Lisson Gallery

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Garrett Bradley ’07
HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

The rising filmmaker hopes to right injustices by revealing them
THE WORD IS
‘LOVE’

VISIONARY FILM-MAKER GARRETT BRADLEY ’07 IS USING HER ART TO EXPOSE THE INJUSTICES OF THE WORLD AND INSPIRE A PATH TO HEALING AND UNIVERSAL CONNECTION.

BY SIMRAN SETHI ’02
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BLVXMTH
Garrett Bradley ’07 does not want to be seen. Not by me; not today. It’s a brisk fall afternoon and we are on a video call, but Bradley has requested that our cameras remain off. I comply, and ask the award-winning auteur Zooming in from Los Angeles to describe herself. “I’m a light-skinned Black woman with freckles, braids, a tank top, and some jeans. And I’m barefoot,” she says.

Her straightforward description belies the enormity of what the rest of the world sees: a 35-year-old film virtuoso who is bending genres, redefining narratives, and breaking new ground for artists of every stripe. In 2017, her short film Alone took the top prize for documentary shorts at the Sundance Film Festival. This was followed by a series of highly lauded projects: America, which was the centerpiece of a recent exhibition at New York’s Museum of Modern Art; her first full-length documentary feature, Time, on the challenges of the prison system, which was nominated for a 2020 Academy Award and netted her the Sundance award for best director of a U.S. documentary; and a three-episode miniseries for Netflix about top-ranked tennis player Naomi Osaka.

The Sundance directorial award for Time was a first for a Black woman, likely one of many firsts to come for Bradley. On the face of it, this recognition is to be celebrated, but, upon deeper reflection, the nod is far more complicated. For Bradley, in 2020, to be the first Black woman to break through the celluloid ceiling reflects how grievously inadequate the film industry has been in honoring diverse talent.

“Any first is a melancholy kind of experience,” she says. “There were moments of feeling guilty, feeling shame … just trying to wrap my head around what the award really meant.” Yet, Bradley is willing to put what she calls “the disappointment of history” aside in service of her broader vision: “to create more visibility around what is working and, in doing so, support a better future.”

The future Bradley envisions is one that rights injustices. Her responsibility, she says, is to reveal them. In Time, she highlights the impacts of mass incarceration by telling the story of Fox and Rob Richardson, and Fox’s long struggle to win her husband’s release from a 60-year sentence for armed robbery. The film’s title is not only a nod to his prison sentence, but also to what is lost by the more than 2 million people who are behind bars; to the children, partners, and families whose lives have also been upended; and to a system that seems to leach the humanity out of those tasked to uphold it.

Bradley underscores this loss through her use of nearly two decades’ worth of Fox’s home video footage, weaved seamlessly into a narrative that filmmaker Ava DuVernay called “a seminal cinematic work [that] must be seen.”

Yet, what makes Time remarkable is that it is not simply a film about indelible absence; it is in equal measure a study of resilience. In a conversation with DuVernay, Bradley described the film as an exploration of “what it means to hope and evolve as a human being, and grow and create revolutions within yourself.”

Bradley’s goal, she tells me, was to not only interrogate the specificity of hope as explored through the Richarson family, but to ask, “What will sharing [their stories] do for those families?” This curiosity around impact is what helps Bradley create work that she describes as “additive, rather than extractive.”

| CREATIVE LIFE |

From a young age, Bradley, who grew up in New York City, was taught that it was perfectly acceptable to build a life around what she cherished, rather than what brought her the biggest paycheck. “For me, a big part of joy was communicating in a way that I felt was effective, and a desire for that communication to heal people and help people better understand themselves and the world that we’re living in,” Bradley says. Her parents—artists Suzanne McClelland and Peter Bradley—nurtured her to think beyond a traditional 9-to-5 existence. “They helped me understand theebb and flow of having money and not having money, and how to use the money I had to support my craft,” she recalls. Beyond these pragmatic lessons, she says her parents’ creative lives instilled in her a “profound idea of what was possible.”

Bradley arrived at Smith in the fall of 2003 with a keen sense of curiosity and wonder. She was intent on studying art history, not because of her early exposure to art but rather because of her dyslexia. Images, Bradley explains, “allowed me to act on my curiosity with a level of confidence that I otherwise didn’t feel.”

As Bradley immersed herself in art, she found herself drawn to the stories behind the works, many of them religious. “There was this Dutch painting class my first semester of my first year, and a conversation around [Johannes] Vermeer’s relationship to Catholicism through his painting Allegory of the Catholic Faith. We were talking about the painting on a formal level, which I was intrigued by, but more broadly I wanted to better understand how [his story] and the image worked together.”

That interest led her to the religion department,
where, in the classrooms of professors including Joel Kaminsky and Andy Rotman, she discovered the essential ingredients for how to make movies: stories, images, and the interactions between them. “It opened up this whole other world that was connected to images but also had elements of philosophy and storytelling.”

Bradley’s studies also seeded one of the hallmarks of her filmmaking: the interplay between the seen and unseen. In Judaic philosophy, she explains, the depiction of God is considered sacrilegious. It is in direct contrast to the Hindu precept of darshan, where, she explains, sight is equal to prayer. “You have two completely different ways of achieving spiritual connection, both reflecting the human experience in super interesting ways.”

Darshan, derived from the Sanskrit word for “sight,” is a devotional practice. “In the ritual context, one comes before a deity (or holy person, or sacred object) and, through the visual exchange, receives a blessing,” Professor Rotman explains. But pull back a bit further and darshan can be perceived as a way of connecting with the world as a whole. “When you’re engaging with a visual object, it’s part of an interaction, and you feel like you’re developing a relationship to it,” he says. “The visual forms are not just imparting information to you, and you’re not just extracting information from them—you’re emmeshed. It’s a way of thinking about visual forms as a kind of community building.”

Bradley credits Rotman with helping her form a “holistic, 360-degree framework around moviemaking” that preceded her awareness that she would become a filmmaker. Rotman isn’t surprised. “Garrett had this amazing ability to come into a wide variety of situations, be comfortable in her skin, and allow others to feel comfortable,” he says. This level of awareness—“to read a room and respond”—makes her valuable to those who are part of her work, as well as those who witness it. “Garrett doesn’t inhabit the comfortable distance that some—especially documentary filmmakers—do,” he says. She finds “a way into familiarity” with her subjects that “beckons” viewers. “You feel involved, and in that immersive experience, you’re transformed.”

Bradley’s films are notable for their unique aesthetic and tone: the creative use of natural sound and silence and the interplay of light and dark.

After completing her bachelor of arts degree at Smith and, in 2012, a master of fine arts in directing from the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, Bradley began to forge a body of work that not only interrogated capitalism, culture, and the quest for social justice, but also imbued in viewers a sense of possibility that—

to paraphrase author Arundhati Roy—a better world is coming. In Below Dreams—an official entrant in the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival—Bradley takes her audience into the lives of residents of New Orleans who struggle to navigate work, love, and the weight of everyday life while holding firm to their visions of better lives.

Ashley Clark, curatorial director at film distributor The Criterion Collection, which recently released Time on Blu-ray, says that though they are different in form and content, Bradley’s early works are “united by a calm observance and human empathy.” Her aesthetic and tone, he says, are unmistakable: a meticulous ear for the use of music, natural sound, and silence; a sharp eye for the interplay of light and dark; long, hypnotic zooms; and elliptical yet harmonic editing.

These techniques are stunningly evident in her 2019 work, America, what New York Times co-chief art critic Roberta Smith describes as a “quicksilver, imperious video installation... an indictment wrapped in a celebration.” The series of short films is a twofold declaration—first, of the estimated 70 percent of domestic feature-length movies made between 1912 and 1929 that were discarded as studios transitioned from silent films to sound, and second, of the Black talent that was prevented from fully flourishing.

“America was important to my development as a filmmaker, or as a maker of any sort,” Bradley says. It was the first time she had worked with archival footage, and that work helped solidify a visual and narrative philosophy that carried through to Time. “When we watch archival material, we intuitively are picking up on the 360 degrees of history—of the present moment and of the future—which is in total contradiction to the linearity of making films,” she says. “America allowed me to become more confident and agile with material that I, myself, didn’t create. It helped me to understand what it means to make something that appears fixed, flexible.”

The 12 black-and-white shorts that constitute America are intercut with segments from Lime Kiln Club Field Day, a 1913 film thought to be the very first feature-length film with an all-Black cast and an integrated production team. Collectively, they give form to what was and what can be. For Bradley, America “functions off the assumption that there was a whole breadth of work that was equally as progressive as this one film, [a series that] proposes that if we have examples of a past that are progressive, it might inform our sense of our present selves.”

America, Ashley Clark says, “marked the arrival of an extraordinary talent who was concerned with seriously interrogating the history and pres-
ent of the Black American image on film, in an idiosyncratic and deeply artistic way.”

When I ask Bradley if this high praise induces anxiety or instills pressure to champion Black representation, she remains dispassionate: “I associate pressure with expectation, and expectation with a preconceived notion of something. I’m not actually interested in that,” she says. “I try as much as possible to think about where there are problems and how my work can, to a certain extent, create not even a resolution but some kind of step forward ... an alternative to a problem. That’s as much as I can hope for. How my work ends up getting received or defined is not up to me.”

**BRADLEY’S FILMS INTERROGATE CAPITALISM, CULTURE, AND THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE.**

**REVEALING POINTS OF CONNECTION**

There is a montage about 23 minutes into *America* that I found myself repeatedly returning to. A barbed-wire fence gives way to a group of joyful Black boys crowding a balloon stand. The close-up of balloons overtakes the screen just before the camera pans down to a Black man whose arms slowly open toward the sky. These visuals are interspersed with shots of Black children, sparkling shards of glass, and a stunning Black girl in a white cotton dress turning a mirror toward sunlight—all set against an ambient soundtrack punctuated by birds, cicadas, and the uncomfortable screech of latex balloons being knotted. Ashley Clark describes this scene as a reflection of “joy, and the possibility of freedom: beauty, but with an aching undertow.” He suggests that the through line of Bradley’s work is care. But what crystallizes for me—in the birdsong and outpouring of light—is love.

I share this interpretation with Bradley. “Absolutely yes,” she says. “Part of that effort around making connections is simply put in one word, which is love.” Art’s purpose, she believes, is to “help nudge us in the direction of understanding and seeing, and being able to participate in the world’s connectedness, rather than its division.”

This response foreshadows Bradley’s upcoming project: a film version of author Octavia Butler’s staggeringly prescient text *Parable of the Sower*. The novel, published in 1993, is set in the dystopian future of 2024—one plagued by climate disasters, the dissolution of democracy, and extreme economic inequality. Butler’s writing is categorized as science fiction, but it is firmly grounded in what readers can recognize in our history and lived experiences. “Octavia was somebody who was really paying attention, and valued the here and the now,” Bradley says. “Although she didn’t consider herself to be particularly religious, a lot of us might...”
In America (left and below), Bradley celebrates Black lives, Black history, and Black talent by reimagining lost moments in African American cinema.

look at her work and consider it prophetic."
I am reminded of one of the most indelible parts of the text: “All that you touch, you change.” Butler writes. “All that changes, changes you. The only lasting truth is change. God is change.”

From a commercial perspective, Parable of the Sower will be Bradley’s most ambitious work as a director: a feature-length interpretation of a cherished novel, financed and distributed by A24, the company behind contemporary classics including Minari, Moonlight, and Uncut Gems. But what I am most curious about is what Bradley herself defines as her greatest achievement. Although I can’t see her, I sense the question gives her pause. “I don’t think that I’ve taken time to think about that,” she says, inhaling deeply and responding slowly. “On a personal level, that’s something I’ll have to sit with. But, professionally, if the people I’ve had the opportunity to work with feel that their life has benefited from the work we’ve done—if they feel that the world is becoming a more just and transparent and loving place as a result of the things that we’ve collaborated on—I can’t imagine any other pursuit more important.”

Sriram Sethi ’92 is an award-winning journalist and scholar and a 2009 recipient of the Smith College Medal.

GARRETT BRADLEY ON WHAT INSPIRES HER

READING
“I’m most inspired by what makes me feel present and connected. That starts with reading articles, newspapers, and books that I can touch, like Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s book An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States. To a certain extent, everything I’m thinking about right now stems from that text, and from reorienting myself around how I define myself as an American. I’m asking the question, If we really want to create change, how does self-identification play into that? And I’m looking at Sun at Night, a catalog from conceptual artist Shilpa Gupta. I had an opportunity to see her installation in London at the Barbican, and I’m just completely inspired by it. I’m still learning [her work], but am so thankful to have new things in my purview.”

LISTENING
“I haven’t been dancing since the pandemic, so I listen to the music I would have heard every Saturday night at The Pink Room in New Orleans. It’s a whole bunch of mixes and remixes of house music by Lil Jodeci. I don’t even know all [the artists’] names; it’s just these wonderful three-hour-long playlists I listen to every day.”

WALKING
“Growing up in New York shaped my need to both be around people and to walk in order to think. I need to step into things I can feel on a physical level, because I believe nothing really has an impact unless its outcomes happen in the real world—in the street. It’s crucial to our survival that we find a way to feel comfortable in three-dimensional space and be in the world with things we can actually touch and [connect] with. That includes engaging with strangers.”
The Times Feature Film in the Oscar Spotlight

Through the story of one family’s painful struggle, the documentary “Time” challenges how the justice system has sentenced people of color.

By Emily Palmer
April 23, 2021

*Times Insider explains who we are and what we do and delivers behind-the-scenes insights into how our journalism comes together.*

When Rob G. Rich first saw “Time,” the documentary about his incarceration for armed robbery — a 60-year sentence for stealing
$5,000 from a credit union — and the crusade of his wife, Fox, for his early release, his emotions swept from joy to anger to sadness.

“But toward the close,” he said, “I started to feel some sort of meaning to this suffering.”

The movie, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival last year, has touched viewers around the world who have seen their own experiences reflected in the family’s struggle — the couple has received responses from as far away as Nigeria. And on Sunday night, “Time” could find its biggest audience yet. The film, directed by Garrett Bradley and produced by The New York Times and Concordia Studio, is a nominee for best documentary feature at the Academy Awards.

“This recognition says stories of this kind matter,” Ms. Bradley said.

Traversing two decades of video footage, “Time” carries viewers along Ms. Rich’s solitary journey raising the couple’s six sons while transforming into an activist, asking if a system that disproportionately incarcerates people of color is a justice system at all.

In 1997, desperate for money to keep the couple’s small hip-hop clothing store afloat, Mr. Rich and his nephew, Ontario Smith, both of whom are Black, robbed a credit union in Grambling, La.

Mr. Rich served 21 years at the Louisiana State Penitentiary before receiving clemency in 2018 — the only man in the state to receive it that year. Mr. Smith, who was 20 at the time of the robbery, is still serving a 45-year sentence. Ms. Rich, who drove the getaway car, served 3½ years.

“The film does not make a case for innocence; it makes a case for forgiveness,” Ms. Bradley said. “And it asks us to take a deeper look at what is lost when we choose to remain a static society, one which sees more value in locking people up than allowing them to contribute to their families and their communities.”

When Ms. Bradley began working on “Time” in 2016, she envisioned a 13-minute film, similar to her earlier Times “Op-Doc”
short, “Alone,” about women with incarcerated partners, also featuring Ms. Rich.

Under the working title “Flat Rob,” inspired by the six-foot-tall cardboard cutout of Mr. Rich that the family carried with them as they wished for his return home, Ms. Bradley hoped to tell a story about the effects of incarceration centering as much on the people outside as in.

At its heart, the film would focus on family, told within the context of a prison system in which almost half of those serving sentences of at least 50 years are Black.

“As soon as she pitched it, I wanted to move forward,” recalled Kathleen Lingo, The Times's editorial director for film and TV, who had worked with Ms. Bradley on “Alone.”

The Times editors Lindsay Crouse, Andrew Blackwell and Kate Sinclair critiqued and fact-checked the work. But as the team sifted through film cuts in late 2018, Ms. Rich surprised the crew with 100 hours of family videos she had shot over some 20 years, recording family milestones like birthdays and graduations to share with her husband — someday.

At that point, Ms. Bradley recalled, “It became very clear the film would be longer than 13 minutes.”
As a feature-length documentary, the film, which was released by Amazon Studios, reflects an overall effort at The Times to broaden the reach of its journalism through movies and television. The documentary TV series “The New York Times Presents” airs on FX and streams on Hulu; “Diagnosis,” an episodic adaptation of the New York Times Magazine column, is offered on Netflix; and Amazon’s “Modern Love” anthology series is modeled after that Styles desk feature.

The documentary “Father Soldier Son,” directed and produced by the Times journalists Catrin Einhorn and Leslye Davis, premiered on Netflix last July. And earlier this month, The Times announced that a docuseries based on “The 1619 Project” from The Times Magazine would appear on Hulu at a later date. Scripted dramas adapted from other Times articles and projects are also under consideration.

Only once before has a Times film received an Oscar nomination for best documentary feature, though several of its “Op-Doc” shorts have been nominated. The Rich family is planning to be in Los Angeles for this year’s ceremony on Sunday night.

The couple, whose birth names are Sibil Fox and Robert Richardson (they go by the collective FoxandRob), now help families of inmates navigate the justice system through the Participatory Defense Movement New Orleans, part of a national community organizing network.

“We save lives by saving time,” Ms. Rich said, noting that so far their organization had cut about 1,000 years off prison terms.

But the family still feels the shadow of imprisonment. Instead of commuting Mr. Rich’s sentence to time served, the judge gave him 40 years of parole, a 9 p.m. curfew (some exceptions are allowed) and indefinite community service.

“We are out of prison,” Ms. Rich said. “But we’re still not free.”
Interview
Garrett Bradley: ‘I was wearing sweatpants for one award ceremony and no one knew’

Kilian Fox

“You look for new ways of finding social grace on the internet’; Garrett Bradley. Photograph: Portrait by bivvymth Courtesy Lisson Gallery

The US director - whose documentary Time, about a family torn apart by prison, is up for an Oscar - on why virtual ceremonies are like video games

Glenda Jackson: ‘Awards should be something you share... the camaraderie was absent’

The American film-maker Garrett Bradley premiered her first nonfiction feature, Time, at the Sundance film festival last year, where she became the first black woman to win the directing award. The documentary, about a mother campaigning for her husband’s release from prison, has since received multiple accolades.
Before Garrett Bradley premiered her documentary *Time*, which has received a slew of nominations over the past 14 months including for the Oscar for best documentary, she didn’t have much experience with awards ceremonies. She went to the Gotham awards in 2014 with her debut feature, *Below Dreams*, but she didn’t win that night. Even so, the event was “beautiful”, she recalls. “There were lots of tables with gorgeous flowers and all different types of silverware, and people I was used to seeing in magazines.”

With *Time*, which follows an African-American family dealing with the trauma and injustices of long-term incarceration, the 35-year-old has been negotiating an entirely different kind of awards experience. From her couch in California, she has logged into 10 different events including the National Society of Film Critics Awards and the Gotham awards, where *Time* won best documentary. (Bradley also won best director in the US documentary category at Sundance, in February 2020, becoming the first black woman to pick up that award.)

