promenade their mules in a loose circle near the starting position on the track. One rider wears a red and white satin shirt and a red satin cap. The other three wear light shirts, trousers, and caps. Spectators line both sides of the track, judging the merits of mules and riders before laying their bets. This is the third and penultimate mule race.

Six men, two black and four white, ride in the third and final horse race. Three men carrying the curved handle canes help the riders get their mounts into position at the starting post. It is a sunny, hot day, and the back of one man's shirt is soaked with sweat. The crowd presses against the white rope fence separating them from the track. HM 2 filmed the start and finish of this race won by a white rider. It is not clear whether this final horse race was a sweepstakes.

Six riders compete in the last recorded mule race, a sweepstakes. The fair-skinned man and the black man in the red cap ride again. HM 2 filmed the line-up and beginning of the races as well as the winning gray mule as it galloped down the track and over the finish line carrying the man in the red cap to victory. As neither camera filmed the award ceremony,
the victor appears in the next shot riding his mule, now wearing a wreath of cotton bolls and flowers around its neck, to the stands for the inspection and acclaim of the crowd. The winner smiles for the cameras as young white boys and a small enthusiastic black boy in a white tee shirt run toward him and his mule. The winning rider continues to smile as he rides out of the frame.

Immediately the camera cuts to a shot of two white men standing on the back of the public address system truck in the middle of the infield. One tips his hat with his left hand while holding the sweepstakes trophy in his right. The announcer standing next to him, microphone in hand, is probably saluting the prize-winning plantation owner and the town for a successful event while reminding the crowd that the day's festivities are not over. More good times are on the agenda.

This home movie footage, limited by the perspectives of the filmmakers, provides information about mule races that is unavailable elsewhere. The pre-race footage of the grounds shows an elaborately staged setting that required time, money, and effort to create. Speakers platforms, concession booths, bleachers, tents, costumes, a public address system and the race track itself had to be built, erected, sewn and organized. The footage established the medieval theme of the mule races reminiscent of the southern tradition of ring tournaments. A parking lot full of cars during the Depression year of 1940, and
small planes saluting the track from the sky indicated the wealth of the spectators. The filmmakers' concentration on the races once they started suggest they might have had animals participating in the competition. Documenting the races on film also infers a seriousness about the events.

Except for the riders, the footage reveals a very limited African-American presence at the track. The initial panorama shot included a small group of blacks. And in one of the final scenes, the camera films a young black boy running to the winning mule rider. Where did he come from? There must have been a separate viewing section for African-Americans not recorded on film. It was probably near the holding area of the mules and horses. Once Jimmy Love, an African-American, arrived on the grounds early and had to wait near the animals:

"One time I went before the race, and [?] kept me waiting. They'd bring a truck there with the mules. Mule be bucking and pawing [?] couldn't hold a mule you know, they was just really wild, some of them mules wild."

The home movie photographer who filmed the first post-war Rosedale race in 1946 (HM 4) trained her camera on the people at the races as well as the events on the track. Her stated agenda was to take pictures of her friends and family. The ensuing description provides the ambiance of the races, as well as an account of events on the track.

7 Jimmy Love. Tape 3, interview.
Mounted black men, in an open, park-like setting, ride their mules toward the starting line. An animal balks and the rider pulls its head up with the bridle and holds it in check. The large mules have dark, glossy coats. A long shot of the starting line shows the riders crouched over the necks of their animals. The camera follows the galloping mules around the track until they pass behind a sound truck parked in the middle of the infield. Then, it films a young man thundering down the track, sitting upright on his mule. He gallops over the finish line, off the track and into the trees. A small group of people can be seen in the distance near the trees. The second and third place mules finish far behind the winner.

People surround the betting booth. A woman's hands tear a perforated ticket from a booklet. A man turns from the booth, smiles at the camera, and fans out a handful of tickets. The crowd is in good spirits. The camera, HM 4, weaves through the crowd casually engaging friends in conversations, filming these people in close up, while filming everything else as a wide shot. The camera turns to the track for a brief shot of men and mules coming around a curve.

Now the camera follows two white men as they walk through the crowd in the black section of the track. Two riders wearing numbers on their backs, one leading a mule, walk in
front of the white men. Suddenly, three riders enter the scene from the left and ride across the frame through the black spectators' section and onto the track. The camera follows their movement to the right, panning over the backs of the enthusiasts facing the track.

People are everywhere. Older men line the benches in front of a booth where a band is playing. A heavy set, older planter chats with the bench sitters from astride a light colored horse. Young men in white shirts wearing ties carry plates of food into the club house. Young women in large hats and carrying white gloves smile and talk to the film maker of HM 4. A quick shot of the score board reads "RACE NO. 5". Riders form a group at the starting line of two or three abreast. About six men take off as two white men in hats back away from them. A rider on a white mule wearing a soft, white, snap-brim cap backwards, canters easily across the finish line. An excited winner jumps up and down in the judges' booth.

Groups socialize in the parking area. People sit on folding chairs and talk. Women huddle over other people's children. Men and women stand between the cars talking. The camera lingers on "Rosedale Mule Races July 5" boldly written on a banner stretched across a car grill. The crowd moves constantly - from the track to the betting booth, to the club house, to the parking lot, and to the grandstand to visit with friends and meet their out-of-town guests.
At the track, a group of spectators enthusiastically cheer on their favorites. Once again, the camera picks out the two white men and follows them through the crowd. One turns, smiles at the filmmaker, and waves to her to follow them into the black section of the track. For three seconds a small group of black men and women in light-colored summer clothing fill the screen. They do not pay attention to the white men or camera operator. The filmmaker terminates the shot.

The filmmaker returns to the parking lot for more shots of talking people. Then she moves back onto the grounds to catch the young man in the white, snap-brimmed hat struggling with the white mule. Coverage ends with a shot of the stocky, older planter, still on horseback, lifting a child up onto his saddle.

This little film is the visual definition of the mule races as described by the planters and their children: a good time, lots of betting, a white community event. People appear very congenial and relaxed. The filmmaker is obviously well known and many people know each other. There are five physical areas: the clubhouse, the race track, the rope encircling the track where spectators watch, the grounds dotted with booths and concession stands, and the parking lot where people gather and talk. No one is eating or drinking on the grounds, though they carry food into the clubhouse. Many people carry betting
tickets in their hands. The overall feel of the film is of a large, relaxed, well-behaved, well-dressed, white, family reunion.

The only African-Americans among the strolling crowd are astride mules. Not counting the riders, blacks appear twice, both times as a stationary group positioned along the track. These brief glimpses of black spectators in HM 4 establish a segregated section at the track supporting first-hand accounts of black attendance. The film also reveals that the holding area for mules and horses was behind the black section, as riders crossed through the African-American spectators to get to the track.

Between six and eight mules ran in a race. A planter could only enter one mule in each race. Races began at 2 PM and ended about 5 in the afternoon. The number of races depended upon the number of animals entered. Greenwood normally had eight races. Except for the Gentlemen’s Jockey, the riders were farm hands usually riding for their employers, the planters. Riders generally wore everyday clothing with large numbers fixed to the back of their shirts. Between races horsemen broke wild mules on the track to the delight of the crowd. A Gentlemen’s Jockey ran in the middle of the races and a Sweepstakes concluded the event. In 1941 the riders who came in first and second received $10 and $5 respectively while the Sweepstakes winner received $25.00.

The 1938 Rosedale Plantation Festival, staged during lay by, a natural pause in the cotton cycle, featured the premier Rosedale mule race. Members of the new, federally funded, WPA-built, white-
only, semi-private Walter Sillers Memorial Park, known locally as the country club, organized the festival. Pari-mutuel betting attracted many people, and the races generated so much money that the following year the town continued the races without the festival. Will Gourlay remembers being told, "... the law says that pari-mutuel horse racing was against the law in Mississippi, didn't say a damn thing about mules." All of the money raised at the Rosedale mule races contributed to the maintenance of the club's facilities.

The mule race was one event in a long festive day full of speeches, games, music, food, and dancing at the country club. Tickets could be bought in advance and at the gate. According to the Bolivar County Democrat, the Rosedale races began an hour or so after supper. The animals ran on an improvised track staked out on the golf course. The Delta State Teacher's College band provided entertainment. Concession stands supplied cake, candy and cold drinks. After the races a bar-b-que supper was offered on the grounds. And the day closed with a dance at the club house. All of the events were white-only except the mule races.

Though the races were dangerous (Greenwood had an ambulance on standby at the track) and the riders took falls, no one remembered any instances of serious injury. Contrary to the image drawn by Mark Twain, the home movie footage revealed fairly orderly mule races alternating with horse races. The color line

8. Will Gourlay. Tape 2, interview. All interviews were recorded and the tapes are in my personal possession.
disappeared during the horse races, and white and black men competed against each other. The races, interrupted by World War II, began again in 1946 without horse racing. The name "mule races" probably subsumed horse races at that time. Conversely, Greenwood began running horses and mules when they resumed the races in the late 1950s. This style of mixed racing was similar to racing programs at county fairs as well as the informal races organized by planters in the early part of the century. The horse racing footage appeared late in the research, after the interviewing process was over. The few informants who viewed the footage could not respond to it. It raises interesting questions about interracial competition and the ambiguous nature of the color line in sports.

Greenwood's races began in 1941 and continued through the war ending in 1948. They followed the pattern of the Rosedale races. Organized by the women's Junior Auxiliary, the Greenwood races took place at the American Legion ball park in town. Proceeds funded the charity work of the organization. Junior Auxiliary members, mostly wives of planters and other prominent men in town, worked to alleviate the health care problems of poor white children. The number of displaced white sharecroppers in Leflore County grew throughout the Depression as white planters replaced them with black sharecroppers and day laborers. Leflore County planters had a bad reputation for their treatment of white sharecroppers. Pete Daniel documents planters' attitudes toward white labor in confrontations between planters and federal relief workers during the New Deal. The following quotation about Leflore
County comes from a Federal Emergency Relief Administration report sent to Mississippi Governor Martin S. Connor in 1933:

Hundreds of families in the Delta lacked "sheets, pillow cases, towels, etc." Quilts had been used until they were "in shreds." . . . When the FERA tried to help, planters objected that relief was "ruining these people."

When the correspondent tried to tempt planters to hire whites, one refused "because they were white people." When he asked planters what they intended to do about such whites, "invariably the answer is 'Starve them out. They are not worth feeding. We do not want them in our county.'"

Ironically, the planters' anti-white labor practices provided their wives with a steady supply of destitute children for their "good works." Indicative of the times, the women observed the color line, assisting only poor white children, though the population of Leflore County in 1934 was 76 percent black.

Greenwood's races differed from the Rosedale races in several ways. They were held in the evening at the baseball park rather than the country club. Beginning in 1943, military men from the Greenwood Army Air Field and Camp McCain attended and competed on the mules. Races were always held at the end of the summer or in early autumn during layby. Other activities did not precede nor follow the races.

---

10 Ibid.
machines placed at the entrance to the park provided another diversion for gambling enthusiasts.

Promotion in the local white newspapers began at least a month in advance. During the week of the event, the papers featured the races with front-page headlines and articles. Inside the paper, the names of out-of-town visitors and lists of mule race parties filled the society columns. Radio advertisements announced the events throughout the state and as far away as Chicago. Flyers and posters were exhibited throughout town in grocery stores, drugstores, and beauty parlors. A Greenwood poster from the World War II era listed the admission fees: *Adults .75, Enlisted men, Children, Colored .25.* The names of the events, the *Rosedale* Mule Races, and the *Greenwood* Mule Races, indicate their community orientation. These elements seemed to have promoted a community event for all members of Rosedale and Greenwood, regardless of race. African-Americans attended in that spirit.

People remember going to the races with their families, arriving on foot and by wagon. Joe Pope went to the Rosedale races:

> Yea, I went to the race because I had never seen a mule race. And so me and my parents, all went out there, come out to the golf course to see the mule race.\(^{13}\)

---

1\(^{1}\) *Italics added to admission fees, town names.*

2\(^{2}\) *Italics added.*

3\(^{3}\) Joe Pope. *Tape 2,* interview.
The people who attended often lived and worked on the plantations that entered mules, but were not necessarily related to the riders. Frank Duncan traveled to Rosedale to see the races:

Bunch of them go. When there was a mule race, just head out to the road and you'll find company and when you get there you got too much company.\(^\text{14}\)

Lilly Wade went to the Greenwood races to see her son ride. The Wade family lived and worked on the plantation that her son represented on the race track:

\begin{quote}
KG \ldots you came out to the races to see your son ride.
LW That's right.
KG Was it an open event for the whole black community as well or just people that had relatives that were riding?
LW That's right. That's for the whole black community. Anybody could come what wanted to. They had the bleachers up there.\(^\text{15}\)
\end{quote}

However, that picture of a bi-racial community event is not what members of the dominant culture remember. They remember a community event organized and operated by whites for a white audience and to the benefit of the white population. African-American film critic James Snead would

\(^{14}\) Frank Duncan. Tape 3, interview.
\(^{15}\) Lilly Wade. Tape 14, interview.
say that the black presence was "structured out" of the common white memory of the event.\textsuperscript{16}

Whites viewed the African-Americans who rode the mules as part of the entourage of the white planter who brought them. The black riders were the planter's contribution, along with his mules, to the success of the community event. Their presence was a reflection of the largess of the white planter who brought them and paid them to ride. They were brought to service the event, not to attend it. They came in through the back gate with the animals. In the familiar service mode, their presence was unacknowledged by the white spectators.

Whites described the non-performing blacks as relatives of the riders thus they had a credible reason for being at the event and were identifiably connected to the status quo through the white planter who employed their kin. "I'm sure there were black kids there with their families," remarked Asterina Carter, "you know, with their daddies riding the horses [mules]."\textsuperscript{17} The racial code based on social separation required an explanation to mask the enthusiastic attendance of the African-American community at the mule races. Whites invoked the reciprocal obligations of paternalism which safely labeled and dismissed the blacks as the responsibility of specific planters.

\textsuperscript{17} Asterina Carter. Tape 2, interview.
Though specific information on the racial composition of the mule races is unavailable, it is highly unlikely that large numbers of non-local blacks attended the races as described on the front page of the Greenwood Commonwealth of August 6, 1941:

The aristocrats from the mansions built on cotton fortunes and negroes from Greenwood’s ram-cat alley had a rush of sporting blood to the head today and dashed off to see Mississippi’s fastest growing outdoor event: The mule races.

Additional throngs of plantation operators and negroes from all over the Delta land poured into Greenwood to watch 70 mules --the entry list brought in from the fields--to compete on a quarter-mile track for sweet charity's stake. (italics added)

Like a carnival Barker drawing attention to a freak show, the Greenwood Commonwealth promoted the mule races by advertising the breaking of caste and class taboos. This sensationalist strategy brought the Greenwood races to the attention of the national press the first year they operated. As an historical document of what took place fifty years ago, this paper must be read with caution. In the Greenwood of 1941, armed white men would have poured into the streets at the whisper of throngs of blacks pouring into town. The article consciously used language to paint a broad picture of contrasts, turning traditional social behavior upside down. National press coverage may have tweaked the competitiveness of the planters enhancing the “serious fun” nature of the races.
Why were the races so popular? Interview subjects differed with each other and the media on the intrinsic nature of the mule races. The media highlighted the liminality of the event, stressing the elimination of rigid class and racial boundaries. White memory recalled the silliness of the races, placing African-Americans in the classic Sambo role of entertainer:

Sambo was an extraordinary type of social control, at once subtle, devious, and encompassing. To exercise a high degree of control meant . . . to create, ultimately, an insidious type of buffoon. To make the black male into an object of laughter . . . to render the black male powerless as a potential warrior, as a sexual competitor, as an economic adversary.¹⁸

Whites told humorous anecdotes ridiculing the unpredictable mule and African-Americans by association. Thus, the mule races reinforced the cultural association of blacks and mules anchoring more firmly the black position at the bottom of the social order.

The mule races spoofed thoroughbred racing. From the young white herald riding his pony wearing racing silks and blowing a horn to announce the start of the events; to the racing silks worn by some of the riders; to the pari-mutuel betting; to the pennants flying from the top of the canopied

stands; to the Gentlemen's Jockey; to the Grand Sweepstakes race and the cotton boll wreath draped around the neck of the ultimate winning mule - the mule races parodied thoroughbred running races. Replacing the expensive, trained horse flesh with plow mules and the light weight professional jockeys with black farmers turned the exclusive "sport of the kings" into a classic Sambo-style performance.

Eleanor Fiore of Greenwood described the attraction of the races:

EF Oh, it was a delight, I never had so much fun. . . . You never [knew] whether they were gonna sit down, those mules would just sit down all of a sudden, they get so confused.

KG Did you actually see a mule sit down?

EF Yes . . . and they might could run backwards, run in the opposite direction. They do everything [?] head out across the middle of a field. You never knew what they were gonna do, or just start buckin all of a sudden. Those mules [?] weren't trained for anything but plowin.¹⁹

Mary Hamilton, a member of the Junior Auxiliary, also believed the unpredictability of the mule was the main attraction of the races:

. . . they were mules, you never know what they're going to do . . . they'd have them all lined up, and they'd start

¹⁹ Eleanor Fiore. Tape 13, telephone interview.
out and maybe one of them, all of a sudden, changes his mind, turn around and go back, jump the fence and go out. So nobody knew what they were going to do. And I think that was one thing that made it so much fun . . . .

Mule races - even the name is comical, an oxymoron. Plow mules are not racing animals nor are they tractable. Placing them in a noisy crowded environment with a man on their back urging them to run in a circle guarantees confusion and possible melee. White people attended for the melee. They hoped to see riders lose control of balky, stubborn, confused animals. Frank McCormick noted that riding bareback increased the probabilities: "... part of the thing is, its harder to stay on without a saddle." 21

Conversely, African-American spectators stressed the skill of the riders as the attraction of the races. Rather like the lure of the rodeo for those familiar with horses and cattle, black farmers went to watch the best hostlers perform. Joe Pope sharecropped with his family on a local plantation and saw his first mule race in Rosedale: "Oh, I think it was great because I had never been to the mule race and I enjoyed them riding mules". 22 Jimmy Love farmed with his family in Rosedale and attended the races before World War II: "It was a great big event and we all look forward to it all the time. And we be at home wondering who's going to ride and who's going to win

20 Mary Hamilton. Tape 11, interview.
21 McCormick, Tape 1.
22 Joe Pope. Tape 2, interview.
. . . Come on out." Love went on to call the races a sport: "I wouldn't care if something like that went on now . . . . They would sure draw a crowd. I didn't know so many people liked that kind of sports."²³

Who could enter animals in the competition? Mule race organizers called on their friends, relatives, and business associates to enter animals. A 1939 solicitation letter to Oscar Johnson, president of Delta and Pine Land Company, reminded him that he had not participated in the 1938 races. His reply was terse:

. . . I doubt if it would be convenient for us to put any mules in the race this year. In the first place I doubt if we have any "racing" mules; in the second place all of our mules are pretty busy at the moment "racing" up and down cotton rows trying to make this year's crop.²⁴

Stories in the local papers named planters who had entered mules, encouraging others to do so. This created or supported the impression that only large land owners entered mules. A majority of informants reflected this bias toward the large land owner. The following conversation with Asterina Carter was typical:

KG Do you have any idea, if you wanted to enter a mule?

²³ Jimmy Love. Tape 3, interview.
AC Any farmer, any big farmer that had mules and wanted to.

KG What about sharecroppers that had a mule?

AC Well a sharecropper wouldn't of had a mule.

KG Didn't some people have their own equipment?

AC It was big farmers that put those mules in there. Yea, I don't think you found any sharecroppers.²⁵

This is the general understanding of who could enter mules in the races, but it is misleading. Though flamboyant, the July 23, 1942 issue of the Greenwood Commonwealth explicitly states who can enter animals in the races:

A hundred mules, fresh from the cotton rows, race here today for charity and the owners, whether sharecroppers or plantation proprietors, compete on equal terms.