“*It’s a bit like a video game,*” she says of the online ceremonies. “Sometimes you’ll see an interface that has different tables, and you’ll be jumping from one table to the next. And the funny thing is, you don’t know who’s going to be there. You click it and then you’re just in it, and there’s no getting out of that virtual table. But it’s kind of fun. You give in to the lack of control and look for new ways of finding social grace on the internet.”

The 11 awards *Time* has collected so far have been personally meaningful for Bradley, the daughter of New York artists who studied religion before becoming a full-time filmmaker. But she’s at pains to emphasise the collective nature of the project, sharing the awards not just with the film crew but also with the Richardson family of New Orleans who trusted her to
tell their story. “To see that we’ve offered an entry point into the conversation around incarceration has been huge for all of us,” she says. “This is not a niche issue: this is a majority issue that affects the majority of people in America.”

**Worst thing about an awards ceremony?**
The rules. You can only get up at a certain time, you have to wear your outfit for a long period of time. It would be nice if it could be a bit more freeform.

**Where do you keep your awards?**
Right now they’re all in a suitcase. I’ve had the same suitcase since 2019. So I just carry them around with me.

**What do you look for in an awards outfit?**
I dressed up once [for an online ceremony] and it was really fun, because I only had to dress up from the waist up - below I was wearing sweatpants and no one knew. It was great.
How *Time*’s Oscar-Nominated Director Built the Trust That Made Her Film Possible

On this week’s *Little Gold Men* podcast, documentary filmmaker Garrett Bradley shares insight into her process, and the hosts answer listener questions.

The origin story for the Oscar-nominated documentary *Time* is almost as astonishing as the film itself. Director Garrett Bradley met prison activist Fox Rich while working on a different project. She made what she thought would be a short documentary about Rich and her work on behalf of the families of incarcerated people. Then, as they were saying goodbye, Rich handed over a bag full of home videos—decades worth of footage capturing her life with her six children while her husband, Robert Richardson, was in prison.
Bradley, whose work straddles the line between art and commercial filmmaking, wove Rich’s home videos into the film she had shot, creating an indelible portrait of a family separated by incarceration. (Rich served three and a half years for her role in the couple’s bank robbery, while Richardson was sentenced to 60 years without parole.) The footage of Rich at one of her many speaking engagements, or even just on the phone doing her job, make it clear that she is an exceptional person. But given the incarceration rates in America, Bradley emphasizes, “This is the story of 2.3 million people. This film hopefully is just the beginning of making sure that that is widely known and understood.”

On this week’s Little Gold Men podcast, Bradley—who, should she win, would be the first Black female director to ever win an Oscar—talks about the trust she built with Fox to make the film, and the power of her personal story to drive actual change in the American prison system. “I think that we’re at a place right now where people are finally starting to bring the conversation around incarceration into public view, into a mainstream conversation,” Bradley says on the podcast. “But it’s still very much rooted in a place of politics, a place of history, a place of statistics. And we don’t have an equal balance of that up against the human experience, up against the effects of those facts. There’s so many stories that can be told from this perspective... I think seeing something is also believing it.”

The episode also includes Richard Lawson, Katey Rich, and Joanna Robinson answering listener questions about the current awards race, from the plans for a no-Zoom-allowed Oscar ceremony to the possibility that Judas and the Black Messiah costars Keith Stanfield and Daniel Kaluuya could split the vote in the best-supporting-actor category. To send us your questions, sign up to receive texts from Little Gold Men at Subtext—we’d love to hear from you!

Listen to the episode above, and find a condensed transcript of the Garrett Bradley interview below. You can subscribe to Little Gold Men on Apple Podcasts or anywhere else you get your podcasts.

**Vanity Fair: What was your experience of getting the Oscar nomination?**

Garrett Bradley: Being nominated was a huge surprise, to be honest with you. This is my first feature length documentary. It’s my first time working with a major distributor. Every part of this process has been a learning curve for all of us. I never assume anything. And so it really is incredible.

I assume there’s been a very different spotlight on this film compared to your previous work, given that it’s your first feature. I think you said in a previous interview that you really pushed back against the idea that features are inherently bigger or more important than shorts. Has this changed the way that you feel about that line between shorts and features in terms of how to get your work out there?

Well, it’s kind of a completely different system, from what I can tell. Shorts, you know, they might go to festivals and and folks may push for them to get awards and then have them sit on a platform, which isn’t different from a feature length film. But I think the way in which those same systems encourage the public to engage with the work is a little bit different, and I do think that that’s
changing. I do think that that especially when we see this intersection now between short filmmaking
and journalism, I think that it has sort of opened up this door for for broader accessibility. But I’m not
sure my opinion has changed. I think that there is a different value system related to them. And I’m
sure that that’s connected to a market and and traditional ideas of how films are funded and how
they’re supposed to function in the world for us.

The level of trust that you built with Fox Rich for making this film was essential to
making the film you needed to. But she has such a strong voice and such a strong sense
of herself. When you’re making it is there a moment of knowing that you had done right
by her? How do you keep her authorship in mind?

I think that as a filmmaker the collaboration is in the intention. Why are we making this? Why do we
want to make this? And once that is clearly established, it’s my job then to articulate it, and to make
that happen. And every step of the way, there has to be a level of transparency. And I think that
working with strong people, strong personalities, does not mean that I’m relinquishing my control as
a filmmaker. It means that I’m able to celebrate and to honor the reality of that person.

We tend to think as viewers that somebody’s weakness or that their vulnerability is somehow more
true than their strength. And I as a filmmaker, am invested in people’s strength. I’m invested in the
way in which they see themselves in the world. And I lean into that. And it doesn’t take away from
anything at all as far as my own vision.

When did you show her the film for the first time?

Right before we were going to go to Sundance. I never, ever make anything without getting the
blessing of the folks that are in the film. And it’s a fine line because you want to give enough time for
people to say, I’m completely uncomfortable with this or that. But you’re also kind of taking a chance
of hoping that there aren’t huge things that you can’t achieve in a short period of time. But that’s not
something I’ve always been super, super worried about, because I think as long as you are, again, in
communication with people about why you’re making the choices that you’re making, a lot of the
time, you know, there aren’t huge surprises. The one thing that Fox did say that I’ll never forget when
she watched it was and we were sitting there, was holding her hand and Robert was next to her. I
remember she just said, I can’t believe how much of me there is in this, and I was like, you are the sun
by which everything revolves. You are the center of this.

I think in her mind, she cannot be separated from the collective of her family and vice versa. She is a
part of a group and a community, a family. And that’s how she sees things. And I think that that’s also
beautiful.

I think it was your interview with Amy Taubin from Sundance, where you kind of talked
about how exceptional she is as a person and how to get that across, that strength that
you were talking about while also making her a person, you know, who we can relate to
in some way. How do you do that?

I let her be herself. And the thing is, this is this is the story of 2.3 million people, and this film
hopefully is just the beginning of making sure that that is widely known and understood. You know, I
think that we’re at a place right now where people are finally starting to bring the conversation around
incarceration into public view, into a mainstream conversation. But it’s still very much rooted in a
place of politics, a place of history, a place of statistics. And we don’t have an equal balance of that up
against the human experience, up against the effects of those facts. There’s so many stories that can be
told from this perspective. And I think that finding that balance was just, it was just seeing it. You
know, I think seeing something is also believing it.
It also, historically speaking, has been the thing that has also held the systems accountable when nothing else will. The idea of the personal story as opposed to all the statistics, being able to actually see the effects of something. Like when Vietnam was happening, you know, people actually could see on their TV what was happening, what the effects were of war on human beings. And it actually caused them to go out on the street and protest. When Emmett Till’s mother decided to have that casket open, that was so people could see what was happening. From a personal point of view this past summer, all of those protests were saying, again, technology and image-making are going to hold these systems accountable. What that has helped me to understand really, really clearly is the absence of image-making around incarceration. How do we show this balance? It’s to simply show it. It’s to simply show the strength and the beauty and the resilience of of families.
Garrett Bradley Reminds Us That Black Joy Always Existed

Her elaborate video installation, which restages quiet and remarkable moments in early 20th-century Black life, is at the Museum of Modern Art.
Garrett Bradley’s quicksilver, imperious video installation “America,” at the Museum of Modern Art is an indictment wrapped in a celebration. Completed in 2019, it reimagines some of the signal events of Black life and culture in the United States during the early decades of the 20th century — reclaiming lost or overlooked pieces of history in a display of inexhaustible narrative and spatial complexity.

This is Bradley’s first solo exhibition in a New York museum, her first foray off the single screen into three-dimensional space and the second in a series of collaborative exhibitions mounted by MoMA and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Basically, the larger, older institution provides the space; the smaller, younger one, the expertise. It was organized by Thelma Golden, the Studio Museum’s director and chief curator, and Legacy Russell, its associate curator.

Like other Black artists of her generation — among them the painter Amy Sherald — Bradley shies away from depicting Black suffering. This tendency is especially clear in “Time” (2020) an innovative feature film centering on one family’s journey through incarceration that won the prize for best director of an American documentary at Sundance this year. (It is available on Amazon Prime Video and a must-see.)
“America,” on view through March 21, pushes this country’s original sin of slavery and its ongoing tragedies to the middle-ground. Racism is an inescapable shadow, but we’re left to make our own connections among scenes that are variously triumphal, mysterious, everyday, surreal and ironic. The numerous vignettes Bradley shot in black and white, without sound, for this work are short or very short; a dozen of them refer, often obliquely, to Black achievements or tragic events that mostly occurred between 1912 and 1929. The Library of Congress has specified these years as a big gap in film history: 70 percent of all films made then were lost thanks to the zealous studios, switching from silent to sound, that threw most of them out. In an act of reclamation, Bradley staged scenes alluding to moments like the 1919 murder of the popular jazz band leader James Reese Europe, the first African-American to receive a public funeral in New York City, and the 1933 performance of Florence Price’s Symphony in E minor by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra — the first time a major orchestra played a work by a Black woman.

With overlapping images projected on, and refracted by, four lightweight screens suspended at the center of a large gallery, Bradley’s ambitious effort adds new energy to both Post-Minimalism and Pictures Generation appropriation art. The piece is built around an existing film: the exuberant, unfinished “Lime Kiln Club Field Day” of 1914, radical in its time for its emphasis on Black joy and romance and its all-black cast, led by the great Bert Williams, a well-known comedian, who performed in blackface. In other words, Bradley is reconstructing both Black (and thus American) history and film history, and asserting that the radical optimism of “Field Day,” had it been finished and released, would have inspired additional films about Black achievement.
Punctuated by the high-spirits and faster speed of “Field Day,” Bradley’s “America” sets us in motion, circling the screens, exploring the possible identities, stories and symbols of its shifting stories and their regular moments of aural and filmic lyricism. Not to mention some perceptual overload: Does the piece use two, three or four channels? You think the images proceed in matched pairs — especially since only two projectors are visible — but then suddenly, they don’t. In every way, this work is a constant discovery.

Playing on a loop of nearly 24 minutes that feel shorter, the projection asserts Williams’s stature at the start, with a formal portrait followed by stills of him on the set of “Field Day,” including one in which he consults with one of the film’s two white directors. *(The film was also unusual for having an integrated crew.)* From there, and in no particular order, the head of a woman in a leather pilot’s cap appears against clouds, an image as heroic as a postage-stamp; then we see her tumbling through space. She represents *Bessie Coleman*, the first woman to earn an international pilot’s license, killed in 1926 in a fall from a plane while practicing a stunt. Symbolizing the founding of baseball’s National Negro League in 1920, a young man in a team uniform swings a bat, his gesture melding smoothly into the swing taken by his younger self. This one of several cinematic thrills Bradley builds into her structure.
Bradley’s best scenes have a depth that supports repeated viewing and exploration. It took me several times through to notice that in the sequence about Price, a woman conducting a small orchestra is suddenly awarded a blue ribbon, which feels off. It seemed to highlight the sometimes patronizing quality of white tolerance and Black fatigue with a society whose racism requires so many firsts in the first place.

Other less specifically race-related sequences feature two children seated at a modest apartment’s kitchen table, who drift off while listening to a Bakelite radio, a staple of domestic life. One vignette turns surreal, evoking the poetic paintings of Hughie Lee Smith: A group of excited boys converge on a man selling balloons in a decrepit empty lot. The camera looks up to the balloons, which are floating into the sky, while their seller seems to rise up with them and then return to Earth, like a magician. The camera looks downward to the boys’ upturned faces, which register a confusing array of emotions.
The journey of a white sheet through several scenes exemplifies the fluidity of Bradley’s camera, storytelling and mutating meanings. It begins with a white sheet worn by a white man sitting under a tree in a sunny field — an oddly benign, pastoral reference to “The Birth of a Nation,” which, released in 1915, glorified the Ku Klux Klan. In Bradley’s scene, a woman carrying a parasol calmly approaches the man, tears the robe off him and repairs it. The sheet morphs into a robe in a Baptism witnessed by several matrons in Sunday hats, then flaps on a laundry line where the young boys return, trying to pull it down. Finally it settles in the dirt of a corral. There it is circled by mounted men who evoke **Buffalo Soldiers**, a Black cavalry regiment that participated in the 1916 Mexican Expedition, led by Gen. John J. Pershing. One of the riders picks up the sheet with a long stick, whereby it becomes a flag. At this point, if you look up, you’ll realize that the four screens are held aloft by copper tubes resembling flag poles. Suddenly, they’re heraldic banners hanging proudly in an ancestral hall.

Another strong component of Bradley’s effort is its lush mercurial music, scored by Trevor Mathison and Udit Duseja, and occasionally mixed with conversation. At one point you may hear a voice saying: “America? That’s a tricky question.”
THE CULTURE ISSUE

A Filmmaker Who Sees Prison Life With Love and Complexity

Garrett Bradley has made a documentary, “Time,” that stubbornly resists all the easy ways of thinking about incarceration in America.

By Ismail Muhammad
Published Oct. 6, 2020    Updated Oct. 8, 2020
When I first watched “Time,” Garrett Bradley’s feature documentary debut, I found myself confused at what exactly I was audience to. Was this, in fact, a documentary? Or an art film? Or a drama? “Time” follows Sibil Richardson, known as Fox Rich, a mother of six and a formerly incarcerated woman, as she works to free her husband, Rob, from the infamous Louisiana State Penitentiary, where he’s in the midst of a mind-boggling 60-year sentence for an armed robbery where no one was hurt. The first images we see are not Bradley’s but Fox Rich’s: a riot of black-and-white home recordings that stutter-step through time. One moment Fox Rich addresses the audience, vowing that she and her family will survive despite her husband’s sentence. As proof, she offers her pregnant belly — she’s carrying twins. Time speeds up, and we see her eldest son, Remington, as a toddler, grinning hugely before diving into a pool. Then time retreats as Fox Rich reminisces about how Rob’s smile snared her heart. We feel her enormous longing.

Soon it’s 20 years later, and Fox Rich is framed by Bradley’s own artful, lovingly composed shots. She’s staring into a monitor in taut concentration as she looks at footage of herself in a commercial for the car dealership she now owns, her hair a bit grayer but her eyes sharp. “What I wanted to do was be able to see what I look like,” she tells the man who’s ostensibly directing the commercial — but the viewer can see she is the one in control. In miniature, the exchange captures the animating dynamic of “Time,” the way the film wants to trouble the line between the director and her subject. The next image we see is of Fox Rich as well, but it’s the back of her head as she gets her hair straightened, as if Bradley is telling us that though she is presenting Fox Rich’s image, that image is Fox Rich’s own to shape.
A week after watching the film (which is a co-production of The New York Times), I met Bradley in Southern California (out of concern for her privacy, she asked that I not reveal her specific location). She landed there after evacuating from Rome, where she had a yearlong fellowship, at the height of the pandemic. Bradley was dressed in jeans and a simple white button-down shirt, and I was struck by the softness of her gaze, the considered poise with which she moved through space. As we talked, Sonny Rollins snaked out of a speaker somewhere. A copy of the Black Liberation Army activist Assata Shakur’s autobiography lay open on the floor, spine up so Assata was watching the proceedings. As we sat talking on opposite ends of a couch, Bradley asked as many questions as she answered, and every so often she’d lapse into thoughtful silence.

“It’s been a difficult time,” she said of quarantine. “So much of my work is about the interaction and exchange with people.”

Questions of isolation and belonging cast long shadows over Bradley’s work. The 34-year-old filmmaker doesn’t just invite her subjects — especially Black women wrestling with incarceration — to contribute around the edges of a project she has already conceived. Instead, her films are occasions for a community’s vision to find expression. To the extent that her formally unruly films are documentaries at all, they document the social spaces in which Black thought takes shape. We’re in a moment when the predominant image of Black life, facilitated by the recordings of Black people’s deaths at the hands of police officers, threatens to become one of victimhood, martyrdom and repression — anything but the complicated and vibrant lives that we actually live in this nation. In turning its attention to Black women as they struggle, love and survive right now, Bradley’s “Time” pushes back, making the representations by which we “know” Black life unfamiliar to us.

Bradley’s first film was a simple one — a dialogue between her mother and father. She made it when she was a 16-year-old student at Brooklyn Friends, the daughter of two visual artists who divorced shortly after they married. She wasn’t terribly close with her father, a painter and sculptor, and she had questions about how their parents’ relationship to their work played a role in their split. Armed with a Hi8 camcorder on loan from her school, she set out to get answers.
“I’d get my camera, and I’d interrogate him basically and ask all these questions I just didn’t feel safe asking without a camera.” She laughed. “Then I’d go home and ask my mom, do a cross-examination and see what’d come out of that.” The film was a fulcrum of her method, inviting multiple perspectives into one conversation, thereby arriving at a deeper truth.

In 2007, Bradley moved from New York to Los Angeles to attend film school at the University of California. It was a lonely period. She felt alienated amid L.A.’s distended landscape. Afraid of driving, she resorted to taking the bus down Sunset from her Silver Lake apartment to U.C.L.A.’s Westside campus, an hour’s ride in traffic. But when she finally arrived on campus, she didn’t feel at home there. While Bradley’s interests already tended toward the experimental, she struggled with the program’s emphasis on the how-tos of production. There wasn’t much time spent doing what Bradley really wanted to do: watch some movies.

During her first year, she met the filmmaker Billy Woodberry, who worked in the program’s equipment office and taught at CalArts. A cigarette-smoking cinephile, he invited her to watch films with him. “Whatever he was watching, I’d want to sit next to him and watch, too,” she recalled. Woodberry himself studied in the same film program, which beginning in ’60s attracted a group of young Black filmmakers who came to be called the L.A. Rebellion, gathering in and around U.C.L.A. after the Watts uprising.