Some of the owners, including negroes from the city's Catfish Alley and planters from mansions built by cotton fortunes .... (italics added)

Frank McCormick remembered that black farmers participated after reading the newspaper: "... there were several owners, you know farmers, where they rode their own mules.²⁶ Clyde Aycock, who worked in the betting booth at the Rosedale races, confirms that the entry process was open to everyone:

CA All you had to do was sign up and pay a little fee .... they had a

²⁵ Asterina Carter. Tape 2, interview.
²⁶ Frank McCormick. Tape 1, interview.
committee to, you know, list all the mules and the owners and so forth. So they’d have enough for the races . . . .

KG But, could anybody enter a mule?
CA Oh, yea there wasn’t any, any excluding anybody. If they wanted to . . . .

African-Americans entered mules in the races. Freddie Anderson rode mules after World War II at the Rosedale and Greenwood races. Anderson rode regularly for the John Gourlay place in Rosedale. But, he also rode for other plantation owners and large African-American land renters:

FA Howard Walker (spells out the name)
KG Did he have a plantation, a big farm?
FA No, he was a big renter.
KG A big renter, and he had mules?
FA Yea, he had mules.
KG His own mules?
FA His own mules.
KG OK, so he could enter...
FA He could enter his mules in the Rosedale race.
KG OK, and you rode for him?
FA I rode for him.
KG Do you remember the name of his mule?
FA Midnight.
KG You rode Midnight for him. Did you win?
FA Yea, Midnight won.
KG . . . I have a few questions to ask

27 Clyde Aycock. Tape 7, telephone interview.
whether there were any black people that entered mules.

FA Yes, and another guy called, he's dead now, but his name was Munch (spells Munch) Munch Love. This is what we all called him but his real name was Oscar Love. OK, now he had a mule that a guy called Kid Piggy, they was colored, they was colored guys too, they rode that mule from Harry Ogden's place.

KG OK, so Munch Love and Kid Piggy rode for?

FA Harry Ogden's. They owned mules but they was coming off of Harry Ogden's plantation . . . they was big renters. They was big renters down there.28

From Anderson's interview, it seems that animals entered the races under the name of the landowner's main plantation. This policy would support the beliefs of many spectators that only large white planters entered animals. Original entry documents have not been found for any of the races.

The Greenwood Commonwealth's extensive race coverage revealed a flexible style of recording the plantation and owner of the winning mules. From 1941-1948 the paper reported the first, second, and third place winners of each race. Information began with the name of the mule, followed by the name of the rider, followed by the name of the owner, or the name of the owner and the name of his plantation, or just the name of the

28 Anderson, Tape 5.
plantation. In which case, the owner's category becomes a bit murky as rented property is often referred to by the name of the landlord's plantation. None of the interviewees could identify a black farmer among the names of first, second and third place winners. The press either did not record African-American entries, camouflaged them under the names of white plantations, or the animals of black renters never made it to first, second or third place.

As only two people remembered that African-Americans entered mules in the races, the Greenwood Commonwealth's graphic language about blacks and whites competing against each other on equal terms is misleading. The majority of people remember that black farm hands rode the mules for white planters. On equal terms would mean black and white farmers competing against each other on their own entries in the Gentlemen's Jockey. Instead, the Gentlemen's Jockey specifically avoided direct bi-racial competition by using the word "gentlemen" to define the class parameters of the race. This event, drawn from the dominant culture's world of thoroughbred racing spoofed the white riders competing on the declassé mule.

White planters' mules competing against black renters' mules is significant, especially in an historical context. For example, in colonial Virginia the laws prevented people from

29 Italicics added
making a race and betting outside their class parameters. An artisan could not race his horse against that of a gentleman. Competition was among social equals within class lines. In ante-bellum Natchez, while free black men of wealth attended the races and bet with whites the caste system prohibited them from entering their horses in the same public competitions. The participation of African-American land renters in the Delta mule races raises interesting questions. Walker, Love, and Kid Piggy, like white planters, owned mules. Was there a democracy among competing mule owners at the race track? Was the quality of a man's animals a reflection of the worth of a black man as well as of a white man? Did they stand elbow-to-elbow to watch the races or were the African-American owners confined to the black section? Did they bet with each other? Black farm hands and spectators did not bet at the pari-mutuel betting booth. Did black mule owners? Did property change the social relations between the races? Black men challenging white men publicly through their stock animals seems like a very risky endeavor, and for what gain? All the money raised went to benefit white institutions and white children. The Grand Sweepstakes prize was a trophy rather than a purse.

Who were the men who rode the mules? The local Rosedale paper, the Bolivar Commercial, did not include the names of the mule riders in its race coverage; but the Greenwood Commonwealth did. The newspaper listed the first, second, and third place winners by the name of the mule, the name of the rider, and the name of the owner or owner's plantation. In six out of the eight years of race coverage, almost one-quarter to one-third of the riders' names were recorded as first names or nicknames without a surname. In the 1944 race coverage, the newspaper listed seventeen of the eighteen riders without a surname. In the 1948 race coverage, the paper listed more than two-thirds of the men by their first name or nickname without a surname. In contrast, the paper always listed the plantation owners by first and last name or by the name of their plantations.31

Without knowing who supplied the information to the newspaper, it is difficult to decipher the meaning and significance of the nicknames. But, not using the surnames of blacks was an old tactic in the strategy of racial control and contrasts strongly with the full names recorded for the white owners. Looking at the list of winning mules and riders from the 1944 races it is easy to confuse the animal's name with that of the rider. Boskin noted the same difficulty in distinguishing the names of animals and slaves.32

31 See Greenwood Racing Guide p. 120.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MULE</th>
<th>RIDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Joe</td>
<td>Flash Gordon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Will</td>
<td>Ned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>Alec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doughboy</td>
<td>Hot Stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Auxiliary</td>
<td>Slim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Shot</td>
<td>Joe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foots</td>
<td>Mister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushwhacker</td>
<td>Sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Bru</td>
<td>Little Rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bazooka</td>
<td>Peckerwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pippin</td>
<td>Cal County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea Biscuit</td>
<td>Hot Dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Buzzard</td>
<td>Mammy's Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flame Thrower</td>
<td>Rising Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts</td>
<td>Sunflower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Victory</td>
<td>Ol Man River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stormy Weather</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchill</td>
<td>Lindberg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

World War II is the predominant influence on the names, though the flavor of Hollywood films, cartoon strips, radio dramas, and geographical region is also apparent. Cal County riding Pippin may be the only man listed with a first and last name. If these were the legitimate nicknames of the riders, the common journalism practice of writing the first and surname with the nickname in parenthesis inserted between them was not extended to the men. But, the names seem more humorous and timely than legitimate. Flash Gordon refers to the radio and comic book hero of the era. Lindberg astride Churchill certainly is a temporal association. Rising Sun is a timely reference to World War II and Japan. Would a black family or community call a child Peckerwood? It is impossible to
answer. The names appear to be designed for the event. A comparison of the 1944 list of riders with the list from 1943 and 1945 reveals that Cal County was the only man to compete before or after 1944, suggesting that the planters, the organizers, or the Greenwood Commonwealth bestowed fictitious names on the entries and riders of the 1944 races.

Renaming blacks goes back to the seventeenth century slave trade, a tactic in "the process of subjugation." Renaming blacks goes back to the seventeenth century slave trade, a tactic in "the process of subjugation."3 In the Jim Crow South denying blacks the respect of a courtesy title or the use of their surname "...is regarded as the epitome of the whole system by which the White affirms and confirms the social inferiority of the Negroe."3 Humorous names fit the atmosphere of a Sambo-style race where supposedly untrained jockeys urged balky, awkward plow mules to run around a golf course or baseball field as if it were a race track.

Normally, one man rode for each farm. The men wanted to ride; they vied for it. Some farms held competitions to determine the best rider: "... you had a big black try-out on the plantations themselves." Some planters trained their mules and riders. Elaine Fiore said the races were more fun when, "... the mules hadn't had a chance, too many people

33 Ibid., p. 32.
35 McCormick, Tape 1.
hadn't trained their mules." Mary Hamilton agrees that they were more fun before, ". . . they got competitive."

African-American riders and spectators celebrated the performances of the men and animals that participated in the races. Community member and mule rider Freddie Anderson remembered the excellent horsemen who competed:

KG ... did each plantation have one main mule rider?
FA Yea, now you take [planter] Pat Walton, Charlie Gatorson . . . was Pat Walton's agent. He was a colored guy but he had light skin, had a beautiful lock, curly, but he rode mules and horses . . . after the race . . . he would put a show on around the track. And this boy from Cleveland, from Pace, called him Sparkplug.

KG Right, who did he ride for?
FA Sparkplug, he rode for all of them . . . . If he was there and they had mules that needed a rider, he rode them.

For black sharecroppers working during the Depression, the opportunity to make extra money while demonstrating their skill with animals was rare. The daily agricultural wage for adults was less than adequate: "In 1942 . . . I used to plow a mule all day long for a dollar a day. I used to pick cotton for

---

36 Fiore, tape 13.
37 Hamilton, tape 11.
38 Anderson, Tape 6.
forty cents a hundred."^^ Competitive planters wanted skilled hostlers to ride their animals to the winner's circle. They did not want mules and men representing their plantations to be the target of ridicule. Planters hired the best hostlers and trained the fastest mules they could buy to run in the races. Two of the four riders interviewed worked as hostlers, not farmers, on the plantations. They broke and trained the plantations' mules, work horses, and show horses.

Planters went to great lengths to disguise fast mules with reputations for winning by painting and dying them, and changing their names. Greenwood rider Johnny Wade rode the same mule under three different names and dyed it with drugstore hair peroxide to conceal its identity.^^ Freddie Anderson remembered a running mule named Mary: "they had painted that mule, I guess twelve or fifteen times going different places. They used to run up there [to mule races] in Blytheville, Arkansas."^^ Planter and their peers wagered large amounts of money and paid successful riders well, as Johnny Wade attested:

... I could get a new car [,?] and wouldn't be nothings said about it, if I rode good. You understand what I'm talking about don't you? It musta been

39 Ibid.
40 Wade, Tape 14, interview.
41 Anderson, Tape 5.
something on the end of the line you know.42

Officially the men received $2.50 to $5.00 for each race they rode, and if they won, they collected the prize money. Unofficially, there are stories of bets between riders, special incentives to riders from owners and bettors, and of hats being passed in the crowd to sweeten the official prize money.

Anderson described the promenade:

FA . . . just before race time you walk your mule or ride your mule up and down that line and then people would be betting on your mule, but now you don’t know who’s betting on you because you steady riding. Only thing you know if somebody comes up and tells you, “are you going to win this race?” Say, I’m going to try. What they tell you, say, “if you win this race you got 50 or 45 or 25 or 30” or whatever, you know what I’m saying?

KG So, you had these things going on the side?

FA Only if you was a good rider Karen. I mean, if somebody was betting on you and put good money on you and they wanted to win. And if you win this is what they gave you. Now this isn’t what you was paid, this was the tip they gave you for winning the race. If they gave you 50 or 45 dollars, what do you think they

42 Wade, Tape 14.
won? Maybe $5000. But anyway, it was money to us because we was riding, you know.\textsuperscript{43}

Anderson described a level of betting activity that took place among the planters outside of the pari-mutuel system:

"... They walked around. They walked around, and the big shots, when they got together said, "My mule'll out run yours," for whatever they was betting. ... this was the way they got their bet on ... had somebody responsible for holding the pouch."\textsuperscript{44}

As the home movie footage shows, the pari-mutuel betting booth was popular at the mule races. Only whites wagered at the pari-mutuel betting booth. Neither the mule riders nor the black spectators knew about or could describe pari-mutuel betting. Riders bet among themselves. Sometimes this action caused fights when the men could not agree on the order they rode across the finish line. Anderson tells a story about a bet and two races that took place between himself and a famous hostler named Sparkplug:

... So after the race one day, the last time we raced ... he was telling the people how his horse could get down. And a lot of them there knew that that old mule I rode could run. So Mr. Will Gourlay and his brother, they were small boys, they come out on the track where I was and walk up and talk to me

\textsuperscript{43} Anderson, Tape 7.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
like little mens. Said, “Freddie, you going to try and win this race?” I said, “I most certainly is.” And they had $5 or $10 in their pocket, said, “If you win this race it’s your $10.” I said, “Well you can give it to me now sir, but I’ll wait until I win it.” . . . So they went around the track with a black hat and they picked up a hat full of money and they come back and this boy [Sparkplug] was talking about how he could do. He said [he’d] give me two lengths, turn his horse’s head the opposite from my mule head and both the horse tail and the mule tail would be pointing toward each other . . . and [he’d] let me take off first and then catch me before I crossed the finish line...I had on two spurs and . . . when that man . . . shot that pistol and dropped that stick, he stood there but I tapped that mule and she jumped. I guess I was the length of two Cadillacs gone before he turned around. And he turned around holding the horse back, and making the horse run sideways like. That mule was gone. When he come around to the last curve . . . for to come home, that mule stepped up, come across the finish line. And he got this, how did you beat me? I said well, “I’m the turtle. I’m slow but simple . . . you the rabbit, you run and you going to clown and jive and take a nap and then get up and beat me to the finish line . . . don’t work like that.” He said, “Man, I didn’t know that mule could run like that.” And I told him, I said, “Look when they pay me whatever they going to give me, . . . I’ll take mule and...me and you will go around the track and I’ll
bet you $5 . . . your horse can't run tail length on the mule." He said, "I'll give you 2 to 1."

. . . we started off, he started talking to his horse, "get up Palmina, get up" and that mule would understand. I told you her momma was a horse and she was mustang . . . Every time he said get up Palmina that mule was getting up too. And listen, all I do is just sit tight, leaving my hand on her neck like that, and just touching her with those spurs . . . and when we come around the finish line that's when the showdown comes. He leant over on her, called Palmina, I leant over on that mule and we come across the finish line neck and neck.45

The man Anderson beat in this story, Sparkplug, rode as an independent. Planters who needed a rider hired him. He was a legendary horseman. Just about every Rosedale informant, white and black, mentioned his name in connection with the races. He was a local man who worked as a hostler on a farm near Pace. Besides riding competitively, Sparkplug broke wild mules between events. Freddie Anderson knew him:

Sparkplug, he rode for all of them. He rode for everybody there. If he was there and they had mules that needed a rider, he rode them . . . . He could ride four or five races too. Course he wasn't riding just one mule or one horse, he's riding whoever didn't have a rider for that mule and that's how I did . . . . I

45 Ibid., Tape 5.
have rode "high 5" races, five mules in one day.46

One of Sparkplug's riding escapades is inextricably entwined with the Rosedale mule races. It is one of the first stories people recall when asked unexpectedly about the races and serves as a case study on the perceptions of the mule races expressed by the black and white communities.

46 Ibid.
CHAPTER 5
The Story of Sparkplug and the Levee

White folks recall the story with humor and use it as an example of the crazy things that can happen when blacks ride mules in a race. African-Americans tell it straight faced and with admiration for the riding skills of Sparkplug. People tell many versions of the story; some called the rider Sparks, others called him Sparkplug; some described a race mule that went out of control, others described a wild mule that ran away; but everyone told the story as the mule that ran over the levee/ Freddie Anderson confirms that the stories were about the same man:

KG I heard a story about a man named Sparkplug. Were there two people, a man named Sparks and a man named Sparkplug; or is that the same person?
FA That’s the same person. You see they used to call him Sparks [?] but his name was Sparkplug.¹

When asked why Rosedale raced mules, Clyde Aycock described the unpredictableness of the animals through the story of Sparkplug:

¹ Ibid.
CA Well it was a lot of fun. Though, you can’t ever tell when you get on a mule and start him to running where he’s going to go. He may stay in the race or he may wind up over on the levee and that’s what happened some time.

KG People ended up over the levee?

CA Yea.

KG Can you tell me the story?

CA Well, they just start the race you know, shoot the gun and start the race, and here they go around there, and the track ain’t nothing but a little, old, roped-off area and a mule’s hard to turn once you get him started. And they just run right on through that rope and up on the levee. It’s down at the country club which is right by the levee.

KG Who did this?

CA I don’t remember who did it. But, it happened. I saw it happen.2

Asterina Carter was told or heard about the event and also used it to describe the attraction of the races:

... one of the jockeys, the black jockeys riding and ... the mule just went wild. And instead of stopping at the end, they said he went across the levee. The golf course, the levee sits right behind the golf course. That mule just went wild, just went, just headed on out.3

---

2 Aycock, Tape 7.
3 Carter, Tape 2.
Frank Duncan, a former chauffeur in Rosedale, remembered Sparkplugs’ name and his reputation though he did not mention the levee story:

There was one called Sparks, Sparks. He was, yea, he was riding them bad mules. What didn’t want you to ride them, Spark would ride them . . . . he wasn’t in the race though. He wasn’t riding round. He just come there to meet different people [who] bring mules . . . [that] you can’t ride . . . at all . . . bad mules.4

Jimmy Love, a former farm worker, saw Sparkplug ride over the levee:

JL . . . they bring mules in for the Negro man to ride. We had a fellow there we used to call Sparks, he could do that . . . ride mules that aint never been rode before.

KG Do you remember any stories, or did you see this guy Sparks?

JL Yea, I seen him ride.

KG Can you describe it?

JL Yea, I can describe it cause he had one mule the man said could nobody ride him. He got on him and he took off but now he didn’t go round no circle, no race. The last time you see Sparks, he and the mule was over the levee. Just kept on crossing the levee. So, after he was across the levee, Spark had a sister, used to be with

---

4 Frank Duncan. Tape 3, interview.
him all the time. She rode a horse.
She followed him. And he was
gone so long we were wondering
about him.
KG What happened?
JL When Sparks come back, that
mule was trotting just as gentle as
[?]...5

Freddie Anderson knew and respected Sparkplug as a
horseman of considerable skill. Once they traveled from
Beulah to the Greenville rodeo together:

. . . they had a big bull there, called him
Big Mick, Big Mick that's what they
called that bull. And some guy was
riding the bull and they didn't want to
. . . pay him . . . . he didn't stay on the
bull a second. And this boy [Sparkplug]
says I can ride him and they give him a
chance and he rode him. And, stayed
his term, out his minute, and that's how
we know he was a rodeo rider.6

While other people tell fragments of the levee story they saw
or heard, Anderson tells it as a witness and as an appreciative
fellow rider:

Mr. Malone had some mules had never
been rode. Had nobody never sit on
their back. Had nobody never put a
bridle on them. They caught them
mules and brought them to that track.
And this boy went up there and got that
mule, put a line on him, hooked him to
that horse and brought him down there.

5 Love, Tape 3.
6 Anderson, Tape 7.
It's one thing that horse will do, if he caught, threwed a line over a mule or cow, he had to drag that horse . . . . that boy had double girths on that horse, breast plates, leather breastplate, and that strip come around his tail, come down his back, that means you couldn't pull that saddle off. He had him dressed to kill but, he would hold whatever you threwed that line over, and it tighten up against the horn of that saddle, hey, only way he'd get away, he'd break every girth that was on it. Cause he wouldn't give up to them, he'd hold them . . . . when you bring them [wild mules] out to the park they would sometimes have to put a twister on it. That's a [?] handle and a rope and, put it on his lip and twist him down so they can get on it. Then they'd throw a rope over him, just like you do on them bulls. And when you twist that twister on his lip, he give. You draw that rope around his waist, twist over on that twister he give. Draw that rope around his waist and get that rope good and tight only thing you can do, then, you jump up on him. You jump up on him and Sparkplug, he was a rodeo rider, he had them big 1/4" spurs. You know he could stop a mule or horse dead still with them spurs. He was tall and he was bowlegged. He'd reach around and hook him in the chest when he bucking and you could see him giving. He'd set back, he wouldn't buck coming down no more. He'd set back . . . . This boy rode a mule there one day. That mule went through the wire fence and broke about four strands of wire. And that mule went over the levee with him. You
know when he was running he
[Sparkplug] whistled (makes whistling
sound). When he left, running that race,
he made his bridle ring up on his
saddle. That horse was standing out
there . . . like he's at attention. And all
Sparkplug had to do was whistle, that
horse was coming to him. When he
whistled, he went to him. That horse
cleared that . . . jumped that fence and
went over out there. And Sparkplug
had got off the mule and . . . that horse
come up, he jumped on that horse and
he taken that line off his saddle and
roped that mule and brought him back.
Yea, he was a rodeo rider, no doubt
about that.7

The white informants remember the outrageousness of
the event. They remember it as a race, not as a dangerous,
between-race event requiring more skill and courage. They
cannot identify the rider. The story is told as an example of
the silly things that can happen when anonymous black men
race mules. It is told as one of the unusual things that one
hoped to see as these unlikely racing animals were forced to
run around the track in a pack. The telling conjures images of
a helpless rider carried over the levee on a runaway mule. The
stories do not bring the rider back. The listener is left with an
image of the black rider vanishing over the horizon.