These filmmakers were only a few miles away from the Hollywood dream factory but felt that they existed in a different world. They repurposed the techniques they discovered in international cinema in order to represent the realities of the Black neighborhoods that exploded in 1965. Many of these films told stories of working-class Black families (often portrayed by nonprofessional actors) through loosely structured, peripatetic narratives that turned on rigorous repetition of striking images, as with the motif in Charles Burnett’s “Killer of Sheep” of crying Black boys, or shots in Woodberry’s “Bless Their Little Hearts” of the crumbling postindustrial South Los Angeles ghetto. Shorts like Julie Dash’s “Four Women” and Barbara McCullough’s “Water Ritual #1” eschewed narrative in favor of dance and ritual in order to draw a connection between an African diaspora, the enslaved past and the Black present. Deeply collaborative in nature (the movement’s members often starred in or worked behind the scenes of one another’s films), the L.A.
Rebellion was determined to offer representations that Hollywood had no interest in surfacing.

For Bradley, watching these films “was a validating experience,” she told me. “Maybe I wasn’t messing up. Maybe I was experimenting. Maybe there was order to what felt like complete madness.”

The Rebellion’s influence on her work is clear in “Below Dreams,” Bradley’s 2014 narrative feature debut. Shot in a loose vérité style as a series of entwined stories about young adults navigating economic insecurity, it meanders, largely allowing its images to tell the stories of Jamaine, an unemployed single father desperately trying to secure a job; the single mother, Leann; and Elliott, a New York transplant. Elliott might be a stand-in for Bradley herself, who relocated to New Orleans from Los Angeles in the middle of her graduate program. She was in the habit of taking bus trips to New Orleans in the summers, during which she’d strike up conversations with her fellow passengers. “I was asking people the same questions I was asking myself — what I wanted in life and what I thought was going to get in the way of it, and how I was going to overcome it,” she remembered. Bradley eventually brought along a recorder.

A scene from “Below Dreams” (2014).

Convinced that the stories of the people she met on her bus trips needed to be told, she moved to New Orleans and worked a series of odd jobs, couch-surfing while doing research and writing a screenplay. A Craigslist ad helped her cast the film with local, mostly nonprofessional actors. The reverence of “Dreams” for its subjects radiates off the screen, in scenes that situate the viewer in the midst of Bradley’s characters, like intimates rather than voyeurs. In one scene set in a jazz club, the camera restlessly
wanders as if unsure what to capture. The trumpeter who has been turned blue-black in the club’s dark? Or the woman jittering to the music? Or Elliott whispering to a woman he’s hitchhiking with? Bradley’s lens roams New Orleans’s streets, stumbling upon candid moments of urban life — a mother’s delicately wiping her son’s face as they sit at a bus stop. Bradley cuts away, but not before we see her playfully lick the boy’s cheek, and the two of them dissolve into laughter.

Bradley’s interest in what images of Black life have not made it to film extends to the historical and speculative. In 2014, the Museum of Modern Art announced that it possessed footage from “Lime Kiln Club Field Day,” an unfinished 1913 silent film featuring the Black vaudeville star Bert Williams. The movie tells a simple love story — Bert Williams tries to win the affections of Odessa Warren Grey, whom he must woo away from rival suitors — but its importance to film history exceeds its thin plot. It’s the oldest surviving film featuring an all-Black cast. The appearance of “Field Day” got Bradley thinking about how many other lost images of Black life and creativity might exist. She decided to use scenes from “Field Day” as the starting point for her own film about 20th-century Black life and American cinema, “America.”

A scene from “America” (2019).

The film, which will be exhibited as a multichannel video installation at the Museum of Modern Art in partnership with the Studio Museum in Harlem this fall, depicts 12 historically significant events and individuals in American history between 1915 and 1926, augmented by Bradley’s own oblique images. In one vignette, we see a woman walking down a country road when she encounters a white man clad in what looks to be a Klan robe sitting
at the base of a tree. She forces it off him and, in a flurry of motion, refashions it into a sheet that floats off into the wind. The sheet, a reference to D.W. Griffith's 1915 white-supremacist landmark Hollywood picture “Birth of a Nation,” begins to travel, subject to augmentation by the Black people who come across it: Children chase after it with delight; it gets caught on a clothesline, only to float away into the midst of Buffalo Soldiers who trample it before turning it into a flag.

Legacy Russell, associate curator at the Studio Museum, told me that Bradley has thought a lot about “how to present new images into an archive, this idea that the archive is participatory.” “America” ripples with this sense of participatory creation, generating images of Black belonging and achievement that have been relegated to the margins. By the time we land on the film’s final image — a Black man between takes on the set of “Field Day” who stares directly into the camera, as if communicating with us through time — we perceive his image as one of pure possibility. Bradley counteracts our society’s prevailing ideas of Blackness with new, ever-multiplying representations.

**“Time” wasn’t Bradley’s idea alone.** She and Fox Rich met in New Orleans during production on Bradley’s 2017 documentary short (and *New York Times* Op-Doc), “Alone,” which tells the story of Aloné Watts, a Louisiana woman struggling with whether she should marry her incarcerated boyfriend. Fox Rich was a well-known prison activist by then, and Bradley sought her help with the project. Bradley had already been considering the possibility of a sister film that would explore the prison system in further depth from a Black feminist point of view. She and Fox Rich had built trust by working together on “Alone,” and that trust played a large part in the two of them deciding to embark on “Time.”

Bradley let the Richardson family’s life determine how she filmed, mostly choosing to shoot their daily rhythms and rituals. There are long shots of Fox Rich’s face as she goes about her day, repeatedly calling the Louisiana courts to determine if they will reconsider Rob’s sentence, or applying makeup as she recounts how the experience of incarceration can render a family estranged from their own emotional lives. Bradley’s footage is contemplative, patient in its desire to know what incarceration has meant for the Richardson family, happy to let that knowledge unfold at its own pace.

The result is a lyrical, elliptical film that works through visual
echoes, repeated motifs and an astonishing level of intimacy, as in a rapturous and dreamlike sex scene filmed in incredibly close proximity. You come away with the sense that Bradley doesn’t want to deliver a narrative so much as set her audience down in the turbulent, time-distending emotional experience of incarceration.

Fox Rich’s own videos are crucial to conveying that experience. Bradley didn’t discover that they existed until she was finished shooting, and she re-edited the whole film around them, splicing them into her own black-and-white footage. In including the home recordings, though, Bradley transformed them, creating a moving back and forth between the two women. Before we see a scene Bradley shot of Remington entering dental school and receiving his first white coat, we see him as a kindergarten student, vows to carry whatever his mother might need him to carry. There’s a melancholy in his face that Bradley echoes in her own images. He smiles at the white-coat ceremony, the very image of achievement, but even then we can see a bit of that child’s hurt in his eyes. “Time is when you look at pictures from when your babies are small, and then you look at them and you see that they have mustaches and beards, and the biggest hope you had was that, before they turned into men, they would have a chance to be with their father;” Fox Rich soliloquizes, her voice quivering a bit, and Bradley’s lens echoes Fox Rich’s evident longing in the way it gazes upon Remington’s face.
If, as Fox Rich says in the film, the carceral state wants to impose loneliness — by sundering husband from wife, father from sons, the individual from community — “Time” asserts the power of community as weapon of resistance. We see this in Fox Rich’s recordings, in the poetic cadence of her voice as she addresses her incarcerated husband, in her sons’ defiant exuberance as they leap, dance, swim and smile through the world, secure in their embrace of one another. We see it in the way the film defies many of the clichés of a prison film. There are no scenes shot inside Angola, no images of Rob in a jumpsuit; the only images we see of the prison are shot from on high, giving us a bird’s-eye view and emphasizing how it is occluded from the rest of society.

There are a few shots in “Time” that I keep returning to. Throughout the film, Bradley sprinkles excerpts from one of Fox Rich’s speaking engagements, a reading and speech about her family’s incarceration. The camera looks up at Fox Rich from below in reverent close-up; she’s lit from behind so that she appears to be faintly glowing. But just as Bradley’s lens threatens to seem worshipful of Fox Rich, we get a cut: to a younger Black woman framed against a dark background, flanked by two other women. She appears on the verge of tears but does not cry. In another excerpt from the speech, the camera cuts away to an older Black woman with close-cropped hair, looking on proudly as she records it with her own phone. Bradley lights these women with the same reverence that we thought was reserved for Fox Rich. Her camera lingers over their faces for so long that it feels as if we’re making eye contact with them, and Bradley manages to convey something of these Black women’s shared pride and pain. To watch their faces is to watch an individual problem become a social problem — to watch loneliness dissipate.

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How Garrett Bradley’s Films Reset Our Personal Algorithms

With ‘Time,’ a Sundance-winning documentary debuting this month on Amazon Prime, and a major museum show opening, artist and filmmaker Garrett Bradley is gaining recognition for her resonant work

By Rebecca Bengal
Oct. 1, 2020 8:33 am ET
For Garrett Bradley, an artist and filmmaker whose work examines memory, history, time and Blackness, a bag of videotapes she received about two years ago turned out to be a transformative gift. In early 2018, Bradley was finishing filming a documentary short about a New Orleans woman’s fight to get her husband released from a 60-year prison sentence. As Bradley parted ways with Sibil Fox Richardson, the film’s main protagonist, Fox Richardson casually handed Bradley a bag. “It was like, ‘Oh, maybe this will be useful to you,’” Bradley, 34, recalls. Inside it were two decades of video diaries that Fox Richardson, who goes by Fox Rich, had recorded for her incarcerated husband, Rob: intimate evidence of her life raising their six sons, bearing witness to the everyday moments he’d missed.

Watching the tapes, Bradley discovered Fox Richardson in her early 20s, confident and determined, even after a stint in jail. (In a desperate moment in 1997, the newlyweds were involved in a bank robbery, making off with about $5,000. She served a three-and-a-half-year sentence, but Rob’s requests for clemency were repeatedly denied.) The personal footage underscored Fox Richardson’s commitment to reuniting with her husband. “I knew that every element of her day is to a certain extent driven by this need to bring him back home,” Bradley says. The videos also reinforced Bradley’s own approach to filming Fox Richardson. “To see Fox placing her camera in the same place I did, 19 years before me, and her doing it with the intention of him coming home,” she says, “I think there was a spiritual connection between my film and the one Fox was making.”

Bradley already had experience working with archival materials. In America, a film she made in 2019, she wove in scenes and stills from the 1913 silent movie Lime Kiln Club Field Day—believed to be the earliest surviving film with an all-Black cast—among a series of dreamlike 35mm vignettes she created. With Fox Richardson’s tapes, Bradley’s documentary started to evolve into another merger of found footage and what she’d filmed herself.

Then, about five months later, word came that Rob Richardson might finally be released. Bradley reassembled her crew and, with Fox Richardson’s blessing, captured the couple’s reunion in the back of a rented limo. From there, what was originally planned as a short grew
into a full-length feature, Bradley’s first. Titled *Time*, it comes out this month in theaters and on Amazon Prime Video, just ahead of Bradley’s first solo New York City exhibition, which opens in November at the Museum of Modern Art.

Rob and Sibyl Fox Richardson reunited in *Time*.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF AMAZON STUDIOS

At the Sundance Film Festival in February, *Time* took the U.S. documentary directing award, and Bradley became the first Black woman director to receive that distinction. RaMell Ross, whose film *Hale County This Morning, This Evening* was nominated for the 2019 Academy Award Best Documentary Feature, met Bradley in 2017 at Sundance. “*Time* has this quality of singular vision inside the documentary genre,” Ross says. “It’s a film about people of color that also is about faith, that also is a parable. It keeps compounding all these ideal qualities; it’s an amazing reference to the way cinema is progressing.” In *Time*, Fox Richardson is seen rehearsing French lessons with one of her sons, waking up her boys for school, addressing an audience of teenagers, speaking before her church, running a business, making repeated calls to judges’ offices to try to get answers on Rob’s clemency and, after 21 years, arriving at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, better known as Angola, to see him walk out free.
Bradley calls *Time* a cinematic sister to her short documentary *Alone*, which follows a young woman, Aloné Watts, who is about to marry an incarcerated man. When Bradley wanted to film a conversation between Watts and a woman well into that experience, a local organization suggested Fox Richardson; their meeting led to the making of *Time*. Just by their titles, Bradley’s recent films—*America, Alone, Time*—highlight how attuned her work is to our current moment of isolation, grief and uprising.

“I think this year is more about revelation than disaster, in many ways,” Bradley says. Though she’s normally based in New Orleans, she came to Joshua Tree, California, after an art fellowship in Rome was interrupted by the pandemic. “I can only hope that the film can [help] people make the connection between how it feels to be separated from their loved ones, and these broader chronic issues plaguing our country, and bring us closer together.”

![A scene from America.](image)

**PHOTO: COURTESY OF FIELD OF VISION**

In her own isolation, she’s been reading biographies, like civil rights activist Assata Shakur’s memoir, *Assata*, and Valerie Boyd’s biography of writer Zora Neale Hurston. In the 1930s, Hurston traveled in the South as a Black woman, oral historian and folklorist, and Bradley admires her sense of adventure. “[Hurston] was curious in a way that was also giving, and generative, and I think that’s a very special trait for an artist to have,” Bradley says, “an essential one for an artist to have.”
Like Hurston’s writing, Bradley’s work spans multiple genres, including both art and film. She was featured in the Whitney Biennial in 2019 and has had a solo exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Earlier this year, when she was at the American Academy in Rome as the recipient of the inaugural Philip Guston Rome Prize in the Visual Arts, she was at work on a series of photographs exploring iconography and mythology.

The daughter of abstract painters Suzanne McClelland and Peter Bradley, who divorced when she was a baby, Bradley grew up with her mother in New York City’s Chinatown. Since her high school years, in the early ‘00s, she has used a camera to aid and abet her curiosity. As a teenager, she began filming her father at his SoHo studio, asking him questions about life and art and family history. “I was protected, because I was behind the camera,” she says. “Then I would go home and ask my mom the same questions, with a camera, and that was like a cross-examination.” Her first short film, Fidelity, which won a prize at a film festival juried by the late critic Stanley Crouch, came out of those conversations.

On summer breaks from UCLA, where she earned her M.F.A. in directing, Bradley began making trips to New Orleans, talking to strangers she met on the Greyhound bus, photographing and recording them, asking where they hoped to go in life. “I was just being guided by my heart,” she says. These questions formed the basis for her 2014 short film, Below Dreams, featuring novice actors Bradley cast in New Orleans. About 10 years ago the city became her home. “I think for me why [New Orleans] is such an important place is that it really feels like the genesis of our country,” she says.

America, Bradley’s short but lyrical epic set to a score by Trevor Mathison, will be shown as part of the MoMA exhibition. It employs footage from Lime Kiln Club Field Day, which MoMA recently restored. Made two years before the inflammatory and racist Birth of a Nation, Lime Kiln Club Field Day was its opposite: Starring an all-Black cast led by the well-known actor Bert Williams, it was a story of romance and leisure, featuring perhaps the first on-camera kiss between Black actors. Intertwined with the silent film clips are 12 vignettes Bradley
shot in high-contrast black-and-white 35mm film. Spanning the years 1915 to 1926, each evokes a forgotten figure in Black history, such as composer Florence Price, the first Black woman to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra. The vignettes, simultaneously timeless and anachronistic, are reminiscent of the American and Italian neorealist directors who have long influenced Bradley, and, in some of the more joyous, ritualistic sequences, in kinship with the work of filmmaker Julie Dash. “Garrett creates this incredible collision in which we are confronted with beauty and significance and amazing visual poetics in the face of what we know about the world. She empowers us to live in the sense of the imagination,” says Studio Museum in Harlem director and chief curator Thelma Golden, who co-curated Bradley's MoMA show.

“Our memory is not exactly linear in terms of how we thread these things together,” says Studio Museum associate curator Legacy Russell, who co-curated the show with Golden. “Garrett often uses the word algorithm to talk about her work.” That is, by retelling and reimagining forgotten and erased stories, Bradley pushes them to the fore of our collective memory—repopulating the “algorithm.” Part of what spurred Bradley to create America was learning that some 11,000 silent films had been lost from the world; she has donated her work to the Library of Congress in order to ensure its survival.
At MoMA, *America* will be shown as an immersive, multichannel installation in a ticket-free zone on the museum’s ground floor, visible from upper floors as well, allowing for a multiplicity of vantage points. “It presents *America* in the round—essentially 12 Americas within one America,” says Russell. “And regardless of [who you are], you allow part of your lived experience to be entangled in that conversation in a way that’s quite gorgeous.”

“Garrett often talks about how [America] is a document of the past for the present, but I think about the ways in which it is a testament to Black humanity,” Golden says. “I think about how it is pushing us to a new future. I am struck by how deeply she seeks to understand and present a vision of the world that is born of our sense of our reality but also one that is tied to a sense of aspiration and a sense of hope.”

In Joshua Tree, while speaking frequently with the Richardson family, Bradley has taken isolation seriously, contemplating her next work. “When Covid hit and when the protests started happening, there was a real pull of me being asked to comment on the current moment, and I tried to...[say], you know, I’m just here in a place of support and observance,” she explains. “The pause is actually what I think will allow me to contribute in a sincere way.”
There’s No Time Like The Present—Or The Past—in Garrett Bradley’s Mesmerizing Films

—in her latest doc, the filmmaker and artist melds new and archival footage into a profound portrait of Black life.
For filmmaker and artist Garrett Bradley, bearing witness has always been a means for understanding the world. Born and raised in New York City by two abstract painters, Suzanne McClelland and Peter Bradley, Garrett, 34, made her first film at age 16. “It was me going to my dad’s studio and harassing him with my camera—asking him questions about what he thinks about art, what he thinks about my mom, and why they got a divorce. And then I would go and ask my mom those same questions,” she says.

Bradley’s parents were only married for a year, so most of what she’d known about their relationship had been a product of her youthful imagination. “[Those interviews] were a way for me to try to fill in the missing pieces and understand, from an artistic standpoint, their philosophies and backgrounds—but also what went wrong in their relationship, and how there might be some level of understanding or revelation.”

Almost two decades later, Bradley continues her pursuit of understanding the lives of others through film. Her 2017 documentary short Alone—which follows Aloné Watts, a young woman whose fiancé, Desmond (a subject in Bradley’s first feature film, Below Dreams), is incarcerated—won Sundance’s Short Film Jury Award for Non-Fiction. Its success inspired her to take another look at the mass incarceration crisis, which impacts more than 2.3 million people in the United States. She asked herself, “Why don’t we make another film that shows a similar journey, but in a very different way?”

While researching Alone, Bradley came across the organization Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children. There she met Sibil Fox Richardson (aka Fox Rich), the protagonist of her next film, Time. Rich had been campaigning for the release of her husband, Rob, who was facing 65 years for armed robbery and jury tampering. Time was also set to be a short until Rich handed Bradley 100 hours of self-taped footage. “It wasn’t until she handed me those tapes that I was like, ‘Oh, this is not a 13-minute film,’” Bradley says.
In collaging new and archival footage, Bradley thoughtfully obscures the divide between filmmaker and subject, joining the ranks of Amiri Baraka, William Greaves, and other Black artists who’ve employed abstraction to reclaim how their stories are told. Rather than clinically documenting the carceral system, Bradley invites audiences to bear witness to an epic love story—and dream of a more just future. The feature film earned Bradley the Best Directing Award for U.S. Documentary at Sundance earlier this year, and debuts in select theaters and on Amazon Prime Video this month.