The black informants named the rider and knew of his
reputation with wild mules. They all knew that Sparkplug was

7 Anderson, Tape 5.
breaking the mule that carried him over the levee. Jimmy Love and Freddie Anderson did not abandon Sparkplug on the other side of the levee; they brought him back with the docile mule tied to his saddle. They brought him back as a man who had successfully completed the job he had set out to do.

The Love and Anderson versions differ on the return of Sparkplug. Love’s story is interesting because it 1) mentions a black horse woman at the races, 2) describes briefly the relationship between Sparks and his sister and, 3) credits her as a heroine who rescues him from a tight spot. Anderson’s story, on the other hand, shows the admiration of one colleague for another. First, he establishes Sparkplug’s credentials as a rodeo rider by describing the Greenville bull incident. Second, he lists the equipment on Sparkplug’s horse and explains the use of the horse in roping and breaking mules. Third, he describes the step by step process of how rope is looped around the animal’s lip and twisted, to physically control the mule until a man can jump onto its back. Finally, after the professional description of wild mule riding and Sparkplug’s background he moves on to the levee story. In Anderson’s version, Sparkplug remains in control, whistling for his horse as he is going over the levee. The horse responds as trained, following its owner. The prior description of the horse and its gear lends credibility to this story. Anderson has his colleague return under his own power rather than resorting to outside help.
While Sparkplug symbolizes the ritual mule races for the bi-racial community, each group interpreted the story to suit its distinctive needs. The interpretations reflect the tension between black and white society as they constantly negotiated and redefined the racial code. White interpretation driven by the need to terminate the liminality of the ritual and restore the temporarily inverted social order, depicted Sparkplug as a buffoon, a Sambo without a name, present only to provide comic entertainment. By denying his name, and recognition of his talents, the white community refused to record his accomplishments within the oral tradition. Liminal rituals are transitory in nature and support the status quo. They are not intended to produce documents or testaments which transgress their carefully delineated confines and challenge the social order. White versions of the story end with the abandonment of Sparkplug over the levee. The story thus carries a double message for the black community. It describes the inept, deferential behavior the white community wishes to see and it acts as a death threat, warning African-Americans of what happens to people who forget their place.

The African-American community rejected the racial stereotypes and defined Sparkplug as a brave, talented, competent man who beat the system by successfully completing what he set out to do against all odds. African-American versions of the story named him, named his horse, cited his reputation, returned him to his community, and
recorded his story in the folklore of the group. Lawrence Levine described this type of character as a "moral hard man" in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*:

... they won their victories within the confines of the legal system in which they lived. They defeated white society on its own territory and by its own rules. They triumphed not by breaking the laws of the larger society but by smashing its expectations and stereotypes, by insisting that their lives transcend the traditional models and roles established for them and their people by the white majority. They were moral figures, too, in the sense that their lives provided more than vehicles for momentary escape; they provided models of action and emulation for other black people.8

Disgruntled planters or their entourage sometimes harassed the successful riders. The temporary glory of victorious black men rattled the social order normally based on African-American servility. Whites angered by their losses and the confidence emanating from the winners, lashed out at the riders. This hostility quickly terminated the liminality of the mule race experience by aggressively reinstating the social order. Anderson called this type of behavior, humbug:

... When they come round like that, the people that you riding for would be pretty close and they would see this and they'd come on and say, "Hey, leave that

---

8 Larry Levine. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, p. 420.
boy alone, leave him alone." When Mr. Gourlay spoke, you didn’t get no more blah, blah, blah.\textsuperscript{9}

As Anderson’s employer, Gourlay protected the World War II veteran from the wrath of other whites. Whites tolerated blacks at the country club only for the duration of the mule races. The end of the last race terminated the liminal nature of the annual ritual just as quickly as the temporary bi-racial status of the country club grounds dissipated. African-American men, fresh from the camaraderie of the track and the cheers of the crowd, quickly left the white-only grounds, forced to don the required deferential demeanor.

\textsuperscript{9} Anderson, Tape 5.
CHAPTER 6
Conclusion

Every year after the crop was planted, two Mississippi Delta towns turned the social order upside town by focusing public attention on the riding skills of African-American men. This annual ritual began during the Depression years of the early 1930s, the same time that large Delta planters started receiving federal agricultural subsidies. Planters used the money to buy tractors and reduce the number of tenants and sharecroppers on their land. Hard times combined with mechanization displaced many sharecroppers. The situation was so grave the federal government interceded and began relief payments to sharecroppers, lessening their financial dependency on the planter. Outside attention, the growing number of unemployed, and federal payments to sharecroppers appeared to loosen the political, social and economic control of the planters.

In this atmosphere, the dominant society asserted its control over the African-American population and affirmed the position of blacks in the social order, by pairing them with the lowly plow mule in the annual races. Whites modeled the event on thoroughbred racing and paid the farm hands to ride the mules as if they were race horses, providing an inherently
comical spectacle for the white audience. Viewing African-Americans in the familiar guise of a nameless, entertaining Sambo, reassured white society of the sanctity and continuity of the social order. Conversely, African-Americans interpreted the public races as validation of the skills of black hostlers. They celebrated the races and the men who performed in them. The conflicting perspectives reflected intrinsic racial tensions in the Jim Crow South. Victor Turner described major rituals as inclusive and, "many leveled . . . capable of carrying and communicating many messages at once, even of subverting on one level what it appears to be 'saying' on another."\(^1\)

The story of Sparkplug going over the levee symbolized the divergent needs of the black and white communities expressed through the ritual racing event. The African-American community used the public arena of the race track to celebrate black manhood and resist the denigration and emasculation of white supremacy politics. Similar to the upwardly mobile pioneers of the seventeenth century who used horse racing to demonstrate their physical prowess and claim social status. While the white community, always alert to possible challenges to the social order, used the mule races to celebrate the traditional way of life, represented by the familiar cultural association of African-Americans and plow mules. White society needed to downplay the power of the

story of Sparkplug. So, they interpreted him (representative of all black men) as an inept, non-threatening buffoon unable to control a mule much less challenge the social order. Thus, the mule race ritual graphically depicts the complexity of racial relations in the South. Created by the planter class to promote the status quo, the mule races celebrated performers from the strata of society with the greatest desire to subvert the social order.

A traditional locus of demonstrations of manly prowess, the race track fanned rivalries between riders and between the planters they represented. Cultural values of personal honor and competitiveness superseded the social requirements of racism and drove the planters to compete seriously on the race track. The convergence of the cultural values of the participating planters and riders leveled the social barriers between the players for the duration of the event.\textsuperscript{72}

It is ironic that the ritual designed to reaffirm the social order, exposed a stronger, cultural value that cut across race to join black and white men in competition. This potentially subversive activity of communitas did not upset the social order because the parameters of the liminal performance were clearly confined by time and space. Black men could be stars and white men could ride mules within the boundaries of the mule races. This was dramatically demonstrated at the 1946

\textsuperscript{72} Turner, \textit{Ritual Process}, p. 128.
Greenwood races according to a report of the August 3rd,

Greenwood Commonwealth:

Old Pippen took this one easily as Cal County guided his long strides down the stretches . . . As he crossed the finish line a winner, his owner Arthur Killebrew jumped astride and rode behind his jockey before the grandstand in all the enthusiasm of a boy as the crowds roared its approval and delight.

When the races ended, the traditional social order reasserted itself with African-Americans on the bottom.

The home movie film which documented the ritual began with a typical political campaign scene of the era - white men on a platform draped in patriotic bunting addressing a crowd of white voters. Disfranchised African-Americans are not in the frame. They appear later, filmed performing in a liminal event where they could compete as men. These images, neatly juxtaposed, contained by the same event, expressed the diverse political will present in Delta society. The footage is extraordinary because it transgresses the boundaries of the liminal ritual and survived the ritual itself. Extracted from its socio-cultural context, the footage does not convey the stereotypical images remembered by members of white society. It does support the African-American memory of the races as a demonstration of manly prowess. It does reveal a continuity of male cultural values, from the Virginia frontier to the Mississippi Delta of the 1940s.
CHAPTER 7
Afterword

This project began in Washington, D.C. as an idea about using home movie footage as a research tool for understanding life in the American South during the first half of the twentieth century. The Center for the Study of Southern Culture provided the academic framework and geographic setting which allowed me to develop the idea. Two years later this document represents the results of a research project initiated by a clip of home movie footage on mule racing in the Delta. The research continues. New interview candidates have appeared, and new home movies have been acquired. A methodology is evolving through the trial and error process of working with new tools.

An anecdote and one minute and forty-five seconds of home movie footage of the 1941 Greenwood mule race launched this project. The anecdote explained the mule races as a fund raiser organized by the planters to financially assist sharecroppers between the end of one crop and the beginning of another. The novel concept of planter philanthropy, designed to supplement the often inadequate yearly settle, contradicted everything I had read about the treatment of labor in the Delta. Interest in exploring the unknown ritual of
mule racing, and social function in Delta society led to this study.

The amazing sight of individual, animated, decently clothed black sharecroppers on a motion picture screen stunned me. The images are not a part of the national visual historical record. Rather, the absence of black American life characterizes the national visual record. Unlike the Farm Security Administration photographs, the home movie footage captured the spirit and vitality of black farmers. The undeniable physical presence of a vital, dynamic black world pranced across the screen. The possibility of identifying the mule riders and interviewing them excited and intrigued me. The black role at the races seemed to promise an opportunity to record their point of view on the events.

Initial questions about mule races revealed the suitability of the topic as a research subject. A nearby town, Rosedale, also held races during the same time period, raising the possibility of a comparison between the two towns, and people who experienced the races responded well to the topic. They remembered the mule races warmly as community events where everyone had a good time. This enthusiastic response, the home movie footage, and a complete microfilm record of the Greenwood Commonwealth from 1941 to 1948 encouraged me to continue the research in earnest.