![A still from Bradley’s America (2019). COURTESY OF GARRETT BRADLEY](image)

In November, Bradley’s work will animate the galleries of New York’s Museum of Modern Art as part of Projects: Garrett Bradley, her first solo museum exhibition. An exhibit highlight, America, presents footage from Lime Kiln Club Field Day, believed to be the oldest surviving film with an all-Black cast, alongside original vignettes. The multichannel video installation is a meditation on how the past is a reflection of the present and future. The film will be released by Field of Vision in early 2021.

“Even though the modern challenge is to be in the present moment, we are also very much always in the present moment,” Bradley says. Here, as in much of her work, viewers come away with the understanding that what actually exists is just as important as what we dream up to fill in the empty spaces.

WATCH TIME STARTING OCTOBER 16

This story appears in the November 2020 issue of ELLE.
‘Most Black Film Isn’t Allowed to Be Ambiguous’: How Garrett Bradley’s Quiet Documentaries Found a Rapt Audience in the Art World

The artist was awarded best director at Sundance and has a solo show on view now at MoMA.

Melissa Smith, January 13, 2021

The thing is: Sibil and Robert Richardson were guilty. But that didn’t dissuade filmmaker Garrett Bradley from telling their story.

Director Ava DuVernay recently asked Bradley why her celebrated documentary, *Time*—which tells the story of Sibil’s fight to get her husband Robert out of prison—doesn’t explicitly address America’s criminal justice system.

“What brought me to making this film,” Bradley replied, “wasn’t so much those big issues as it was... leaning into the intimacy and beauty and strength of what I saw in [the subjects] as individuals.”

One of the hardest parts of being an artist is finding the right story to tell. Bradley’s priorities and instincts—which, to a certain extent, have been lived and not learned—led her to focus first on the Richardson family, with the rest of the narrative falling into place from there.

This approach is emblematic of 35-year-old Bradley, who is quickly becoming a force in both the art and cinema worlds.

*Time*, now streaming on Amazon, has won nearly every award for which it’s been nominated (including best director for Bradley at Sundance). It captures the life of Sibil, better known as Fox Rich, who, along with Robert, made a botched attempt to rob a bank in the late ’90s. Sibil, who was 16 at the time, was sentenced to three years in prison; Rob was released in 2016 after serving a 21-year sentence.
When Bradley considered adding details about our prison-industrial complex to *Time*, she essentially found herself trying to “explain racism in America,” she told Du Vernay, “and then that made me ask myself: Well, who is my audience? Do I need to explain racism? Or do I just trust that who I’m speaking with is just going to understand what’s going on?”

“This Is What I’m Doing Now”

Bradley was born in New York in 1986 and raised by two artists. She made her first movie in high school. Her teacher told her it was good — so good that she encouraged Bradley to submit it to a festival at her school, Brooklyn Friends. Academics never came easily to Bradley, who has dyslexia, so when she excelled at something, she thought, “I’m not doing anything else. This is what I’m doing now for, like... forever.”

The film, which Bradley describes as “a little thing made with her school’s camcorder,” was centered on her parents, who divorced when she was two. Through the film, she wanted to get to know her father a little better — both individually and through his relationship with her mother.

Before spending any more time going into detail about the movie, though, Bradley quickly warns me not to assume she had been “affected in any kind of way by their divorce.” It felt as though she sensed where my mind would go; that, when left with no context, people tend to fill in the gaps — just like I was about to — with the easy story, but not necessarily the right one.

Still from Garrett Bradley’s *Time* (2020). Courtesy of the artist and Amazon.
This is classic Bradley: she seems to have the ability to recognize someone else’s tendency to make quick—and oftentimes false—assumptions, but not succumb to the same. In her work, she allows narratives to naturally progress rather than forcefully shaping them, and that’s rare. This openness was especially evident when, at the tail end of shooting *Time*, Fox Rich handed her more than 100 hours of archival footage of herself and her family, recorded over the 21-year period of her husband’s incarceration.

With that, the film immediately transformed from a short into a feature—one that is neither strictly documentary nor strictly fiction. “One of the things that’s most interesting about her as an artist,” notes curator Rujeko Hockley, “is that she’s really destabilizing a lot of these categories that we place around types of moving image-making.”

**Missing History**

Bradley’s work began to gain widespread notice in 2014, when she debuted her first feature, *Below Dreams*, about three millennial strivers in New Orleans, at the Tribeca Film Festival.

Around the same time, she was busy filming 12 short vignettes as part of a project to reimagine Black feature films that could have been produced between 1915 and 1926—a period during which, according to the Library of Congress, 70 percent of the films made in America have been lost.

Bradley arrived at the idea after reading about the Museum of Modern Art’s **unlikely discovery** of footage from what is believed to be the earliest feature film with an all-Black cast, *Lime Kiln Club Field Day*. Could there have been more of these Black-made movies, Bradley thought?

"They found this one film that happens to be in this period that's super progressive," Bradley says. "What would it mean to fill that gap with the assumption that all this work was equally as progressive—socially and cinematically—as what we see in Lime Kiln?"

This line of thinking turned into America (2019), a multi-channel video installation on view at MoMA (through March 21). In it, Bradley intersperses scenes from Lime Kiln with the black-and-white films she began shooting and remixing years earlier.

"America was my first time really trying to investigate and work through archives... something that I did not have control over," she says. Bradley joins a cohort of filmmakers and artists, like Ja’Tovia Gary and Bisa Butler, who are, in different ways, mining the historical archive and looking for ways to responsibly insert Blackness into it.

She, along with these other artists, is addressing something that is "bigger than truth at this point," says City College of New York film professor Michael Gillespie. "It might sound hackneyed or tired to say it, but there’s a measure of a political consciousness-raising that’s happening."
Into the Archive

After beginning with a few stills from Lime Kiln featuring its black-faced star, Bert Williams (who, mind you, was already Black), America features a scene of a white man sitting beneath a tree with a white sheet draped around his body. A Black woman quietly moves towards him, takes off her hat, violently grabs the sheet and fights him for it. Then she coolly returns her hat to her head and walks away.

This was one of Gillespie’s favorite parts. "I always think of that as a great reading, thinking about the history of the Birth of a Nation," he says, referencing the horrifically racist 1915 film that glorified the Ku Klux Klan, "and just how quickly he can be disrobed and we can just keep on moving down the road—that that doesn’t necessarily have to be the beginning of the story, it’s just one point along the way."


America moves through a carefully crafted chronology of historical events, with some that represent Blackness and others that do not explicitly—but Bradley feels still can. There’s 1915, when Birth of a Nation was screened at the White House; 1916, when Woodrow Wilson established the Boy Scouts, which Bradley re-envisioned using students she’d taught at the Sojourner Truth Neighborhood Center in New Orleans; August 2, 1974, the day James Baldwin was born and New York City held its first-ever Macy’s Day Parade.
This kind of melding of real events with reconstructed scenes represents an evolution in thinking about film and the role it plays in establishing the Black image. Each of us carries a set of preconceived ideas about the truth in history, the truth in life. With America, Bradley began to understand how incomplete and disjointed that truth can be, not only in our archives but also “in this present moment,” she says.

After making that work, she was able “to take it a step further,” she continues, “in working with a contemporary archive with a living person, with Time.”

Still from Garrett Bradley’s Time (2020). Courtesy of the artist and Amazon.

**Community Building**

Bradley accepts her subjects for who and what they are—so much so that she brought in Fox Rich as a co-creator of Time. The film operates “within a community, and incorporates the community,” says Yale media studies professor Thomas Allen Harris, who considers Bradley’s work as part of a lineage that includes Camille Bishops and William Greaves.

Like America, Time thrives on ambiguity, on showing how a story about Blackness doesn’t have to fit into a neat package to be a story worth telling. “Most Black film isn’t allowed to be ambiguous,” Michael Gillespie notes, because “it has to provide immediate answers on how to save Black people.”

On top of that, films about systemic racism often highlight Black pain and trauma first and foremost. Those that bluntly spell out what is wrong with the “system” tend to be judged only on how well they fight the “good” fight—rather than on their creative merits. By contrast, Time isn’t intended to convince an external audience of much of anything.
“It was beautiful that the film wasn’t interested in trying to traumatize,” says Darius Monroe, who is very familiar with how audiences react to films about incarceration, having made one about his own called *Evolution of a Crime*.


By taking away “things that normally would be included, like the court case, and jail,” Thomas Allen Harris says, Bradley brings us “into this other world and we then get this validation of that world.” Not the world of prison. Not the world of Fox Rich and prison. Just Fox Rich and the poetry of her family’s world.

**Filling the Gap**

In the end, history—and life—will never be a singularly understood set of facts. The truth will always be how we are willing to see it.

Of the 7,500 films missing from the Library of Congress, “we’re starting with 12,” Bradley says in reference to *America*. “It’s my dream that one day we would be able to create some kind of fund for other artists and filmmakers to continue to make films in the spirit of these parameters, until we collectively have filled that gap.”

In all of her work, Bradley is providing audiences with an opportunity to let go of their sense of context. Because without letting our expectations get in the way, it all seems so simple to her. “When something touches you, it touches you,” she says. “It’s really not that deep.”
Garrett Bradley on How She Is Unbeholden to Any Film Genre

The filmmaker aims to make work that offers a space for people to experience 'a sense of safety and a radical homecoming for the past'.

BY TERENCE TROUILLOT AND GARRETT BRADLEY IN INTERVIEWS | 26 NOV 20

Terence Trouillot: Your short film Alone (2017) and your recent feature-length documentary, Time (2020), both relay true stories of women in relationships with imprisoned men. More than just archetypal tales of love or investigations into systemic racism and the prison industrial complex, these works focus on female resilience, familial bonds and the protagonists’ humanity.

Garrett Bradley: My projects have all evolved naturally, one from the other. I came to them by way of my own life, by way of the community I am already a part of. I think I’m obsessed with and personally invested in: how communities, individuals and institutional structures appear to not be in dialogue with – and often contradict – one another. I think my work occupies that intersectional grey area between seemingly oppositional arenas.

You’re right when you say that all of my projects have focused, at least partly, on female subjectivity, but that’s not totally by design. I’m first and foremost developing relationships with people that I’ve met along the way – like Fox Rich, the central character of Time, whose husband has been sentenced to 60 years in prison for armed robbery. Ultimately, I’m making films with people, and these larger issues are, to a certain extent, secondary to that.
TT: I feel like there’s always this balancing act in your work. On the one hand, you’re making documentaries; on the other, you’re also producing experimental, multi-channel film installations like *America* (2019), currently being shown at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, which references pivotal moments in Black history through filmed and archive footage. In terms of your process, where do those two approaches intersect?

GB: The first paid opportunities given to me were under the umbrella of documentary filmmaking. Regardless of the project, my process doesn’t change. This question of genre is something I leave to the technocrats – I don’t really make those distinctions myself – although I am invested in the truth and the different ways truth is navigated in the context of documentary filmmaking. The history of documentary filmmaking is rooted in this false idea of objectivity when, in reality, even the very first documentary, *Nanook of the North* (1922), was a fictional re-creation. There’s also this notion in documentary filmmaking that the truth is vulnerable and aligned with victimhood to a certain extent, which is something that doesn’t interest me. In *Time*, the way Fox wants to present herself to the world, the way she finds her path through, is her truth – and that’s the truth I lean into. It is actually very similar to the approach I took in *America*, which was to think about performance through the lens of oppression and resistance. That’s the American story.
TT: Can you speak to your use of black and white film as a stylistic trope? Apart from the obvious metaphors around race, how does it function as a narrative device?

GB: There are two answers to that question. One is that even though colour is available to us, black and white is still an option. We used to shoot everything in black and white but, somehow, we ended up with all these expectations around colour and commercial viability. I think the medium is too young for us to have fixed standards like that.

While I was making America, which took five or six years, I was simultaneously working on various other projects, including Alone, so I had this almost exclusively black and white vision. Since I consider Time and Alone to be sister films, when I started making Time, I was like: 'It's definitely going to be in black and white.' Then, on our last day of shooting, Fox gave me all her personal home archives, which I hadn't known existed: 100 hours of beautiful colour footage. It gave me a completely different sense of materiality, weight and texture. So, I did experiment with Time being in colour. But, I came back full circle when I started thinking about the soundtrack. Ultimately, colour made the film feel like you were jumping from one steppingstone to the next, rather than standing in the flow of the river. And, when I added the music to the colour version, it just didn't work; it was overwhelming.
TT: Trust plays a big role in your work. In *Time*, you can see it in your relationship with Fox. But how do you begin that process in a film like *America*, which drew extensively on early-20th-century archive footage?

GB: *America* was a challenge because I was trying to channel the actor Bert Williams, who died in 1922. So, the question became: how do I build trust with this spirit? Is this truly what he would have wanted? I was praying, man; I was burning candles and shit! Williams was the star of *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* (1913): the first feature-length film with an all-Black cast and integrated production. Less than two decades after *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) – the beginning of the Jim Crow laws in the South – Williams managed to get white and Black people to collaborate on producing a work of Black vision. Yes, Williams is wearing Blackface in *Lime Kiln Club Field Day*, but he found a palpable way to offer nuance in his performance, to ensure we understood him as a character, not a representation of a race.

When it came to making *America*, my challenge was to go through *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* one frame at a time to find the moments that I thought perfectly articulated who was unequivocally in charge. That’s why I open the film with still images of Williams as himself, so we can understand him as a person. These are followed by further stills of him giving direction to a white producer: gestures of power that I felt were less discernible at 17 frames per second. When you speak of trust in terms of *America*, I think, really, it was about evoking what I saw as a communal nostalgia for Williams’s vision of the future, a knowing of progress in the making. Working from that place of intention – the thing that guides my process – is not only about trust in the immediate sense but, I hope, something that offers a sense of safety and a radical homecoming for the past.


CULTURED

GARRETT BRADLEY’S ARCHIVE FOR A NEW ERA

THE FIRST BLACK WOMAN TO RECEIVE THE BEST DIRECTOR PRIZE AT SUNDANCE, GARRETT BRADLEY MAKES FILMS THAT LOOK FORWARD AS THEY LOOK BACK.

VANESSA THILL
03.03.2020

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER ANDREW SMITH
It’s the 19th of December, the morning after her first solo show “American Rhapsody” opened at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and I’m picturing Garrett Bradley taking my call from the top of a ladder, or the peak of a mountain. Houston is pretty flat, but wherever she is, Bradley is taking in the view. “It’s been a crazy, amazing year,” she says on the phone, reflecting on twelve months of lauded screenings and awards. Her 30-minute film America (2019), which screened at Sundance Film Festival, New Orleans Museum of Art and Brooklyn Academy of Music, is now on view as a multi-channel installation in Houston through March, along with her two other most recent works, AKA (2019), included in the 2019 Whitney Biennial, and Alone (2017).
America includes never-released clips from Lime Kiln Club Field Day (1913), the oldest surviving film with an all-black cast that was discovered, unfinished, in the Library of Congress archives a few years ago. Says Bradley, “there is so much beauty and leisure in the film,” which was shot by an interracial production crew led by actor and director Bert Williams and shows the festive celebrations of a fictional black social club. “To me, that was a really amazing and a rare opportunity to look back at a film from that early on and not be met with trauma,” Bradley says. “I really feel like beauty is just as inspiring and motivating for us to create change.”

Interspersed with the archival footage are Bradley’s own clips: twelve vignettes shot in high-contrast black-and-white 35mm film that include modern-day Buffalo Soldiers, a New Orleans horse riding club that commemorates the black cavalry soldiers of the Civil War. Blanketed with the ambient sounds of children laughing and distant police sirens, other shots depict gentle yet stoic-looking characters, such as slow-motion sprinters in the dark and a girl daydreaming at a kitchen table. Mid-century costumes and props, as well as swiveling camera angles and double exposures, create a disorienting relationship to time. Several scenes are linked together with the motif of a white cloth: trampled, ripped, used in a baptism, waved as a flag and hung out to dry. Like a cloth fluttering in the sun, America seems to float in and out of history. The effect is cryptic yet resonant, hinting at a deep melancholy that is pulled along with the peaceful breeze.

According to the Library of Congress, more than 9,000 silent films of 11,000 released between 1912-1929 no longer exist in their original format; most have been lost forever. Compared to degradable nitrate, and even to digital files, 35mm film is still the most reliable format, in Bradley’s view. “I shot on 35mm film because a lot of that project was about an archive and the lack of an archive,” she explains. “For me, America is a prompt, an assumption and a jumping-off point.” Test prints from America have been donated to the collection of the Library of Congress not only as a gesture to remedy the lack of black films from that time period, but also as a hopeful project for the future. When screened at institutions, the filmmaker is excited about the educational programming that can accompany and expand the work, prompting young people to make their own films and contribute to a new archive.
The daughter of two painters, Suzanne McClelland and Peter Bradley, the filmmaker grew up with an understanding that process is an art in itself. “I’ve been making little films since I was in high school,” Bradley says, both as a way to express herself and to make money documenting events like concerts. Despite struggling with dyslexia in school, she quickly learned she had a knack for the language of film. At 16, she won her first award in a Quaker film festival after the encouragement of a teacher, and “I’ve never done anything else” since.
Bradley is headed back to Rome this spring, her current base after winning the Rome Prize last year. “I’m thinking a lot about monument building,” she says of ancient Roman monuments as well as those of the American South. But before she leaves America for a while, she’s stopping in her hometown of New York City. On January 9th, she screened a two-channel clip from America as part of a program at MoMA PS1 celebrating Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments, Saidiya Hartman’s recent book about the changing lives of young black women in the early 20th century. The book is written in a verb tense reminiscent of Bradley’s filmic style: hitting multiple registers at once, grounded in sharp detail yet floating in a dream-space. At PS1, Hartman describes her text by saying, “imagine that which cannot be verified,” and there is almost no better description of Bradley’s America as it relates to a lost archive.

Bradley had the chance to riff on another, more intimate archive in her newest work, Time, for which she was awarded best director at Sundance. It follows a New Orleans woman named Fox Rich, whose husband was given a life sentence after they robbed a bank together in the 1990s. “The film for me is about what the system forces people to do in order to survive and overcome,” Bradley says. On their last day of shooting, Rich handed Bradley 21 years’ worth of home videos, some of which were incorporated into the final cut. The filmmaker’s interest in making Time was to explore stories of incarceration “from a black, female and feminist perspective,” reflecting on what she sees as a lack of these viewpoints in the mainstream. “But of course,” she says, “there is no single perspective.” It’s about time we see that.
THE TREATMENT

Garrett Bradley: ‘Time’

Hosted by Elvis Mitchell • Feb. 23, 2021

Garret Bradley

Photo by Alex Smith

This week on The Treatment, Elvis welcomes Garrett Bradley, director of the documentary “Time,” which was nominated for a Spirit Award for best documentary. Bradley was named best director of a documentary at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival for “Time.” The film follows Fox Rich, a wife, mother, and activist as she tries to secure her husband’s release from prison after he had served over 20 years for robbery. In their conversation, Bradley discusses the multiple, complicated meanings of time in her film. She talks about her decision to make the film in black and white and how when Rich surprised Bradley with hours of home movies, it completely changed the film.