Investigating an undocumented phenomenon handicaps research. As secondary sources on mule racing do not exist, I
began the research without reference material to form questions or frame an overall strategy. I simply set out to collect as much information as possible by talking to everyone that remembered the events beginning with members of planter society. Planters' memories shaped the foundation of the work. I formulated research questions from their descriptions of the mule races.

I advertised in the *Greenwood Commonwealth* and sent a request to all of the historical societies in Mississippi for information on the mule races. Records of the organizing groups did not exist in Rosedale nor in Greenwood except for a report of the Junior Auxiliary Publicity Committee of 1948. The lack of documents describing the logistics of the races, the rules, entry procedures, gambling guidelines, and expenses increased my dependency on the memories of the planters.

Using names of black riders collected from the *Greenwood Commonwealth*, I tried locating the men through the phone book. This proved fruitless due to the common use of nicknames, inaccurate surnames, and the mobility of black farmers. Compiling eight years of newspaper coverage, I made a racing guide of the names of riders, animals, and plantations. I took this to barbershops and restaurants in the black community of Greenwood, but few people recalled the mule races or recognized the names from fifty years ago. When efforts to find the mule riders proved unsuccessful, I again turned to members of the dominant class.
Questions about African-Americans made many whites uncomfortable as they remembered the mule races as a white-only event. The response contradicted the profuse pre-race advertisements and the oral histories of black informants. This conflict between memory and actuality reappeared throughout the research.

In Gunnison, Emma Lytle and I reviewed her home movie footage of Perthshire and the 1946 Rosedale races on videotape. At the initial interview she could not identify the black workers or riders on the tape. Since then African-American residents of Gunnison have identified many people on the videotape. I also sent the home movie footage to former mule rider Freddie Anderson in Chicago. The film became a shared text enriching our discussions over the phone. Anderson made identifications of riders, mules, and plantation owners. The ability to transfer home movie film to videotape and distribute it to informants expedited the research. It also made a piece of the past accessible to members of the participating community.

Lytle presented her home movie footage in five Delta communities. This expansive gesture is crucial in the process of redefining home movies as historical documents. By including the larger community in the viewing audience the filmmaker takes the material out of the private sphere, the
home, and places it in the public sphere. Audience response to the home movie film in Gunnison, her home community, illustrated the primacy of memory, its role in determining social behavior, and interpreting and shaping the historical record.

The film played to an audience of the filmmaker's friends and neighbors familiar with the Rosedale races. The showing took place after a luncheon. While the white audience viewed the film an elderly black woman washed the dishes in a connecting room. She had been introduced as an old-time resident of the neighborhood. She could hear the audience but could not see the film from her position at the kitchen sink. The host reminded the viewers that the film was silent and prompted them to call out any information that would help identify people. The audience knew many of the people in the film and responded in typical family film fashion commenting on how people looked, who had lost or gained weight, who was with whom, and who was related to whom. It was a very comfortable setting for the viewers and they seemed to interject their comments freely. When African-Americans appeared on the screen the audience floundered, unable to identify the local people. No one thought to ask the member of their generation, washing lunch dishes within hearing range, whether she could identify members of the black community.

---

nor did she step out of the kitchen and volunteer the information. She was as invisible in 1995 as the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, published in 1947: "... that was the fundamental contradiction. I *was* and yet I was unseen." African-American commentary on the mule race films would provide information and a point of view unknown in the white community. I plan to create a narrative track to accompany the silent mule race film from information collected from the two communities.

---

74 Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man*, p. 383, *original italics.*
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Fair Program. Nelson County Agricultural Association, September 1, 2, 3 & 4, 1885.


**RECORDED INTERVIEWS**


Aycock, Clyde.  Tape 7, telephone interview, Rosedale, MS, November 29, 1993.


Duncan, Frank.  Tape 3, interview, Duncan, MS, October 16, 1993.


Gourlay, Will.  Tape 2, interview, Rosedale, MS, October 16, 1993.


McCormick, Frank. Tape 1, interview, Greenwood, Mississippi, October 15, 1993.


Myers, Sara. Conversation, Gunnison, Mississippi, September 14, 1994.

Pope, Joe. Tape 2, interview, Rosedale, Mississippi, October 16, 1993.


Wade, Lilly. Tape 14, interview, Greenwood, Mississippi, April 8, 1994.

NEWSPAPERS

Mule Races to Be Held October 15. Bolivar County Democrat October 10, 1940.


APPENDIX
Greenwood Racing Guide 1941-1948
August 6, 1941

Larry Pryor         Announcer         Greenville
Harold Council      Starter          Greenville

Sweepstakes

John Parkinson      Bolivar County

Winners

1st Race
Sport           Grant Weathers     Geren McLemore
Clyde            J.C. Mose          Vivian Johnson
George           Raymond Neal       (Indianola)

2nd Race
Gone With the Wind       Snow        C. Whittington
Jeff              Ed Anderson       Ellis Williams
Trouble            P.C. Larks       (Morgan City)

3rd Race
Lightning         Sunshine         C. Whittington
Elle             George May       Billy Garrard
Blanche           A_______          (Indianola)

Gentlemen's Jockey

Trim              L.P. Kimbrough    Itta Bena
Blitzkrieg        Ben Sturdivant    Glendora
Wiley             Billy Garrard    Indianola

5th Race
Issiquena Joe     Harry Tucker      Felix Nicholson
Spark Plug        Roosevelt Dean    Maury McIntyre
Turkey Village Bell Alfred King     V.D. Hemphill
                                (Carroll Co)
5th Race
Issiquena Joe    Harry Tucker    Felix Nicholson
Spark Plug      Roosevelt Dean    Maury McIntyre
Turkey Village Bell    Alfred King    V.D. Hemphill
(Charroll Co)

6th Race
Ole Bill        Willie Jones    Joe Parkinson
Alex            L.V. Smith    Billy Fox Swift
Jake            Bow Legs    Wildwood

Sweepstakes
Trim

July 23, 1942
Neil Streater      Announcer    Greenville
Harold Council    Starter    Greenville

August 5, 1943
Harold Council    Starter    Greenville
Cpt Larry Pryor    Judge    Silver Lake
Charles Whittington    Judge    Glen Allen
Felix Nicholson    Judge
Bill Parker    Announcer

Entries
George        Otis Ellis    Newton
Plantation Co.    Booker Gray
Hattie

Jim        Lewis Keys    L.W. Wade
Trixie      Richard Joiner
Dot        Willie Henry

Ocean Breeze    Jack Rabbit    Stannard Equen
Step 'N Fetchit    Moon Mullins
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boll Weevil</td>
<td>Willie Butler</td>
<td>A. Whittington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Worm</td>
<td>Charlie Grant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Magic</td>
<td>Charlie Grant</td>
<td>J.P. Cole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida</td>
<td>Will McCluney</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Rabbit</td>
<td>Rasberry</td>
<td>W.P. Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jello</td>
<td>Buck Benny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stormy Weather</td>
<td>Schooner Richardson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-38 Clipper</td>
<td>Walter Adams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rim</td>
<td>Flo Sibley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantation Amos Blitz</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wildwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slick Special</td>
<td>Sanford Hudson</td>
<td>Ruby Planting Co</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Jerry</td>
<td>Charlie Hooker</td>
<td>Race Track Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Eddie Jackson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top</td>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Peter Nichols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thunderbolt Spark Plug</td>
<td>Lightning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-24</td>
<td>Gunshy</td>
<td>Foaad Maloug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag</td>
<td>Smokey Joe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deuce Henry</td>
<td>George Harris</td>
<td>L. Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnight Sue</td>
<td>Yank Ferrill</td>
<td>E.R. King Place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WINNERS

Squadron Races
Greenwood Army Air Field

1st Clipper Pfc. Claud Nichols Ralph Redditt
2nd Dude T2 Sgt. Nick Furey C. Whittington
3rd Step 'n Fetchit Sgt. James P. Lewis Stannard Equen

87th Division
Della Pfc. Harry Hillman Hal Parchman
Sally Rand Cpl. Wm. White Will Pillow
Jack Pfc. Glenn Flower Hal Parchman

Squadron Sweepstakes
Della 1st Sgt. K. Vanderlark Hal Parchman
Sally Rand T-Sgt. Paul Parhan Will Pillow
Clipper Pfc. Claud Nichols Ralph Redditt

Local Races

2nd Race
Amos Bo Legs Wildwood
Jello Buck Benny Ralph Redditt
Army Worm Clarence Smith A. Whittington

3rd Race
Flash Baldie C.S. Whittington
Duce Coon Can L. Walker
B-24 Smokie Joe Foaad Malouf

4th Race
Mazie Cal Spunk Moon John Kearny
Black Magie Mutt Clay J.P. Cole
Jim Lewis Keys Luther Wade

5th Race
Dot Willie Henry Luther Wade
Tag George Harris L. Walker
Little Susie Baldie C.S. Whittington
6th Race
Eddy
Josephine
Cloudy Weather

Tee Grant
Sweet Pea
Sleepy

Jack Meek
Foaad Malouf
C. Whittington

Grand Plantation Sweepstakes

Flash
Mazie Cal
Eddy

Baldie
C. Whittington
C. Whittington
Jack Meeks

August 2, 1944

Harold Council
Botts Blackstone
C.E. Humphries
Luther Wade
Charles Whittington

Starter
Announcer
Judge
Judge
Judge

Greenville
Itta Bena
Greenwood
Greenwood

1st Race
Little Joe
Chicken Will
Overseas

Flash Gordon
Ned
Alec

C. Whittington
L.L. Walker
O.F. Bledsoe

2nd Race
Doughboy Jr. Auxiliary
Hot Shot

Hot Stuff
Slim
Joe

Foaad Malouf
C. Whittington
Wildwood Plan.

3rd Race
Foots Bushwhacker
Old Bru

Mister
Sugar
Little Rock

Whittington
Luther Wade
J.S. Equen

4th Race
Bazooka Pippin
Sea Biscuit

Peckerwood
Cal County
Hot Dog

C. Whittington
Arthur Killebrew
O.F. Bledsoe
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5th Race</th>
<th>Mammy's Chile</th>
<th>J.H. Huges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baby Buzzard</td>
<td>Rising Sun</td>
<td>C. Whittington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flame Thrower</td>
<td>Sunflower</td>
<td>E.V. Long</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6th Race</th>
<th>Ol Man River</th>
<th>C. Whittington</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miss Victory</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Ralph Redditt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stormy Weather</td>
<td>Lindberg</td>
<td>Arthur Killbrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sweepstakes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pippin</th>
<th>Cal County</th>
<th>Arthur Killebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stormy Weather</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Ralph Redditt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Buzzard</td>
<td>Mammy's Chile</td>
<td>J.H. Huges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**August 2, 1945**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Larry Pryor</th>
<th>Announcer</th>
<th>Greenville</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harold Council</td>
<td>Starter</td>
<td>Greenville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.A. Wilson</td>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Cottondale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.E. Reynolds</td>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Glendora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirby Henderson</td>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Winners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thunderbolt</th>
<th>Baldy</th>
<th>Greenacres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornelia Queen</td>
<td>Ben Nash</td>
<td>O.F. Bledsoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hoot Gibson</td>
<td>L. Walker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Little Henry</th>
<th>Peewee Robinson</th>
<th>L. Walker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Fred</td>
<td>Jim Holloway</td>
<td>Wildwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eddie Sifer</td>
<td>O.E. Bledsoe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Split Second</th>
<th>Cruger Special</th>
<th>Arthur Killebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wildcat Dimple</td>
<td>Bilbo</td>
<td>Greenacres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Army Clay</td>
<td>J.B. Cole</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poncho Villa</th>
<th>Baldy</th>
<th>Greenacres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admiral McCain</td>
<td>J.P. Sims</td>
<td>Wildwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustange</td>
<td>Leroy Dollarson</td>
<td>Ralph Redditt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pippin  Cal County  Arthur Killebrew
Foots  Baldy  Greenacres
Whirlwind  Big Push  Dr. J.C. Adams

Liza Jane  Eddie Jackson  Maury McIntyre
Martha  Edgar King  O.F. Bledsoe
Unknown  Masked Marvel  Foaad Malouf

Sweepstakes

Pippen  Cal County  Arthur Killebrew
Little Henry  Peewee Robinson  L. Walker
Foots  Baldy  C.S. Whittington

Last Minute Entries

Shine  Bill Reeves  Joe Pugh of
Swiftown  Cleve Ward  Greenville
Dallas  

/  August 2, 1946  Greenville

Harold Council  Starter  Greenville
Larry Pryor  Announcer  Greenville
Charles Whittington  Judge  Greenwood
Kirby Henderson  Judge  Money
R. H. Lake  Judge  Greenville

Winners

1st Race
Lucky Draw  Coon  Arthur Killebrew
Marie  Hoot Oliver  Foaad Malouf
Fleet Feet  Willie Wickham  Whittington

2nd Race
Diamond Jim  Guy Jackson  Leslie Tucker
Satin  J.D. Davis  Joe Pugh
Little Willie  Jerry P. Robinson  L. Walker

3rd Race
Split Second  Cruger Special  Arthur Killebrew
Atom Bomb   Joe Lee Washington  Hugh Gary
Foots      Baldy  Greenacres Plan.

4th Race
Black Ann  C.B. Bell  L. Walker
Cornelius  Sidney Johnson  O.F. Bledsoe
Plenty Tough  Willie Curry  Jack Meeks

5th Race
Old Pippin  Cal County  Arthur Killebrew
Mink  Lige Reynolds  Race Track
Rocket  Van Johnson  Wildwood

6th Race
Belzebub  Woodrow Taylor  John Hughes
Nine  Ernest Hough  Foad Malouf
Black Diamond  Baldy  Green Acres

Sweepstakes
Black Ann  C. B. Bell  L. Walker
Belzebub  Woodrow Taylor  John Hughes
Lucky Draw  Coon  Arthur Killebrew

September 24, 1947

R. C. Watson  Announcer
Harold Council  Starter
R.H. Lake  Judge
Luther Wade  Judge
Charles Whittington  Judge

Winners
1st Race
Honey Boy  Frank  Greenbrier
Hot  Essie Gaines  Cecil Bennet
Frank  Eugene Williams  Luther Wade

2nd Race
Baby Doll  Shorty  Greenbrier
Sugar Foot  J. D. Sims  Wildwood
100 Octane  
Junior Dunlap  
Fort Mound Plan.

3rd Race
Black Ann   Jerry Lee Robinson  L. Walker  
Pippin      Cal County        Arthur Killebrew  
Little Bit  Shorty           I. McIntyre Jr.

4th Race
Beezlebub   Sam               John Hughes  
Lucky Draw  Coon              Arthur Killebrew  
Pen        Ezell Bryant       Wildwood

5th Race
Ole Crow    Johnny            Greenbrier  
Little Willie Hoot Oliver     L. Walker  
Stockin' Foot Lou  John Jones  Cecil Bennett

6th Race
Little Joe  Baldy             Green Acres  
Stonewall   Edgar King        Oscar F. Bledsoe  
Doll Baby   Jesse Starks      Luther Wade

Sweepstakes
Black Ann   Jerry Lee Robinson  L. Walker  
Old Crow    Johnny             I. McIntyre Jr.  
Little Joe  Baldy              C. Whittington

September 22, 1948

Officials
C.S. Whittington  Starter  
R.C. Watson      Announcer  
R.H. Lake        Judge  Greenville
Kirby Henderson  Judge  Money  
Luther Wade      Judge  Greenwood

Winners
1st Race
Carroll County Trouble
Best Regards Also Ran
Queen Elizabeth Petunia
Your Friend

Essie Heels Beals Truman
Philip Nitely Taw Po Boy Shad

2nd Race
Ole Crow Little Joe
Little Willie Bojack Buzz Boy U.B. Dam
Frank Bilbo Ernest Huff Ezell Bryant Ezell Keys Tommy

3rd Race
Katie Clabber Girl Jack Lucky Army Worm Fancy GoGo
Red Yancy Lon Smoky Sidney Booker L.C. Holmes Starks

Gentlemen Jockey Race
1st Little Willie 2nd Demey 3rd Buzz Boy
Maury McIntyre Jr. Truman Thurmond
Lawrence Walker Fred Metcalfe Jr Hugh Noell Jr
Racetrack Plantation Joe Chatham Frederick Belk

5th Race
Honey Boy Lady Godiva Comet Feet Flea Hopper Freedom
Frank Sir Galahad Bow Legs Baldy Dave Buster

Pat Riley Milan Killebrew C.S. Whittington C.C. Kuykendall

B.B. Provine Jr. C.C. Kuykendall Pat Riley
Milan Killebrew Geren McLemore R.A. Billups

Also Ran Philip Nitely Pat Riley
Queen Elizabeth Taw Milan Killebrew
Petunia Po Boy R.A. Billups
Your Friend Shad

Best Regards
Trouble

Trouble Heels Beals
Beals B.B. Provine Jr.
Provine Jr. Reinhardt

Trouble Heels Beals
Beals B.B. Provine Jr.
Provine Jr. Reinhardt
Cricket
Black Anne

6th Race
Baby Doll
Beezlebub
100 Octane
Clover
Flying Ebony
Bingo
Delta Special

Willie B
Sam
Junior
J.D Sims
Jim
Butch

7th Race
Sweet Violet
Boll Weevil
Shorty
Acre's O'Reilly
Yancy
Modern Version
Rock

Little Jack
Frank Binion
Jimmy Lee
Ozark Ike
Bob Head
Benny
L.C.

Grand Sweepstakes

Katie
Baby Doll
Sweet Violet

Red
Willie B
Little Joe

Drug Store Bicycle Race

1st Chaney's Pharmacy
Sidney Bell
City Drug Store
Barrett's
Roberts
Union Drug Store
Anderson's

I. McIntyre Jr.
L. Walker
I. McIntyre Jr.
John Hughes Jr.
Hugh Noell Jr.
Hugh Gary
Green McLemore
R.A. Billups
A. Whittington
C.S. Whittington
A. Whittington
Hugh Gary
B.B. Provine Jr.
Luther Wade
4/5ths Plan.
Cecil Bennett
L. Walker
I. McIntyre Jr.
C. Whittington
Home Movie Log

Home Movie 1, edited, Rosedale, 1940, 38:00
Inventory of Events on film

-women golfing at Walter Sillers Memorial Park (Rosedale Country Club)
-child with black nanny
-mule races
-family gathering Christmas Eve
-outside, group of men posing for camera
-child playing, with father; outside, child with black nanny and dog
-Rosedale Christmas Eve dance at Court house
-outside, children playing on swings and bikes; black nanny in sandbox with child; pan of house with child on front step; pan of garden; wide shot of street; pan of house and garden
-pan of river or lake; cabins at lake side; boat; men on boat
-party with men in uniform and women in gowns
-pan of snow covered houses, bushes; sledding down levee;
-river, scenes from speed boat
-outside, two boys practicing casting with rods and reels;
-Memphis airport; air show at Chicago airport
-mansion; outside, woman playing with toddler

Home Movie 1, Rosedale Mule Races, 2:37
A Shot by shot description

-politicians speaking from bunting draped platform to seated audience
-Walter Sillers Memorial Park clubhouse decorated with strings of pennants; seated groups of people drinking beer inside
-quick shot of concession stands
-Governor White seated
-pan of race track with black riders on mules at starting line; spectators line the track with pavilion style tent in the background; pennants flying from tent tops; grandstands shaded by tenting; pan rests on full parking lot behind the stands.
-mules take off clockwise toward camera
photographer with back to camera takes picture of black riders as they round the bend.
cut to car in infield
man approaches camera, tips his hat, smiles, speaks
wide of spectators in light colored clothing behind single rail fence; young boy in satin shirt wearing boots rides pony toward fence
cut to close up (CU) of man on horseback who tips his hat to camera
CU of mules and black riders as they start; man in front of riders drops his arm; grandstands in background, spectators line the fence; all riders wear light colored, billed caps and signs with numbers on their backs; mules wear bridles and nothing else, not even feed sacks; as they take off two more men are revealed with original starter, all have curved handled canes; two wear ties
cut to mule and rider hugging outside of track, racing toward camera with another mule at least five lengths behind and a third animal twice as far back
first mule gallops past camera
man in boater hat seems to clock the speed of the first mule as it passes
mule on inside veers across track at extreme angle; rider pulls the animal up before it goes through the rope fence; the mule turns in circles until they are facing the wrong direction
cut to saddled horses and men talking to white rider
cut to track and two mules in middle of course racing toward camera; spectators line the track
cut to a dozen men standing on the infield watching
cut to reversal of man backing away from starting line as horse and white rider #88 race down track
camera pans over crowd to follow rider #88 down the track
cut to plane flying overhead
cut to track and start of race; five mules take off and ride toward camera; mules gallop furiously, riders lashing them on
cut to small group of people clustered by themselves under a stand of trees watching the races; too far to determine race, believe they are black
Home Movies 2, three reels, Bulah, 1940, 17:29
Inventory of Events on film