*The following interview has been abbreviated and edited for clarity.*
KCRW: Welcome to The Treatment, the home edition. I'm Elvis Mitchell. My guest, director Garrett Bradley, has made a short documentary into a new art form. And she extended that talent and expertise with her feature film "Time," which debuted about a year ago at the Sundance Film Festival and is still continuing to astonish people. First of all, let's talk about the title "Time" because it exists in your film as both an abstraction and a real marker of life going by.

Garrett Bradley: I actually feel like titling things, for me, is one of the hardest parts of making a film because it's so definitive. And it's something that every part of my body wants to work against. I'm really more interested in the expansiveness of what films can do and the possibilities that can exist out of that. And "Time" came to me out of that conundrum, out of that resistance.

What I appreciated about the word itself was that clearly it was an integral part of the story and an integral element to how the Richardsons as a family were existing in the world. But it also didn't necessarily elicit an image. I mean, there's the clock, which was brought by England to India, in the 1860s, as a symbol of oppression, as sort of a weapon, a thing to control our days. Suddenly someone is late or on time. And it is actually destroyed, I think, in the 1890s as a form of resistance against this. So time and the clock have been weaponized for centuries. So it, to me, was a way to speak to all these histories and to the way in which the abstractness and the elusiveness of time exists, but also maybe even in a really concrete way, at the same time.

KCRW: I think it is definitely doing that because one of the things that we do with a camera, as Fox your protagonist shows us, is that we use it as a way to mark time, to also memorialize time. I find myself thinking, as I've seen your shorts, and then seeing "Time," of Charles Burnett's "Killer of Sheep." I wonder if that was an influence on you at all.

Bradley: Oh, absolutely. I think what they call the LA Rebellion, which in my mind is really just this incredible adaptation of the Neo-realist movement that was brought to the states specifically within a Black context in the 1960s and 70s. When I first actually watched "Killer of Sheep," it was this bizarre homecoming, even though I wasn't aware fully of that movement at the time. It was the first time I was able to sense my own instincts in a certain kind of way.

I struggled a little bit trying to figure out what I was making, like, what is my voice? I went to film school at UCLA, and I made some amazing friends, and I had mentors. I was trying to figure out these cinematic rules, like crossing the line. I just could not figure that out, man. And I think when you're younger, you're really focused on trying to master something, and your version of mastering something is to do it perfectly, and to do it perfectly within the constraints and traditions and parameters that have existed before you. And I think that my feeling like I was failing was actually a turning point for me of saying, Okay, I'm not necessarily failing at it. I'm just finding myself within that. And then when I saw "Killer of Sheep," and I was able to see the films that were being made during that time period, Zeinabu Irene Davis and Julie Dash and Billy Woodberry and Larry Clark, it was almost as if this was an example of filmmakers who were speaking impressionistically within the parameters of cinema, and I think that felt like something I could do.
KCRW: Your films don’t exist in a vacuum. They’re really about the way people connect in the world.

Bradley: I was fortunate enough to get my hands on a High 8 camcorder when I was 16 years old in high school. My parents are both painters, and they were married for about a year, and my dad’s studio was not too far from where I went to school. And I remember going to find him at this bar that was around the corner, and I would just interrogate him, frankly, with the camera and ask him questions, I was really afraid to ask him without the camera. And then I’d go home and do this cross-examination and ask my mom these same questions. And that became my first film. My teacher, Andy Cohen, encouraged me to submit it to a film festival. I submitted it to a Quaker Film Festival, and it won this little award. And it was the first time I remember feeling I had found a way to communicate. And I think fundamentally, that’s what our purpose is: to find a way to feel like we can effectively communicate because to feel heard, is I think, to feel loved.

KCRW: Whenever I see black and white film, there’s also that one thing that’s missing subtextually because we don’t tend to think in black and white anymore. And the missing presence of the father almost feels like it’s what makes that time feel like it’s not quite there, not quite present.

Bradley: I think that the absence of Robert, his physical absence, certainly as you said, I was hoping we would still feel his presence in the process of making the film. It was really important that he had agency, that he understood what we were doing and why we were doing it.

I remember just this past summer, watching the protests and really feeling the presence of Emmett Till’s mother, who really had the brilliance and knowing what the role of seeing does for holding systems accountable. Thinking about the Vietnam War, part of the reason why I think people were out on the streets protesting was because they could see for the first time what war looked like. I grew up with the green screen. I grew up with this blocking of the truth, this visibility. And I think that that only further highlights the fact that we’ve got 2.3 million people that are incarcerated right now. And that is by design, you have an entire community that you can’t see, and in this case, the only evidence of those communities is with the family, is with those that are serving time on the outside. So I think that certainly this question of the absence, and the presence of things being a key role, to the way in which the story was had to be articulated in cinematic terms was something I was thinking about.

I was making a short, silent film called “America” for about six years in black and white, because I wanted to work within the technical constraints of the turn of the century. And as I was trying to develop these other projects, to be honest with you, it’s funny, you said, we don’t really see in black and white anymore. At the time, I couldn’t see in color, or I couldn’t think about a film and see it in color in my head.
KCRW: But why was that? There's a part of us that makes an emotional leap and fills in some things, which happens in black and white. And I was wondering if you wanted to demand that kind of point of entry, not only for yourself or for the viewer?

Bradley: Yoshi Yamamoto talks a lot about when he cuts clothing, he likes working with black and white because you can see its shape and its form better. And I kind of feel the same way. I just keep going back to this idea of how young the craft is and these expectations that we have on what makes something authentic or legitimate, I think should always be kept into question.

KCRW: I guess I should ask you what "Time" is about.

Bradley: Fox Rich, who's the family matriarch, embarks on a 21 year journey in reuniting her family after a botched robbery that happened in the 80s in Louisiana, and for which they both served prison time. Robert was given a numerical life sentence: 60 years. Fox served three years. Parole is another part of the story; even if somebody is released, they're still looking at 40 years of parole. And that is a whole other conversation. But the film is about how this family moves through the system, moves through their own life in pursuit of coming back together again.

KCRW: Talk about setting up that opening scene.

Bradley: So that opening sequence really starts with the overall editorial process, which had so many twists and turns. This is my first feature length documentary. I was convinced that I was making a 13-minute film the whole time I was shooting it. On my last day of filming, I remember saying to Fox, Okay, I'm going to go edit, and I'll come back, and I'll show you some stuff. And she handed me that night what ended up being about 100 hours of her own personal archive, which I wasn't aware existed while I was shooting. And so when Gabe Rhodes, who cut the film, and I were sitting and really trying to figure out how do we rethink this entire film, it was really important that the intention stay the same, even if the structure and the length were going to change. And the intention for me was connected to a conversation that I had with the entire family before we started filming.
That is an important part of the process for me with any project I do: having a series of conversations around why we want to make this film, because that intention becomes the anchoring point for me every single day when I’m shooting about what I’m shooting, and why I’m shooting it. And so much of making documentaries is about honoring the present moment, and finding a way to navigate what’s unexpected without trying to control it. And so this intention came directly from the family, saying, we want to make this film, because we feel that our story is the story of 2.3 million American families, and our story can offer hope. My job I felt like then was to translate: okay, well, hope can be kind of abstract and vague. What does that mean, in cinematic terms? What does that mean, in actionable terms? What does that mean for them in their daily life? And that was my focus every single day. It really kind of boiled down to these three things. It was individuality: their ability to be individuals in the world, and not be stigmatized by being an incarcerated family, which is a form of resistance in and of itself. It was certainly love. And it was also unity, their ability to stay together over the course of 21 years.

So when it came to months later, being in the editing room and being like, okay, we’ve got 100 hours of all this incredible footage that we hadn’t anticipated, how do we create this opening sequence? It took a lot of time and pain and tears, saying, okay, the intention is also the anchoring point, not only when we’re shooting, but in the edit. And so every single frame, I would like to think that we pulled from the archive, as well as the stuff that I shot, spoke to one of those three pillars, none of which are linear, none of which are chronological, all of which surpassed time and space.

KCRW: There’s a moment that is really about forgiveness, and it comes at a point in the film that anybody else would treat as a climax. And it’s really about the halfway point in the film. There were no tears there. It’s just about sheer honesty. And I wonder what it was like when you found that moment.

Bradley: You’re right, there are no tears there. And it’s the Rising Phoenix moment. Gabe and I both watched every single inch of the footage backwards and forwards several times, and then came together and talked through it from every angle possible. And I remember, with that specific clip, it literally was a light bulb moment for lack of a better phrase.

Something I think I was taking for granted as a filmmaker is that people would understand [performance and putting on armor] is required of Black people, but specifically Black women, and I realized, especially when we were showing the film and in these test screening scenarios, people were really almost taken aback. They didn’t understand; they needed that moment, they needed her to apologize, and to ask for forgiveness. It still presents a lot of questions, I think, around the same question of power, of control, of expectation, of victimhood. And it was clearly important for Fox. It was a turning point for her also, in that transition point of going from Sibil and becoming Fox and really saying, I have a voice and I’m going to use my voice for good.
A fight against the justice system gets deeply emotional in ‘Time’

Fox Rich offered 18 years of home videos for use in the documentary “Time.” “My story is the story of 2.3 million other American families and our stories can offer hope,” she says in the film. (Amazon Studios)

By STEVE DOLLAR
JAN. 4, 2021 8 AM PT

As its title suggests, “Time” measures a temporal span. It’s the two decades that its charismatic and seemingly indefatigable subject, Sibil Fox Richardson, spent working toward the release of her husband, Robert Richardson, from the Louisiana State Penitentiary. But the film, streaming on Amazon Prime, also presents a particular aesthetic challenge.
It’s one that Garrett Bradley, the New Orleans-based filmmaker whose documentary made her the first Black woman to win the directing award at the Sundance Film Festival last year, puts at the core of her work, which explores “how past, present and future can all collapse into an understanding of the present moment.”

Bradley spoke as she prepared a solo exhibit at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, organized by the Studio Museum in Harlem. Running through March 21, it features a multi-channel version of her film “America,” which draws footage and inspiration from the unreleased 1913 film “Lime Kiln Club Field Day,” the earliest surviving film with an all-Black cast.

“It was my first attempt,” she says of “America,” “at trying to dig at one of the inherent challenges of making films, which is you are working in a two-dimensional space and you can only tell a story one frame at a time in a chronological way.” She had always intended the project, screened in 2019 as a 30-minute silent shot on luminous black-and-white film, to be an installation.

“America’s” monochrome design carries over to “Time,” as does an integral relationship with archival material that bears an essential message about the Black experience in America. In this instance, that’s some 18 years of home videos made by Fox Rich — as the activist-entrepreneur now calls herself — whom Bradley had been filming for a follow-up to her 2017 short film “Alone,” likewise a black-and-white documentary about incarceration and its effect on Black families and communities. “I was shooting the whole time thinking I was making another 13-minute short film,” Bradley said. In a moment, the entire project took on a bold new scale.

“When Fox handed me the archives, it extended from the same process I’m frankly just obsessed with,” Bradley said. “The idea of trying to mimic the 360-degree experience in which we live life. ...
That we are beings made up of so many moments that led up to the one we are experiencing. The archive allowed that to come to life. It allowed us to see the evolution and revolution of who Fox was. It added a lot of these questions of how to tell stories in a more holistic way."

The videos, a chronicle intended for an absent husband and father, are limned with intimate glances and resonant moments of unguarded emotion. They open up a continuum of experience as Fox Rich raises six children and pursues Rob’s release from a 60-year sentence for an armed robbery (for which she also served 3½ years, in a plea deal). The story builds to the moment, in September 2018, when Rob was freed. The focus, however, is not on the juvenile felony. Rather, the film deeply personalizes the historical perspective Ava DuVernay brought to the issue of racial inequality and the carceral state in her 2016 documentary “13th.”

Working with editor Gabriel Rhodes, Bradley cut together the footage to achieve that goal in the most organic way possible.

“Garrett said in the beginning, ‘Make the film flow like a river,’” Rhodes recalled. The approach, he said, was to “let the sense of time not be ‘then and now’ but be ‘always.’ The past and present could exist on the same plane. ... Memory exists as something that happened then but also lives in our mind now.”

Rhodes, whose credits include archive-enriched documentaries like “Matangi/Maya/M.I.A.” and “The Witness,” shared a key trait with Bradley, which animated a collaborative edit that often was conducted long-distance. “She had a very innate sense of rhythm and composition. She had a very musical ear,” he said. “I’m a musician and have a musical ear. I think editing is being musical, in a lot of ways.”
Bradley also came up with what she called “pillars” to help her shape the film. “Fox said to me, ‘My story is the story of 2.3 million other American families and our stories can offer hope.’” Grappling with the generalized nature of the word, the director identified three themes to help her distill the concept of hope into something cinematic.

“The first one is unity,” she said. “Their ability to stay together over the course of 21 years. [Then] Love. Thinking about love as something that isn’t necessarily abstract but rather concrete. And their sense of individuality, holding on to who they were as individuals amidst a system that is intended to break them down.”

The filmmaker, who has called New Orleans home for a decade, would be pleased to see more such work on screen. “This isn’t a monolithic experience,” she said. “It’s diverse and this is just one example, hopefully that can offer hope.”
Garrett Bradley’s America film installation goes on show at MoMA, exploring racism in black and white

The artist intersperses her work with footage from an unreleased 1914 film, believed to be the oldest surviving feature-length film with an all-Black cast

GABRIELLA ANGELETI
18th November 2020 09:35 GMT

A still from Garrett Bradley’s film America (2019), which references key moments in Black history © Garrett Bradley
The New Orleans-based artist and filmmaker Garrett Bradley, who is best
known for her lyrical works that address themes such as race, class, social
justice and relationships, will present the multi-channel film installation
*America* (2019) at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) this month.

The film references pivotal moments in Black history through 12 black-and-
white vignettes, using footage from seminal films such as the unreleased
*Lime Kiln Club Field Day* from 1914—the earliest known film with an all-
Black cast—and referencing the 1915 release of *Birth of a Nation*. The latter is
“one of the most virulently racist films that is often regarded as a primary
origin point in cinema”, says the co-curator Legacy Russell.

“Bradley became the first Black woman to receive a Sundance Film Festival directing
award, for *Time* (2020)”

Scenes from *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* show Black actors in joyous and
intimate moments, subverting the narrative of Black visual culture in the
Golden Age of US cinema, which was often guilty of racist depictions of
minorities. The 35mm 60-minute silent film was produced by white
directors, marking a ground-breaking interracial collaboration between
crew members and Black artists, but was mysteriously abandoned during
post-production. Negatives of the film were discovered in 1939 by MoMA’s
late film curator Iris Barry and conserved and studied for nearly a century
before *Lime Kiln*’s public debut at the museum in 2014.
Bradley’s film, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2019, features a score by Trevor Mathison and Udit Duseja, members of the Black Audio Film Collective, a pioneering group led by Black artists that was active between 1983 and 1998, and which “imaginatively and greatly expanded the sonic experience of Black life”, Russell says. The exhibition is part of a long-term initiative between MoMA and the Studio Museum in Harlem, where Russell is an associate curator.

Earlier this year, Bradley became the first Black woman to receive a Sundance Film Festival directing award, for *Time* (2020), her documentary that deals with incarceration and the systemic separation of Black families in the US. The film premiered last month in cinemas and on Amazon Prime.

*Projects: Garrett Bradley ©, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 21 November-21 March 2021*

*Appeared in The Art Newspaper, 328 November 2020*
Everyday Resistance in ‘Time’: An Interview with Garrett Bradley

Yasmina Price

Garrett Bradley’s intimate documentary shows how one person’s incarceration affects the lives of so many more.

October 24, 2020

Two recent archival projects documenting Black life in America coincided in 2014. First, the Museum of Modern Art premiered the restoration of the 1913 Lime Kiln Club Field Day, the oldest surviving feature with an all-Black cast. Second, the African American Home Movie Archive was created as a space to collect, digitize, and provide access to home movie collections from the 1920s to the 1980s. Archival preservation efforts have become increasingly attentive to visual materials that have been systematically discounted, with home movies in particular recognized as a unique repository of intimate histories. They are especially important as private records
These two archival endeavors also form a point of convergence for the work of artist and filmmaker Garrett Bradley, whose Sundance-awarded documentary on the effects of the carceral system, *Time*, is now streaming on Amazon Prime. Her work *America* (2019) draws on footage from *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* to imaginatively supplement the archival losses of African American cinematic history with a hypnotic sequence of vignettes. *Time* is also a work about augmentation and loss, but on a more intimate scale: Bradley explores the irrecoverable cost of time stolen by incarceration from a family, and attempts recovery through storytelling, a collaboration between the director and the family's home movie archive. The film centers on Fox Rich, who becomes a kind of co-director when she shares with Bradley eighteen years of home movies that she made during her husband Rob's imprisonment, which Bradley weaves into her own footage. *Time* tells the story of the Richardsons and their six children, as well as their larger community, with an acute awareness of how one person's incarceration suffuses the daily lives of so many more.

The film's anchoring in the everyday counters familiar depictions of incarcerated people that foreground spectacle or reinforce non-belonging, the expulsion from social life; and Fox Rich's resilience resists the exhausted trope that individual heroics are either a fair demand or a solution for dismantling systemic injustices. *Time* instead offers an urgent, expansive meditation on how survival is always collective, making visible what we sometimes are unable or unwilling to see. I spoke to Bradley recently about the release of *Time*, the need for collaboration, and the importance of honoring the small things we do every day. Our conversation has been edited and condensed.

**Yasmina Price:** Where are you existentially, emotionally, ideologically?

**Garrett Bradley:** For the past few weeks I've been talking about *Time* to support the release of the film. I'm simultaneously working through *America*, and its new iteration as an installation [at MoMA, Nov 21, 2020–Mar 21, 2021]. And so, it's a lot of team-building and team-working, in a very different way from what filmmaking requires, which is always fun. So much of the work is about bringing the best out of people. Identifying what in their work world brings
them joy and finding ways to make that an integral part of the process....something that then aids the larger goal.

[With the release of *Time*] I've been presented with a lot of questions, a lot of the same questions over and over again. And that becomes an interesting exercise, an opportunity to break outside of the question: What is the question actually questioning? That's something I've been thinking a lot about—and I think it's specific to *Time*—thinking about erasure, thinking about this current moment, where we have such an unprecedented amount of allyship in our movement toward racial equality in America, and a lot of that being inspired by technology and optics around things that have always been happening. When we consider the prison industrial complex, it only furthers this idea of erasure—that we have such little visual evidence of 2.3 million incarcerated Americans. So how do the questions being asked reveal expectations and possibilities for what can be done in this moment? How, as artists and filmmakers, can we think about our craft as a tool of proof? Maybe that's what art is? Proof of something less obvious? Proof of things hidden, less considered?