Reel 1
-paddle boat on river
-Oaklawn Park Racetrack in Arkansas
-cattle herd grazing on levee
-Oaklawn Park Races
-Rosedale mule races
-crop dusting
-land owner flying his own plane
-Pass Christian
-men posing

Reel 2
-snow in Bulah
-bird dogs in the field; pedigreed puppies
-black men hauling truckload of hay
-men showing their catch of fish
-Easter? family outside, dressed up; pan of property
-pet cat in yard
-model airplane in yard
-outside, children posing; child posed on fender of red truck

Reel 3
-game cocks sparring
-outside, woman with family cat
-calf; hunting dog
-man in sit raising antenna of car
-outside, women and man posing with child
-outside, children receiving baby animals; women walking to and fro for camera
-man posing with game cock; birds spar;
-CUs of flowers; women pose under flowering arbor
-cut to family and friends in field next to flat bottom wagon; black man working on wagon
-crop dusting
-young black man walks toward camera; cut to two shot of him and black woman wearing apron standing side by side
-cattle grazing on levee; land owner and his father on horseback among cattle; young boy on horseback
-bulls in barnyard
-land owner shooting skeet with pistol
-flowering trees in garden

Home Movie 2, Rosedale Mule Races, 1:39
A shot by shot description

-boy wearing red satin cap and shirt rides through trees toward camera on pony blowing a brass horn to signal start of races.
-cut to pan of tent covered grandstand with pennants flying from peaks; white post fence with single rail girds track in front of tents; people looking into shaded wooden pen holding an animal; men and women in light colored clothing walking about
-cut to dark horse and rider galloping down track toward camera followed by a white horse and rider; the dark horse with white rider passes camera
-cut to man on horseback on track smiling at camera. He's holding a curved handled cane used by starters men who are officiating at the races.
-cut to plane overhead
-cut to pan of grandstand
-cut to two planes overhead
-cut to wide of track and railing where spectators in hats and ties watch; man leads a saddled white horse and the herald mounted on the pony.
-camera follows them, man in hat and cane approaches camera
-wide of trace lined with spectators
-cut to CU of blacks lined up at start; all wear caps, regular clothing with large numbers attached to back of their shirts
-they start; boy in lead, wearing short sleeved shirt, rolled blue jeans, and white socks, looks white; everyone rides bareback; some have cloths over mule's back; light mule with black rider gallops toward camera; red satin cap, light shirt, trousers, no cloth on mule's back
-cut to black and white car with lettering on door sitting in infield with sign behind it (illegible)
-cut to front view of saddled horses at starting position with white riders wearing caps and numbers on their backs
-cut to CU of white man wearing yellowish satin cap, #88, as he flies past camera on horse; track lined with white spectators
-cut to mules at starting position; black rider on left wearing a red and white satin shirt and red satin cap; remaining three riders wearing light shirts, trousers and caps; white man walks past them carrying curved handle cane
-cut to reversal of same riders promenading their animals at a walk past the spectators
-cut to starting position and black and white riders trying to maneuver their saddled horses into position
-cut to start as six take off
-cut to rider as he flashes across finish
-cut to six riders lined up on mules; one looks white; take off; round bend in track
-cut to gray mule and black rider in red cap thundering toward and past camera
-cut to wide reversal of rider guiding his mule up to railing and spectators; mule has wreath of cotton bolls and flowers around its neck; rider smiles as people take his photo with peaked tent behind him; little boys run up to rider and mule; small black boy in tee shirt runs up; camera zooms in on rider and mule as they ride out of frame
-cut to white man on back of PA system truck holding a trophy in right hand while tipping hat to camera with left; white man next to him holds microphone in his hand.

Home Movie 3, edited, Greenwood, 1941
Inventory of events on film

-cotton fields with black workers
-black workers mowing hay
-white people on hayride, mule pulled wagons driven by blacks
-black baptism ceremony at lake
-mule races
-plantation owners on their riding horses
Home Movie 3, Greenwood Mule race, 1:45
A shot by shot description

-long shot of mules and black men riding away from camera on a circular track with wood fencing (American Legion Baseball Stadium)
-cut to full frame shot of white spectators in bleachers.
-long shot of mules lined up, the track explodes into movement as arms flail and the mules are off; a few white men, one carrying a white flag, cross the track walking into the center of the field; camera begins to follow the mules around the track
-cut to mule and rider as they approach the finish line and ride out of sight; two others ride into frame and then off screen; there is a small, white awning in the center of the field
-cut to full frame shot of mules and riders approaching the starting point in a sedate fashion
-cut to shot of five mules and riders lined up waiting for the signal; the scene explodes as the mules take off, raising a curtain of dust, two riders hug the inside of the track and three mules and riders bunch up on the outside edge
-cut to two men, ambling into view; camera pans behind them to include three more riders as they approach the starting point; a large stock barn and assorted smaller buildings are in the background
-riders appear to have mules reined in and under control as they approach the starting line and take off; mules approach the finish line running flat out, pass the stationary camera and run out of frame
-cut to full take off from starting line
-cut to full take off from starting line

Home Movie 4, Perthshire, 1938-1946
Inventory of events on film

-outside, children and women playing
-sculptor at work, black man assisting
-mule race at Rosedale
-cotton fields with black workers, white overseer, white owner
-child with black cook
-children at Easter egg hunt
-children at Christmas
-Nativity play staged by children
-family and friends in car
-snow, sledding down road
-children at Easter egg hunt
-black maid helping child play piano
-white woman playing piano
-men at beach on vacation
-women at gulf tournament
-scenes of Chicago
-Greenwood horse show
-child playing with ducks
-black woman seated in front of small wood cabin
-black woman dancing for child and camera
-blacks working with mules in fields
-blacks sitting at crossroads
-blacks visiting each other at commissary on a Saturday
-blacks working at the cotton gin
-cotton textile mills in North Carolina

Rosedale Mule Races, 1946, 4:15
Shot by shot description

REEL 1

-group of mounted black men in an open space with tall trees in background, walk their mounts towards camera. One person’s animal balks and the rider pulls its head up with the bridle and holds it in check. The animals are large with glossy coats.
-cut to side view and the viewer sees that these are mules of different heights, and that the rider are bareback
-cut to long shot of the starting line with the riders hunched over the necks as they take off. The mules gallop around the circular course and are hidden behind a sound truck parked in the center of the track.
-cut to a young man thundering down the track toward the camera, sitting upright on his mule. The camera follows him as he gallops over the finish line, off the track and into the trees. A small group of white people can be seen in the
distance near the trees. A second and third mule finish the race far behind the winner.
-cut to a close up of white hands pulling a ticket or betting slip out of a booklet.
-cut to CU of woman talking to someone while looking directly at camera
-cut to full frame CU of woman in group of women
-cut to brief shot of mules racing on track

REEL 2
-reversal, camera follows the back of two white men as they walk through the crowd. Pans over the backs of black people as they face the track watching the riders. There are trees on the horizon beyond the track.
-cut to CU of Florence Sillers talking to a man in the parking lot
-cut to group shot of Florence Sillers talking and ducking from camera
-cut to long shot of people at a booth covered with bunting.
-cut to medium shot of man in crowd who turns toward camera to talk to camera person
-cut to the back of a man buying tickets at a betting booth. He turns around and smiles at camera.
-cut to woman backing out of a CU; man enters frame and laughs
-cut to a long fuzzy shot of a band playing in one of the bunting covered booths. Men sitting on bench in front of booth.
-cut to heavy set man on light colored horse talking to them. camera follows the back of a man through the crowd; pans over the crowd
-cuts to black riders arranging themselves at the starting line.
 A white man in a dark suit walks towards camera smiling.
-cut to brief shot of race score board; written in large chalk letters, "RACE NO. 5" NAME OF MULE (RELIABLE) OWNED BY (SID HAN?)
-cut to white man on horse looking at camera
-cut to reversal of the starting line; riders are not lined up abreast of each other, they appear to be in a column of two or three across
-cut to two white men in hats backing away as riders
-cut to rider on a white mule, wearing a white hat cantering toward camera and across the finish line. A small, roofed
platform is at the finish line, perhaps this is where the judges watch. Someone on the platform jumped up and down as the white mule crossed the line.
  -cut to a group of men intent on something off screen, one turns, smiles and displays his voting slips fanned out like a hand of cards.
  -cut to full frame shot of the crowd and Florence Sillers talking to a woman and two children.
  -cut to CU of older white man seated, smiling as he talks to camera, women sitting in chairs in background.
  -cut to full frame shot of front grill of car with sign, "Rosedale Mule Races July 5"
  -cut to back of an enthusiastic group of spectators lining the track as they cheer on their favorites.
  -cut to two white men in crowd on the fringe of black spectators' area. They smile and wave the camera to follow them into or through the black section. It is a 3 second shot showing a small group of black men, in white shirts and hats, and women in light colored dresses, standing along the rope separating the crowd from the track. None of the blacks pay any attention to the white men and camera person.
  -cut to shot of Florence Sillers talking to a man in parking lot.
  -cut to CU of black rider struggling with mule
  -cut to white man on horseback lifting child onto the saddle
VITA

Karen Marie Glynn, born June 9, 1956, graduated from St. Mark's High School, Wilmington, Delaware, in 1974. She earned a Bachelors of Arts degree in communications from the University of Pennsylvania in 1979. After teaching English as a Second Language in San Francisco, California, she moved to Washington, D.C., and became a broadcast news editor at Cable News Network. From 1986 to 1993 she was a self-employed documentary film researcher.