*That makes me think of an idea presented by abolitionists—that prisons are the creation and management of surplus populations that are excluded from social life. How have you been thinking about space and separation, and how can we build roads or bridges to overcome that? Whether it's the fact of how carcerality works as separation, or the situation we're in right now, where we can't meet each other physically in the same ways?*

Something we've been talking about a lot, in the context of both *America* and *Time*, is how can we not take for granted examples of resistance that exist in the everyday, and that are seemingly mundane? Like love. Like staying in touch with one another, unity, maintaining one's individuality parallel to performance? How can we think about these practices as active forms of engagement with resistance? And I think that this year has helped to illuminate for everybody what many of us, historically speaking, have always experienced and known.
Collaboration is clearly so crucial to the way you work, but does that extend across time, in the sense of the lineage of filmmakers you’re working within? I see your work within a tradition of Black women filmmakers who have been attentive to the everyday in ways that show that there is radical or even revolutionary potential in the mundane. Are there filmmakers or cultural workers in other mediums who you’ve been thinking with?

It’s a challenging question because I have spent a lot of time and energy building and being a part of a community that is not inherently connected to my practice. It’s always been really important to me that I have a job that’s totally separate from filmmaking, that I have friends and family members and people whom I’m in dialogue with who come from all different types of ways of thinking and working and living in the world.

I can tell you that when I was growing up, when I was younger and in film school, and studying religion in college, I was looking at Billy Woodberry, Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, and John Cassavetes, who were hugely inspiring to me. I had an opportunity in high school to assist Linda Goode Bryant and Laura Poitras on their [2003] film *Flag Wars*. And have continued to be inspired by the work they have
done separately as artists and activists—their ability to constantly evolve and respond to the needs of now. It wasn’t until I graduated from school that I learned about Madeline Anderson, Ngozi Onwurah, Fronza Woods...William Greaves, who completely shifted my entire perspective, and Wong Kar-wai, and a lot of [Andrei] Tarkovsky films and Neorealist films from Italy, all as reference points. I remember seeing Steve McQueen’s *Hunger* while I was an intern at the Telluride Film Festival...But I’m also really inspired by music, by Sonny Rollins and Art Blakey and John Coltrane and Alice Coltrane and Neil Young and Lil Wayne, and so many others that I’ve benefited from.

*Black artists have historically and are presently facing and working against incredibly restrictive established narratives. I see your work as part of a project of resistant storytelling, of reinterpretation and reimagination.*

This is a slight deviation, but I do think it’s connected and really interesting—that for both *Time* and *Alone* (2017) [a short film about her friend Aloné Watts, weighing the decision to marry boyfriend Desmond Watson, after his incarceration], when I had the privilege of being able to show the film to an audience and actually have an in-person Q&A, a lot of the questions were around the legibility of the crime itself; like, “Why didn’t you go into the crime? Why didn’t you focus in on the details of the crime?” And I think that for me, it was really important to talk about the effects [of incarceration] being just as important as the facts [of incarceration] themselves.

There are different ways to tackle the same issue. I don’t think there is one singular approach that is more valid than others. *Time*, for instance, stands on the shoulders of Ava [DuVernay]’s *13th*, and I see them really working together. The facts and the effects need to work together. I also want the work to be nourishing, to be therapeutic, to be something that we ourselves could go to and knew was for us, in addition to being something that was maybe eye-opening for those who were not yet aware. And so, when we talk about the universality [of a story], who are we really talking about? There’re 2.3 million people incarcerated in the country right now, if not double, triple that number affected if you take into account family and loved ones.
So this is a major experience in the country. Questions around universality, legibility are, to my mind, deeply coded.

Something else the film illuminates is how Black survival in the US has always depended on inventing forms of community, of having these sort of flexible kinships beyond the nuclear framework. Did the process of filming Time make you think of community differently or did it perhaps reinforce ways you already conceived of how we collectively support each other?

I think it really reinforced this idea of thinking about unity, and staying connected to the ones that we love as a form of resistance. That that is an inherently political act. The reason why I think that that’s so important is that, unless we’re out in the street protesting or involved in something more directly political, I think many of us might feel that we are disengaged from participating in an active movement. And that is further validated by the fact that to be Black in America is already an exhausting experience. In the process of making the film, it was a reminder, and hopefully a reminder to everybody who watches the film, that one is participating in a beautiful and active and critical way just by their maintenance of familial ties, the ties to those that you love, and by your ability to hold on to yourself as you see yourself.

Something I was thinking about, too, is how waiting is such a critical piece of all of this. Waiting as repetition and waiting as anticipation—and also as nostalgia. Fox has to occupy all of these different forms of
waiting at once, and one scene that genuinely broke my heart was when she’s on the phone, and at first she’s sort of laughing it off that she’s once again not getting answers from the court clerk’s office about Rob’s release date, and then the scene builds into this emotional crescendo where, at the end of it, you see her facade crack a little: this brave face that she’s been putting on falls apart a bit.

I did feel as if we deserved—as Black women, as Black families—to have that moment of just being like, You know what, I am going to be angry. I am going to have that, that breath, and I am also going to show you that I can do that and still keep it moving, because that is what is required of me. That to not have it would have been also to potentially reinforce the sort of more externalized ideas of strength that are not sustainable or real.

Yeah, because there’s this myth of the strong, invincible Black woman, which ends up being an additional burden and an erasure of all sorts of different networks of care. How have you been sustaining yourself, personally—what has been giving you comfort?

Walking has always been an important part of my life. And my relationships with my family and my friends, and cooking food. Those three things. I’m naturally a pretty quiet person, I’m naturally more introverted; I am more comfortable in a place of contemplation and listening and observing than I am of being the center of something. So I think a lot of what feeds me is finding spaces where I can be of service to others.

Yasmina Price

Yasmina Price is a writer, researcher, and PhD student in the Departments of African American Studies and Film/Media Studies at Yale University. She focuses on anti-colonial African cinema and the work of visual artists across the Black diaspora, with a particular interest in the experimental work of women filmmakers. (June 2020)
Time review - poetic documentary about a family torn apart by prison

Garrett Bradley uses home movies and a lyrical style to tell the story of watching a loved one locked away

Mark Kermode
Observer film critic

@KermodeMovie
Sun 18 Oct 2020 08.00
BST

▲ ‘An extraordinarily intimate portrait’; Fox Rich in Time. Photograph: Courtesy of Amazon Studios
The idea that the mass incarceration of African Americans is in effect a modern form of slavery has been explored in several powerful documentaries, ranging from Sam Pollard’s 2012 *Slavery by Another Name* (from Douglas A. Blackmon’s book) to Ava DuVernay’s Oscar-nominated *13th* (2016). But while others have tended to concentrate on statistics, history and politics, director Garrett Bradley goes the other way in her film *Time*, conjuring an almost expressionist account of the experiences of a family torn apart by prison, examining the toll that jail time takes on those outside the prison walls.

Despite headlines at the time, there was little Bonnie and Clyde glamour to the bank robbery that landed Fox Rich (AKA Sibil Fox Richardson) and her husband, Robert, in prison in the late 90s. Both accepted responsibility for the crime, an out-of-character reaction to the collapse of a business on which they had pinned all their hopes. Yet while Fox took a plea deal and served three and a half years, Robert fell foul of terrible legal advice and wound up sentenced to 60 years without parole.

Such legal details, however, are not the focus of this extraordinarily intimate portrait of the Rich family, in which Bradley, who won the directing award in the US documentary category at Sundance, moves back and forth through two decades of separation, drawing on an extensive archive of home-movie footage that Fox created to show Robert the life he was missing inside, and that was waiting for him when he got out, something she never doubted would happen.

Through these videos, which are beautifully interwoven by editor Gabriel Rhodes with more recent footage (all rendered in strangely cinematic black and white), we watch young twins Freedom and Justus grow from boys to men, inspired by their mother, who somehow juggled raising six sons with becoming a businesswoman, an activist and a powerful advocate for prison reform.
Eschewing explanatory title cards or on-screen text, Bradley creates a tone poem that ebbs and flows in hypnotically lyrical style, dexterously shuffling images from disparate periods to create something unified and immersive. Through this time-shifting montage, we are encouraged to share in the experiences of the indomitable woman whom Bradley met while making the 2017 New York Times Op-Docs episode Alone, a stylistically similar short film she considers the “sister” to this feature. “This system breaks you apart,” Fox says in Alone. “It is designed, just like slavery, to tear you apart.” Yet in Time it’s an almost superhuman sense of togetherness that rings through, a refusal to bow down, to be broken or defeated.

For all its urgent verisimilitude, there are moments when Bradley’s documentary seems closer to a drama, not least in a scene of remarkable backseat intimacy, sensitively shot in slow-mo by Nisa East, one of three credited cinematographers. There’s even a self-reflexive sequence of Fox taping a promo for her car dealership that teases away at the boundaries of performance and personality. But such playfulness never obscures the truth of Bradley’s vision or the honesty with which Rich confronts her own circumstances.

Worth noting too is the superb use of piano music by Emahoy Tsegue-Maryam Guèbrou, the subject of Kate Molleson’s 2017 BBC Radio 4 doc The Honky Tonk Nun, which ripples with bluesy ease throughout the movie, combining the same air of soulfulness and spirituality that lies at the heart of Bradley’s film.
when filmmaker Garrett Bradley wrapped shooting on her documentary *Time* in 2018, her main subject, prison abolitionist Sibil “Fox Rich” Richardson, gave her a bag that changed the course of the film. Inside the bag were two decades’ worth of home footage that Fox had made of herself and her six sons for her husband, Rob, during the 21 years she fought to free him from a 60-year prison sentence in the Louisiana State Penitentiary.

Bradley had originally planned for *Time*, which debuts on Amazon Prime on Friday and for which she became the first Black woman to win Best Director for U.S. documentary at Sundance back in January, to be a sister film to *Alone*, her 2017 short documentary about a woman whose fiancé is incarcerated. But after receiving the tapes, the 34-year-old director realized that she now had a way to show the long-term and deeply personal effects of the prison system—and
more than enough material for a full-length feature. Splicing together her
footage from the present day with the home videos, Bradley takes a
compassionate, compelling look at one family’s fight not just for prison
abolition, but for the hope of reuniting with their husband and father.

“I wanted to show the ripple effect of what it means to incarcerate 2.3 million
people,” Bradley tells TIME. “We think about the magnitude of people that are
incarcerated, but we have no optics, no sort of visual examples of what that
looks like. We’re dealing with an invisible community. In a way, the only way we
can bear witness to their experience is through the people who are on the
outside.”

The result is a gorgeously expansive, experimental 81-minute feature, with the
aesthetics of an art film and a lyrical pacing not often seen in documentaries
about the carceral state. Bradley’s velvety footage of Fox follows her tireless
work to free her husband from prison, as well as her activism in the prison
abolition space and sweet moments with her sons, some of whom are adults
now themselves. Bradley chose to focus the film on her subjects’ humanity
rather than the details behind the prison sentence. She also presents her
footage in black and white, to help it blend with the grainy home videos, which
illuminate the personal losses experienced because of incarceration—none of
which is felt more than when Fox reflects on how her children have grown
during her son Remington’s dental school graduation.

“Time is when you look at pictures of when your babies were small and then
you look at them and you see that they have mustaches and beards,” she says,
as she looks at her son, now a full-grown man striding across a stage. “And that
the biggest hope that you had was that before they turned into men, they would
have a chance to be with their father.”

Director Garrett Bradley at the Tribeca Film Festival Getty Images Studio. Larry Busacca—Getty Images
Through the home footage, viewers get a window into the Richardson family’s life over the past 21 years, a glimpse of what Fox preserved for Rob. There are big milestones like birthdays, but the most precious moments to watch are the seemingly banal events of everyday life: Fox as a young woman, hugging her swollen belly, pregnant with their twin sons; their tiny sons screaming with glee on a carnival ride; the boys putting on their socks in the morning; Fox driving the kids to school with the seat beside her empty until Rob can join them. It’s the bittersweet record of a woman and a family who adapted to the absence of their beloved, but who have never stopped longing for his presence.

"Without that archive, we really wouldn’t be able to understand the armor that developed around Fox and around the family," Bradley says. "Or to see the holistic nature and the revolution that happened within her and the family over the course of 21 years."

The film’s close focus on the personal moments in Fox’s family’s life, from helping her sons with their homework to her joyful reunion with Rob when he is released early, is a measured decision on Bradley’s part, as is the minimal attention on Rob’s sentence. Viewers learn that Fox and Rob were high school sweethearts-turned-young business owners who resorted to robbing a credit union during tough times, a crime for which they were punished (Fox served 3.5 years in prison, while Rob got sentenced to 60 years without parole). However, the details of the crime come second to the lived experience of the subjects; the documentary is as much the epic love story of Fox and Rob as it is an indictment of a broken system. This was a deliberate choice for Bradley, whose careful consideration can be felt in the intimacy of the current footage and the nuanced approach she takes to framing the Richardsons’ story.

Bradley felt that attempting to explain the reason behind Rob’s harsh sentence would require a full accounting of the role of racism in the U.S. and Louisiana specifically, which then prompted questions about for whom she was making the film. “The film is truly for everybody, in the sense that it’s about love, it’s about the right to intimacy and access to our loved ones, it’s about how love can be a form of resistance. But it is for people who are also directly and immediately experiencing what it means to be an incarcerated family in this country. That’s different than focusing on the trauma and the violence of our history, which is also important, but I find speaks more to people who need to know versus those who already know and don’t want to see that.”

It’s hard not to feel that Time is prescient in this moment, as a national reckoning with race brings issues like prison abolition and racial injustice to the forefront. But Bradley, whose films (including 2019’s America, a dreamy short that reexamines how visual history is told by sampling clips from Lime Kiln Club Field Day, a 1913 film that’s widely believed to be the oldest movie
with an all-Black cast) meditate on Blackness and the importance of perspective and reframing history, points out that the need for justice that the film calls for has always been relevant, if not mainstream.

“There’s always been a time for this film. We’ve never experienced a moment in American history where it hasn’t been relevant, where there hasn’t been a call for justice,” Bradley says. “I say that to be optimistic about the future. We are at a major turning point of real radical change and being able to see allyship for the movement in a way that we’ve never seen it before.”

Bradley credits her honor at Sundance to the work of women of color filmmakers before her, and she hopes it is an indicator of the industry moving forward. Next, she’s been tapped to direct a Netflix docuseries about tennis champ Naomi Osaka, and she has a solo exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art debuting next month featuring her film America. When speaking about her upcoming projects, Bradley’s thoughts are often punctuated by her hope for the future during an uncertain time. It’s a continual element running through Time, something she hopes viewers can connect with.

“I think hope can seem really general, but I can’t emphasize enough that there are examples in the film of what resistance can look like, which anybody can achieve—and that is to hold onto your individuality, to hold onto each other as a family and to believe that love is just as powerful as anything else.”
CULTURE

A Radically Different Way to Look at Incarceration

Time, a breathtaking documentary by Garrett Bradley, follows a young couple’s journey to keep their family together during a 20-year prison stay.

SAMANTHA N. SHEPPARD OCTOBER 17, 2020

The prison abolitionist and scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore once wrote, “Prison is not a building ‘over there,’ but a set of relationships that undermine rather than stabilize everyday lives everywhere.” This idea is the focus of the filmmaker Garrett Bradley’s Time, a gripping documentary that reframes the perception of mass incarceration and its far-reaching effects. Counter to the slew of prison films and television programming that have shaped the public imagination of life behind bars, Bradley shifts attention away from the geography of the prison as central to examining the carceral state and instead concentrates on the private sphere.

Time, which is currently streaming on Amazon Prime, highlights a Louisiana couple, Rob and Sibil Fox Richardson, who were sentenced to prison for a bank robbery they committed in 1997, when they were 29 and 25, respectively. Rob was sentenced to 60 years, while Fox accepted a plea deal of 12 years and served three and a half. The film is an amalgam drawn from a 20-year archive of home videos recorded by Fox as she awaited Rob’s return and current-day footage of the Richardson family shot by Bradley. The film bridges the past and the present, exposing mass incarceration’s domestic impact on the lives of those tethered to and regulated by the penal system.
Fox's footage ranges from the momentous to the mundane: their six children's playdates, family gatherings, speaking engagements, birthday celebrations, car rides, school activities, and confessions. Alongside these black-and-white images of events and rituals, Bradley's contemporary footage—shot in a complementary gray scale—similarly captures the quotidian activities of Fox and her family as they fight for her husband's release from prison.

The documentary's nonsequential assemblage suggests that, for Bradley, time itself is a medium through which to examine the conditions for the incarcerated and for their loved ones left behind. Bradley, who is the first Black woman to win best director for a U.S. documentary at the Sundance Film Festival, originally broached this topic in her 2017 New York Times op-doc, Alone, a short film that captures a young woman's fraught and isolating decision to marry her incarcerated boyfriend. Time continues Bradley's cinematic study of Black women's advocacy efforts and gendered labor, illuminating the emotional toll on them to sustain interpersonal relationships, familial ties, and social networks for imprisoned loved ones.

Time begins with the first video Fox recorded 20 years ago, in which she reveals that a week and a day has passed since her own release from prison. In direct address to both Rob and an imagined audience, she reveals that she is pregnant with twins and proclaims, "I know that, despite how grim my circumstances look right now, everything will be okay." The documentary fast-forwards through time, providing glimpses into the family's social histories and private memories. The breadth of Fox's archive underscores the carceral state's ability to capture, arrest, and surveil time even beyond prison walls.
In the 80-minute collage of home video and vérité footage, Bradley illustrates how the state uses time punitively to warp the lives of the incarcerated and non-incarcerated. The stasis, suspension, and recursive nature of time for the Richardson family is endless, as they loop through repetitive legal cycles that result in no progress in their quest for Rob's release. But Bradley also shows how Fox and her sons resist this temporal fix by going about their daily lives—getting ready for work, being honored at a white-coat ceremony, exercising, speaking at a university about prison abolition, participating in student debates, practicing French vocabulary. The Richardson family's interpretations of time help structure their experiences of Rob's absence. For Fox, "time is when you look at pictures from when your babies was small, and then you look at them and you see that they have moustaches and beards and that the biggest hope that you had was that before they turned into men they would have a chance to be with their father." For their son Remington, "time is influenced by our emotions. It's influenced by our actions." According to one of their twins, Justus, "Time is what you make of it. Time is unbiased. Time is lost. Time flies. This situation has just been a long time. A really long time."

These explanations, which highlight the family's oscillation between past and present, underscore the consequences of what the art historian and curator Nicole Fleetwood describes as "penal time," or the multiple temporalities that exist for the incarcerated and their families. Bradley's film sutures these timelines into a cohesive work that moves, stagnates, progresses, and regresses as it grapples with the movement of time.

For example, Bradley captures Fox calling the judge's office to inquire about a ruling on Rob's case. As Fox is placed on hold, Bradley's camera waits in real time as Fox stares at the phone in anticipation. Finally, the judge's assistant takes the call, quickly dismissing Fox with no update and a directive to call back after the weekend. The ambient sound is replaced with a recurring sonic motif that signals time's passage, and the scene cuts to home-video footage of a young Fox getting her small children ready to go see their father in prison. Bradley doesn't imprint the amateur footage with a date on-screen; however, the news program captured in the background places it in 2003. With a gray interstice, Bradley then cuts to the present day, with the Richardson family getting dressed to visit Rob at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. In voice-over, Fox explains how, for the past 20 years, she and her family have always begun the new year knowing that it would be the year Rob would be released, a fact she describes as both the hope and lie she tells herself. Bradley's attention to waiting, repetition, expectation, and the promise of tomorrow punctuates the film's reconfigurations of time.
While the documentary evinces Bradley's elegant artistry as a filmmaker, *Time* is not a singular auteur vision. It is a co-directed work that demonstrates how amateur filmmaking meant for private use can counter more visible forms of popular entertainment. *Time*'s abolitionist narrative stands in opposition to mainstream fare about criminal-justice reform: This includes Destin Daniel Cretton's 2019 film, *Just Mercy*, based on the defense attorney Bryan Stevenson's memoir about his work to appeal the murder conviction of Walter McMillian; Tom Shadyac's 2018 biopic, *Brian Banks*, which details the story of the high-school-football linebacker who was falsely accused of rape and sent to prison; and ABC's legal drama *For Life*, which draws on the story of Isaac Wright Jr., a wrongly convicted man who becomes a defense attorney for fellow inmates while fighting to prove his own innocence. While these examples address structural racism in the criminal-justice system, they also uphold categories of guilt and innocence. These works, in turn, influence audiences' feelings of who should and should not be incarcerated, reproducing carceral logics even as they advocate for civil rights and reform.

In *Time*'s liberatory field of vision, abolition is the end goal. Fox ties the carceral state to slavery, showing how racism, exploitation, and capitalism undergird the prison-industrial complex. In a rare moment for Fox, whose empowering lectures reflect the film's hopeful telos, she expresses anger at the way individuals working within the system have no respect for human life. Bradley captures Fox repeating a positive affirmation to calm herself, but her smile slips. The dramatic moment crescendos when she slams her hand on her desk, cursing and critiquing the racial politics she has to contend with. “Goddamn, he could have been home with his family just ‘cause they bullshitting!” Fox exclaims. “Ain’t no hurry. Oh, just some ol’ niggers trying to get home from the penitentiary… Don’t you want anyone out of the system that ain’t supposed to be there?” The charged moment dissipates as quickly as it arises, as Fox moves on to her next task. The emotional eruption signals to the audience how Black women endeavor to “keep it together”—relationships, families, their sanity—in the midst of what Fox calls the “cruel and unusual punishment” of carceralty.

*Time*'s conclusion provides both joy- and grief-filled catharsis with Rob's release from prison, an unanticipated climax that required Bradley to reassemble her crew five months after completing shooting. Throughout the documentary, Rob exists in a disembodied state, as a voice on the phone, as an image in an old home video, and as a life-size cardboard cutout Fox hangs on her bedroom wall. Upon his release, his once-frozen-in-time, one-dimensional image is now fleshed, animated, lively, and free. Bradley beautifully captures Rob's homecoming, but the documentary's final shot alludes to an indescribable sorrow. As the camera lingers on Rob's face staring at something beyond the frame, his eyes look haunted. The shot cuts to a montage of home-video footage rolling in reverse. Activities, events, and time are undone. The film's final image is that of the happy couple, Fox and Rob, sharing a kiss 20 years ago. The footage looks like both a beginning and an end. Filtered through the eyes of a newly free Rob, Bradley's cinematic rewind reminds the audience that time is both fluid and fleeting. For the once incarcerated, doing time produces plural pasts—the one lived behind bars and the one missed at home. While we can capture memories on film, Rob's viewpoint reminds us that spectatorship is no substitute for a lived experience with those we love and time lost.
REVIEW

Time Is a Moving Documentary Collage of Life Under Injustice

Garrett Bradley’s artful film follows a woman during the years her husband is in prison.

BY RICHARD LAWSON
OCTOBER 7, 2020
With a title like *Time*, Garrett Bradley’s documentary (in theaters October 9, Amazon Prime on October 16) could be about anything. She’s being deliberately expansive because her subject—a woman, Fox Rich, raising her family and fighting for her husband’s release from prison—contains multitudes. *Time* is not a polemic about the injustices of the American carceral system, though that frustration and tragedy is in the film. It’s not a linear portrait of one woman’s resolve as she fights the system, though that spirit fills the film. *Time*, like time, can’t be reduced to one thing. It’s instead a collage of experience, lovingly assembled by Bradley with Rich’s invaluable help.

Much of the film, which liltts out over just 80 minutes, is footage that Rich shot herself over the course of twenty years. When she and her husband were in their 20s, they robbed a Shreveport, LA bank. Rich served some prison time, while her husband, Rob, was sentenced to an appalling 60 years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. The big life they had planned for themselves was not put on hold so much as it was horribly reshaped.

Rich filmed herself and her family as they tried their best to carry on, all while crusading for Rob’s release from such an overbearing sentence. Bradley then brought her own camera into Rich’s life, her lovely black and white footage blending with and supplementing Rich’s video diary.

What’s powerful about *Time* is what it suggests about the realities and ripple effects of incarceration. From a cruel judge’s perspective, Rob Rich’s life was simply cast into a permanent dark, with his loved ones as collateral damage. A problem citizen and his family tossed away to be forgotten. But of course their lives kept ticking along anyway. The lyrical, impressionistic structure of Bradley’s film gives weight and presence to that fact. Our draconian system grinds and destroys, but it doesn’t always obliterate. Here are Rich and her children and Rob to give testament to that, in the fluid swirl of Bradley’s film.

Rich became a kind of motivational speaker, telling people her story and helping them to see the value of hope and persistent determination in their own lives. Rich is angry at the mechanics that brought her to this place, but she has found a certain grace in her hardship—one that can be shared, like a kind of urgent blessing or encouragement, with her community and beyond. Rich is a fascinating figure; she’s got a gift for showmanship, knowing when to play up a moment caught on camera for maximal effect. Which isn’t to say that she’s putting on some kind of act. It’s rather that she is keenly attuned to the realities
of America, particularly to how difficult it is to be heard by indifferent—or malignant—authority, especially for a Black woman dealing with a rigged and long biased justice system.

So Rich uses her charm and forceful way with words to make whatever noise she can. That boldness is interestingly offset by *Time*'s gentle, meandering aesthetic. There's fire in the film, but even that is rendered delicately. The film feels intimate, but sometimes seems broadcast from a watery remove. I suppose that might simulate the liquidity of memory—yet it's hard to get a firm understanding of the throughline of Rich's story, and of particular developments in her and her sons' lives. We see snippets of concrete things: a graduation, a reunion, some of Rich's time working at a car dealership. But those fleeting scenes drift away and we float on, either forward or backward in time, to some other narrative ribbon.

In that way, *Time* is much more of an art film than its subject—so pertinent and political and steeped in exacting process—would seem to suggest. The beauty of the film is how it subverts that expectation, for the viewer and for the system it ultimately targets. Rich refuses to be folded into a statistic, to be narrowed into an emblem of a particular outrage. Bradley is equally uninterested in doing that to her. The film is defiant in that way, demanding the audience look at the fullness of people who might otherwise be so marked, from the outside, by one experience, by a handful of decisions.

That's what should scare and shatter us about *Time*. This is just one family's story—yet look at how much complexity, how much roundness there still is to lives that have been so curtailed and thwarted. If it's true of the Riches, it's also true of so many others. One can imagine *Time*'s mosaic doubling and redoubling, growing in exponential bloom into something unfathomably vast, encompassing and swallowing the whole country.

To evoke all that staggering scale in under 90 minutes is no easy feat. Remarkably, Bradley's film doesn't telegraph its significance, doesn't lecture—however righteously it would do so—about its importance. It's not a demure film, by any measure, nor does it shy away from hard truths. What it does is allow the Riches the loveliness and grain of their individual being, and lets that be enough. The rest of the film's mission, then, is what we in the audience do with what Bradley, and Rich, have graciously shown us. *Time* appeals to heart and mind. It also, hopefully, convinces us of their capacity for action.
CRITIC’S PICK

‘Time’ Review: What We Really Mean When We Say Mass Incarceration

In Garrett Bradley’s moving documentary, a woman fights for her family and justice as a husband and father’s absence reverberates.

By Lisa Kennedy

Published Oct. 8, 2020  Updated Oct. 9, 2020

Time  NYT Critic’s Pick  Directed by Garrett Bradley  Documentary  PG-13  1h 21m
Substantive and stunning, the documentary “Time” delivers on the title's promise of the monumental as well as the personal. In telling the story of Fox Rich’s fight to keep her family intact — raising six sons, making a living, doing activist work — while her husband, Rob, served a prison sentence of 60 years, the director Garrett Bradley depicts with rattling and tender regard America’s thorny gestalt of the individual thrown against the backdrop of systemic inequality.

In 1997, young marrieds Fox and Rob G. Rich — high school sweethearts — opened a hip-hop apparel business in Shreveport, La. They were brashly optimistic — and then they struggled. “What I remember more than anything was not wanting to fail, and we had become desperate,” Fox Rich says in one of the voice-overs that carry the film. “Desperate people do desperate things. It’s as simple as that.”

Rob and his younger cousin robbed a credit union. Fox was the getaway driver. They were caught. As ripe for rebuttal as her assessment may be, it doesn’t make Fox Rich any less compelling a protagonist. Once the twins Freedom and Justus were born, she went to prison; she served three and a half years. Rob Rich was sentenced to 60 years without the chance of parole or — at the time — any hope of sentencing mitigation.

In the sweep of Bradley’s epic vision, Fox Rich is both a Penelope and an Odysseus for America’s dark odyssey. Because this is her saga (not her husband’s), she is the steadfast mate and the heroic traveler, making her way through the chop and around the shoals of mass incarceration. That phrase, while apt, smudges the names of those lost within the very system it describes. “Time” makes Fox and her sons indelible.

“Time” doesn’t retry the Riches’ crime (although there is a scene between Fox Rich and her pastor that wrestles with the harm the robbery inflicted). Instead it focuses on the consequences of Rob’s harsh sentence. What did it take for Fox and her sons to avoid being torn apart by Rob’s absence? A worry was that the boys would probably be men — perhaps even fathers in their own right — long before his return.
The daughter of the painters Suzanne McClelland and Peter Bradley, Garrett Bradley has a taut and compassionate grasp of being Black in America that is realized through a deft layering of images and archival footage, sound and music. (She won the best director prize at the Sundance Film Festival this year; this feature was a co-production of The New York Times.)

In 2009, Fox Rich published her memoir, “The One That Got Away: A True Story of Personal Transformation.” She ran her own car dealership in New Orleans, where she moved her sons to be closer to the Louisiana State Penitentiary, also known as Angola, and has become a figure in the prison abolition movement. A deft montage of Rich’s many appearances — in churches, at colleges, in auditoriums — over the years gives a sense of her pull, but also her growth.

Rich is Bradley’s collaborator as much as subject, having provided years of the home-video footage that has been interwoven with sumptuous black-and-white images captured by Bradley and the cinematographers Zac Manuel, Justin Zweifach and Nisa East.

Bradley and the editor Gabriel Rhodes make nuanced use of Rich’s videos. Time doesn’t march on. It curls back. It nudges forward. Some video footage is charming — when the twins are asked about little Freedom’s student-of-the-month prize, or the kindergartner Remington boasts about being strong enough to carry his mom’s load. “Time” also wounds, often in those same moments. Moving between past and present mimics a cycle of hope and rebuff. Rich’s
faith isn't toothless; it requires tenacity. When she is on the phone with this judge's assistant, that prison official's gatekeeper, her voice is pleasant, information-seeking, seldom beseeching or embittered. Above all, the "ma'ams" are tactical.

Rich's mother, known as Ms. Peggy, appears from time to time. An educator, she hoped for better and expected more from her daughter. "Right don't come from doing wrong," she says. But it isn't all judgment. Ms. Peggy had more than a hand in helping raise the boys. We watch these sons — the twins in particular — grow into contemplative young men, who, by the way, seem to really like ironing. In a movie that demands your visual attention, one of the most revealing moments requires listening. It comes when, again in voice-over, Remington, Fox Rich and Justus talk about what "time is."

If one judges a story of crushing absence by the ache of its homecoming, "Time" doesn't disappoint. Nor does it end with a scene of "closure." (How could it? So much lies ahead for Fox and Rob Rich, and their sons.) Instead the documentary rewinds through the archival footage to a kiss — before the time, before the crime. We could see this reversal as merely a gesture of hope. But consider the final moments of "Time" a different kind of restorative justice — one signaling a family's reset while acknowledging so much that was lost.

Lisa Kennedy writes on popular culture, race and gender. She lives in Denver, Colo.

**Time**
Rated PG-13 for some strong language. Running time: 1 hour 21 minutes. In theaters on Oct. 9 and streaming on Amazon on Oct 16. Please consult the guidelines outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention before watching movies inside theaters.

**Correction: Oct. 9, 2020**
An earlier version of this article misstated The New York Times's involvement in producing the movie "Time." The film was a co-production of The New York Times; it was not part of The Times's Op-Docs series.
Time ▪ NYT Critic's Pick

When you purchase a ticket for an independently reviewed film through our site, we earn an affiliate commission.

Director Garrett Bradley
Stars Paolo Ikonomi, Fox Rich
Rating PG-13
Running Time 1h 21m
Genre Documentary

IMDb Movie data powered by IMDb.com

A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 9, 2020, Section C, Page 9 of the New York edition with the headline: What We Really Mean by Mass Incarceration. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe
‘Time’: A Woman’s Life, A Man’s Imprisonment, A Portrait of Love Everlasting

Garrett Bradley’s decades-spanning documentary on a family dealing with the impact of incarceration — told mostly through video diaries — is one of the most essential films of the year

By K. AUSTIN COLLINS

OCTOBER 9, 2020 10:30AM ET

Fox Rich and her husband Robert, the subjects of Garrett Bradley’s documentary ‘Time.’

Courtesy of Amazon Studios
There's a pair of shattering moments at the heart of the 2016 short documentary *Alone*, directed by Garrett Bradley, that opens the door to the world the filmmaker complicates and expounds upon in her new, feature-length documentary *Time*. (Bradley's latest, which receives a limited theatrical run this week, launches on Amazon Prime Streaming on October 16th.) The first comes when the young woman at its center, Aloné Watts, reveals to her family that she plans to marry Desmond Watson, a man in prison. We have already seen her trying on a wedding dress; we have already heard her say, in a voiceover, “I am beautiful in this dress.” But then Aloné reveals her intentions to her family, and something breaks — loudly. Bradley’s camera rests on the image of Watts’s family home for the extent of the scene. But the sound creates a gap: the voices we hear hit us as if we are inside, at Aloné’s side, when she breaks the news. And what we hear, as loudly and immediately as if they were being hurled in our direction, are screams. A streak of reprimands, heartbreak, and astonished doubt as white-hot as a lightning bolt. All of it born of fear; you can hear it in each voice. Aloné, her family tries to tell her, is going to waste her life. This is not advice. It is, in their eyes, a certainty.

She later meets with a woman whose voice, though softer, is just as wise and equally certain — this is the next shattering moment. “This system breaks you apart,” the woman tells Aloné. “It is designed, just like slavery, to tear you apart. And instead of using a whip, they use time. They use hardships.” It’s like, she says, “when they used to hang people, but barely hang them, and leave their feet just tip-toeing in the mud. So that they’re constantly on their tip toes, fighting for their lives.”

This woman, a preacher and poet in spirit, if not by trade, is Sibil Fox Richardson, who goes by Fox Rich. It’s Rich’s story that Bradley tells in *Time* — though “tells” already vastly oversimplifies what Bradley and Rich, together, have accomplished in this remarkable movie. Both *Alone* and this new documentary are urgent, lacerating films about black families grappling with the incarceration of loved ones. Both are, more specifically, about the lives of black women, either married to or on the cusp of marrying men who are not free. Women whose sense of their lives, as narrated to us in each film, is that they, too, are not free, and that they will not be so long as the men they love remain incarcerated.

*Time would not exist but for a surprising gesture.* Bradley had already finished shooting what was to become a short film on Rich when, on the last day of shooting, Rich stopped Bradley to give the filmmaker a box of tapes. Video diaries, more specifically, spanning 18 years and recorded by Rich and occasionally her children on a mini-DV camera. These videos largely record the mundane: the everyday bits of life, especially with growing children, that are most easily taken for granted until they are lost to us. They are letters to Rich’s husband, Robert Richardson. For their nearly two-decade span, Robert is away serving a 60-year prison sentence without parole, for an armed robbery the pair committed (with a nephew) when they were young, newly married, and desperate for money. Rich had been sentenced to 13 years for the crime; she served three and a half. What followed that ordeal — and what Rich’s video diaries
painstakingly document — is the life she lived thereon, without her husband, as a single mother caring for the couple’s six children, two of whom were young twins. This is what goes unsaid in Fox’s brief scene in *Alone*: It’s the history you hear in her voice when she says, “This system breaks you apart.”

With *Time*, Garrett Bradley has taken a well-chosen and gorgeously organized sample of Rich’s video diaries and wedded them to recent footage, this time filmed by Bradley and a trio of cinematographers. These scenes, which are somehow equally personal, documents Rich’s still-ongoing fight to get her husband parole. He has, by this time, served nearly 18 years. Rich’s goal is to get him home before the 18th birthday of the twins.

There was a linear throughway available to Bradley here, one that would have told this story in straight chronology, moving from the self-recorded snapshots of Rich and her children enduring the span of Robert’s time in prison to the near-present, when Robert is still in prison and Rich, now a gainfully employed prison abolitionist, is still fighting for his life. Their life. That version of *Time* would likely be satisfying, too, and perhaps provide more in the way of straight information about, among other things, the case.

But this isn’t a true crime documentary. Against the grain of that genre, it redirects our attention from the crime of this couple to the crime of the system. In the first place, there’s an argument to be made — in fact, by giving ample space to Rich’s own confrontation with the question of forgiveness over the years, *Time* convincingly makes it — for asking fewer questions about what people did to “deserve” imprisonment and more questions about prison’s impact, not only on the people inside, but on the people waiting for them to come home. For this family and many others, incarceration is the absence of a father, a husband. It’s an absence that structures the rest of the family’s life.

Bradley opts to make us feel that absence — to witness it, reckon with it, be shocked by it. She does this by finding a non-linear order for telling this story, one that still has a broad narrative arc (the fight for Robert’s parole) but which encourages us to abandon ourselves to the flow of Rich’s ideas and emotions. There is no everyday life that is unaffected by her husband’s absence. But he’s always on her mind, even when she cannot see or hear him. Even when we don’t see him in Bradley’s film, he’s on ours.

*Time* incites questions and associations and feelings, all hallmarks of thoughtful editing, though rarely is the effect so generative as it is here. The mini-DV transfers of Rich’s diaries are so pointedly clean and sharp that her movie’s own black and white images flow close enough to seamlessly to be even more uncanny than if they’d been all of a piece. She allows things to shock us: the image of the Richardson children as children in one instance, then the sight (and sound) of them as college students the next. How can this, in itself, prove to be so moving?

What distinguishes this documentary from other movies about mass incarceration is the novelty with which Bradley subverts the mass and trains our eye, frequently literally, on the particular. Films about imprisonment often feature the family, if only because the family is usually easier to access than the people behind bars. But talking
to those wives and sons and daughters is one thing. Bradley has not only Rich’s footage to her advantage, but her own incredible perceptiveness to guide her, and a real intelligence for how to let a face tell the story of an entire scene. In this, she’s guided by Rich herself — who is, among other things, an incredible camera presence. (A cut, early on, from Rich in one of her video diaries to her shooting a local commercial proves this point so well, it’s almost jarring.) It feels as if Bradley has gone out of her way to pick up visual cues from her subject’s own video footage — to converse with those diaries, rather than simply complement or contextualize them. Rich’s footage was for her husband. It shows she wanted him to see what he’s missed all these years, from a world outside of a cell to his children’s faces. Intimate details, in other words: lives in loving close-up.

This is what Bradley matches in her own attentive, careful filmmaking, zeroing in on the family as if she, too, wants to give Robert something to see: his wife. Bradley’s footage — down to the fact that it, like Rich’s, is in black and white, and is limited to the same aspect ratio — somehow avoids the problem of feeling like an intervening gaze from an outsider. But being an outsider has its benefits too, because it affords Bradley her own ideas. The mere organization of this movie, the associations Bradley finds between past and present, “video diary” versus “documentary,” are a case in point; it’s the stitching that gives away the dividing line between these merged projects. But so is the way the filmmaker trains her attention on Rich in moments both grand and mundane.

There’s a stirring sequence here, for example, that collects a series of speeches Rich has given over the years about her experience with the prison system; you’re right to feel, here, as if the movie is rooting for her to win. But the ideas are in the editing, too. The movie makes a point of including the moment that Rich announces the date in each of her diaries, which confer less a sense of time passing than of, more interestingly, her commitment to marking time. She is counting the days. We even see her describe her life this way: that year-long cycle of legal appointments, deadlines, and holidays that structure her fight for Robert’s parole. Which is to say, her life.

Obviously, the film’s name is not arbitrary. But part of the power of Time is in the range of meanings it manages to generate, in an attentive viewer’s mind, over the course of its runtime. The title verges on ironic. Time, by definition, is progress: It hurries only forward, with no off-ramps or exits, no alternatives, no take-backs. It is only appropriate for Bradley to treat this definition like a rule worth breaking. Because time’s role in our lives is, ultimately, something like a seventh sense. It is that fundamental to our perspective of the shape and span of our lives, so much so that we can’t help but claim, in our language, that it’s ours. We say it can be given, stolen, borrowed, managed, wasted. Bradley’s portrait is a blistering and compassionate reminder that for the incarcerated and their loved ones, time is not something you have, but something you do. It isn’t progress. It’s punishment. To “do time” is to lose it.

It’s essential, then, that Bradley’s documentary attends so carefully to our sensations as we watch, swelling and swerving its way through this family’s long haul of an emotional ordeal. It’s vital, and also sort of impossible, that the movie climaxes and closes on the
most startlingly intimate of notes. I’ll leave the raw details to the movie to reveal. But you can’t miss it. There’s a brief moment, in a car — the suggestion of an incident — which, among other things, reveals the level of trust and compassion flowing between the director and the Richardson family, and gets to the root of what it means to let an artist into one’s life, to say nothing of how it feels to see a life restored.

Bradley’s own sleight of hand comes soon after, and it is all the more extraordinary for being so simple. She finds a way to recast what came before, building toward a final image that is deeply, knowingly bittersweet. Time, Bradley asks us to remember, is what we lose. Only in a movie can we entertain and engineer the fantasy of getting it back, rewinding the clock, restoring presence to a loved one’s absence. Thank God, then, for movies. This one especially.
Garrett Bradley on Her Short Film ‘America’: ‘I Didn’t Want to Shy Away From What it Would Mean to Title it After My Country’

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on May 19, 2020 • 10:58 am

Still from “America” (2019) by Garrett Bradley

ARTIST AND FILMMAKER Garrett Bradley makes lyrical films that explore the challenges of contemporary life and surface lost histories. A pair of revelations about the legacy of silent film inspired one of her latest projects.

In 2013, the Library of Congress (LOC) released a report declaring America’s silent film heritage is endangered. Nearly 11,000 silent films were made between 1912 and 1929, but the majority of them—75 percent—are lost.

A year later, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) announced seven reels of unedited and unreleased footage shot in 1913 had been languishing in its archives. Featuring an integrated crew and all-black cast led by Bert Williams (1874–1922), “Lime Kiln Club Field Day” (1914/2014) was filmed in New York and New Jersey. The romantic comedy is believed to be the earliest surviving feature film with a black cast.

These landmark developments moved Bradley to make a film of her own. She titled it “America” (2019) and wove footage from “Lime Kiln Club Field Day” throughout the project, which is scored by Trevor Mathison and Udit Duseja.

The short film was screened during the New Directors/New Films festival co-presented by the Museum of Modern Art and the Film Society of Lincoln Center (April 2019), and was recently on view at the Contemporary Art Museum Houston. Showcasing new and recent single and multi-channel films and videos, “Garrett Bradley: American Panoply” (Dec. 19, 2019–March 22, 2020) is her first solo museum exhibition.
”This project is very much about making assumptions and connecting dots,” Bradley has said about the film. “I was interested in starting in 1915 and going through a series of 12 years, each of which go into a moment or individual in history that I thought was significant, that’s been buried or hidden. Sometimes we’re seeing these things illustrated in a really straightforward manner and sometimes they’re more abstract.”

“America’ is sort of a grandiose title, but I didn’t want to shy away from what it would mean to title the film after my country, because the impetus for this was to visually illustrate inclusivity and make a case for the beauty of what that could mean.” — Garrett Bradley


BORN IN NEW YORK CITY, Bradley is based in New Orleans, where she is a professor at Loyola University. She earned an MFA from UCLA (2012). In 2019, she won the inaugural Philip Guston Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome and was featured in the Whitney Biennial, where she presented “AKA” (2019), a short film about relationships between mothers and daughters.

Bradley has an impressive track record at Sundance. In 2017, she won the Short Film Jury Award (nonfiction) for “Alone.” The film explores what it means to marry someone who is incarcerated, from the perspective of a young woman who is weighing the decision. In 2019, “America” was screened in the U.S. Narrative Shorts Competition.

Earlier this year, Bradley won the directing award in the U.S. Documentary category for “Time,” a feature-length film that answers the question posed in her earlier work. This film examines the life of a mother of six who has spent two decades trying to gain her husband’s release. Incarcerated for an offense they both committed, he is serving a 60-year sentence. Shortly after Sundance, Amazon Studios acquired “Time” for $5 million.

In October, Bradley was scheduled to return to MoMA for her first solo museum exhibition in New York. Organized by Thelma Golden and Legacy Russell from the Studio Museum in Harlem, the show is part of a multiyear initiative among MoMA, MoMA PS1, and the Studio Museum. Currently, the dates for “Projects: Garrett Bradley” are to be announced, due to the museum’s temporary closure in the wake of COVID-19.
"America" is a sort of a grandiose title, but I didn't want to shy away from what it would mean to title the film after my country, because the impetus for this was to visually illustrate inclusivity and make a case for the beauty of what that could mean," Bradley says in a Sundance Institute video about the film.

"The heart and soul of the project asks us to evaluate the role of pleasure particularly within communities still in some ways barred from that fundamental experience or right. So 'America' is both a meditation and recognition of the beauty that exists in the past, a resurfacing of that beauty, and also a proposal for the future." CT

TOP IMAGE: GARRETT BRADLEY, "America," 2019 (film still, multi-channel video installation; 35mm film transferred to video: black and white, sound, 23:55 minutes). I Courtesy the filmmaker
‘Time’ Review: A Poignant and Monumental Portrait of Mass Incarceration in America

A woman’s 20-year fight to free her husband is captured on home video and cut together into a profoundly moving story of hope.

David Ehrlich
Feb 3, 2020 2:45 pm
@davidehrlich

“Time”
Amazon Studios

Editor’s note: This review was originally published at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival. Amazon releases the film in select theaters on Friday, October 9, with a streaming rollout to follow on Friday, October 23.

On its surface, Garrett Bradley’s “Time” asks a simple question: How can you convey the full length of 21 years in the span of a single film, let alone a documentary that runs just 81 minutes? And from its degraded opening images — borrowed from the first of a thousand video messages that a black Louisiana woman named Sibil Fox Richardson (aka “Fox Rich”) recorded for her husband as she waited for him to be released from the State Penitentiary — offers a similarly simple answer: You don’t measure it in length, but rather in loss.
You measure time in absence. In the undertows of anger that swirl under the water and threaten to sweep you out to sea. In the punitive aftertaste of forcing six boys to grow up without a father. In the way that their mother, a determined but soft-spoken 27-year-old when she made that initial tape, has hardened into a social justice warrior of such indomitable strength that she could single-handedly restore that term to the power it implies. You don’t think of time as a bridge that stretches between past and future, but as the boundless present that flows below; infinite along one axis, but so narrow along the other that you can barely see the distance between shores.

Swirled together from 18 years’ worth of MiniDV tapes (in addition to the newer, more pristine footage the filmmaker shot of Fox and her family before that incredible treasure trove of home video was dumped in her lap), Bradley’s monumental and enormously moving “Time” doesn’t juxtapose the pain of yesterday against the hope of tomorrow so much as it insists upon a perpetual now. And while the documentary never reduces its subjects to mere symbols of the oppression they represent — the film couldn’t be more personal, and it builds to a moment of such unvarnished intimacy that you can hardly believe what you’re watching — Bradley’s Trafamadorian editing flattens time in a way that contextualizes mass incarceration on the largest of continuums. “Time” in name and timeless in style, this liquid history streams centuries of subjugation into a single confluence of dehumanization until black slavery and the prison-industrial complex become two separate brooks that feed into the same river.

If only Fox hadn’t waded into those waters. The trouble started in September 1997, when an investor in the hip-hop clothing store that she and Rob were opening together suddenly pulled out at the last second. Desperate and unmoored, the couple hatched a costly plan: Fox would act as a getaway driver while Rob and his nephew robbed a branch of the Shreveport Credit Union. It didn’t go well. No money was stolen, and the culprits were all first-time offenders, but — due to a sordid arrangement of plea bargains and miscellaneous other pieces of bureaucracy-related bullshit — Fox was sentenced to 19 years, and her husband 65. She served three and then went home to their children; by the time Bradley started filming, Rob was already nearing two decades behind bars.

As the song goes: “Don’t do the crime if you can’t do the time.” But who could do that time (least of all for that crime)? And who takes stock of what that time does to us? Shown in black-and-white and set to a rolling score that largely consists of piano tracks licensed from an Ethiopian nun who Bradley found on YouTube (her name is Emahoy Tsegü-Maryam Guèbrou, she’s 96 years old, and the melodic blues music she wrote for an orphanage in 1968 sounds like a pebble skipping along the surface of the entire 20th century), “Time” ricochets back and forth across the years until everything seems to be happening at once and always. One moment, Fox is pregnant with twins; the next, Freedom and Justus are taking
junior high school by storm; the next, they’re five years old and acting their age on the front lawn. It’s never “then,” always “now.”

The change is somehow even more pronounced in their tireless mother, who evolves into a self-described “abolitionist.” Fighting to eke a measure of humanity from a system that shouldn’t have the power to deny it from people in the first place, Fox molds herself into an undeniable force of nature — a powerhouse of black feminist energy. “Regretful but not embarrassed,” she speaks against injustice, she raises six extremely impressive children, and she maintains hope in the face of indifference. Without betraying any part of herself, Fox also becomes the kind of unfailingly polite black woman who a white-run institution might deign to recognize; all “if it’s not asking too much” and “yes ma’am” when calling to see if a judge’s secretary might be so kind as to see if her non-violent husband might ever be allowed to hug his children.

In one moment of superhuman strength, Fox ends a phone call by saying “thank you so much for your time” without spitting blood. Her anger seldom boils to the surface, but Bradley is there to see it when it does, as the contrast between the pristine stillness of the professional footage and the diaristic jangle of Fox’s home videos speaks to the performative nature of her fight. These two energies often merge in spectacular fashion, such as the scene where Fox confidently directs and stars in a commercial for her auto business, negotiating between public and private personas in a way that makes clear that her growth is in the service of an intractable self-identity; the prison system wants to separate black families at the seams, but Fox refuses to let time fray the integrity of her relationship with her husband (or of her sons’ relationship to their father).

In that sense, Fox’s home videos — and the film that Bradley has made from them — feel like an act of self-preservation in the face of a racist power structure that doesn’t want certain stories to be told. They’re both a means of recording moments for Rob to watch, and also a means of preserving a kind of stasis. The question of “when are we” rarely seems relevant; the Richardsons may not be together, but the distance between them never grows.

If the flat circularity of the film’s chronology can sometimes mute its emotional impact, that’s because virtually every scene is moving in its own way. Fox is a riveting character — vulnerable when she’s alone and voracious when she has an audience — and Bradley’s framework respects her resilience. There are a few broadly tender flashpoints (such as Fox’s youngest son hovering near her like a shadow so he can hear his dad’s voice over the phone), but everything on screen is vested in lived reality. While gripping from start to finish, there isn’t a minute of “Time” that feels engineered for our entertainment. And though Bradley’s grounded footage can seem at odds with Fox’s home videos — like ice floes dropped into a rushing spring — they ultimately melt together into the film’s most profound moments of enduring love. Rob’s incarceration suggests that time isn’t measured by what changes, but rather by what doesn’t. And Fox’s struggle to free him suggests that perhaps time isn’t measured by what’s lost, but rather by what isn’t.
Grade: A-

“Time” premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival in the U.S. Documentary Competition.

As new movies open in theaters during the COVID-19 pandemic, IndieWire will continue to review them whenever possible. We encourage readers to follow the safety precautions provided by CDC and health authorities. Additionally, our coverage will provide alternative viewing options whenever they are available.
‘Time’: Film Review

Director Garrett Bradley combines vérité observation with 18 years of home videos to make a longitudinal study of incarceration’s effects on an American family.

By Peter Debruge

Feb 4, 2020 3:59pm PT

Sixty years. That’s how long a Louisiana judge sentenced Rob Richardson to serve for armed bank robbery. Garrett Bradley covers more than a third of that term in “Time,” and the cumulative impact — boiled down into an open-minded and deeply empathetic 81 minutes — will almost certainly rewire how Americans think about the prison-industrial complex.
Bradley interweaves the day-to-day struggle of Rob’s seemingly tireless wife Fox Rich in the present with nearly two decades of home movies that Rich recorded over the span of her husband’s incarceration. The videos were the last ingredient to fall into place (Rich entrusted them to Bradley only after principal shooting had wrapped), but they’re incorporated beautifully and absolutely define the unconventionally structured result, which earned Bradley the best director prize at the Sundance Film Festival.

No one is arguing for Richardson’s innocence — Fox pleaded guilty, too, and served more than three years behind bars for her part as the getaway driver — and yet, the film challenges the assumption that incarceration makes the world a safer place. What it does, as “Time” will tell, is separate families, segregate communities and uphold white supremacy under the semblance of law — what a 2012 documentary, based on the best-seller by Douglas A. Blackmon, identified as “Slavery by Another Name.”

Looking back on the two and a half years she spent in prison, Rich says, “What I clearly saw was that our prison system was slavery, and I’m an abolitionist.” As Bradley observes, now Rich fights back by speaking out to mothers and daughters and wives who’ve been similarly affected. She fights back by calling the judge every chance she can to appeal for Richardson’s release. And she fights back by not letting the system beat her, but by getting up every day and being a mother to her six sons, including twins Freedom and Justus, with whom she was pregnant when her husband was sentenced. She’s raised them well, alone: Now in high school, Freedom wants to study criminal justice with the goal of reforming racially biased policy.

We’ve all heard the saying “don’t do the crime if you can’t do the time.” And yet, for society’s most desperate citizens, breaking the law comes as a last resort. In those cases, incarceration is no deterrent, and prison actually compounds the underlying problem. Bradley’s approach brings this seemingly overwhelming issue down to a personal level, revealing how communities are actually worse off for ripping families apart. The director presents the family’s case in black and white, yet the issue is anything but.
Since the early days of American cinema, movies have been expected to uphold the rectitude of the country’s legal system. The Hays Code cautioned Hollywood on the treatment of certain subjects, including “sympathy for criminals,” and that mentality has profoundly influenced movies ever since. Rare are the films that pay women like Rich the slightest attention — unless, of course, they’re battling to prove their husbands’ innocence, in which case they’re treated as noble crusaders.

Doing time transformed both Richardson and Rich. Audiences can see that through Rich’s home videos — which Bradley strips of color, so the grainy VHS blends more smoothly with her monochrome presentation of the present. But what if the establishment itself needs changing as well? Where does compassion fit into the picture? In one of the film’s most potent scenes, seven years after the robbery, Rich stands up in front of her church and begs the congregation’s forgiveness. The bank employees have already given her theirs. Few are the films that focus on such healing.

Two years ago, there was another documentary, Rudy Valdez’s 15-years-in-the-making “The Sentence,” that feels like something of a thematic soulmate in the emotional way it humanizes the effects of incarceration on an American family. “The Sentence” won the audience award at Sundance and later, an Emmy as well. On the fiction front, Bradley’s film also has certain elements in common with Michael Winterbottom’s “Everyday,” shot over five years, and Barry Jenkins’ recent adaptation of “If Beale Street Could Talk” (the latter being a case of wrongful conviction).

But the movie that “Time” most resembles is Bradley’s own 12-minute short, “Alone,” which posted to the New York Times Op-Docs video platform on Valentine’s Day 2017. “What would it mean to marry someone behind bars?” Bradley asks via that film, watching a woman she had known for years, Aloné Watts, struggle with how to adjust to her boyfriend’s arrest. It was during the making of “Alone” that Bradley met Rich, who knew the price of such separation all too well. “This system breaks you apart,” Rich commiserates in the short. “It is designed just like slavery to tear you apart. Instead of using the whip, they use Mother Time.”
In “Time,” Bradley allows Rich to elaborate on that analogy — which many may reject outright. Through her activism as well as her more mundane everyday activities, she reveals the kind of hardship that prison puts on a family: the money that high-priced lawyers charge just to tell her they can’t help, the humiliation of kissing up to white judges who have no intention of considering her husband’s case, the strain of only being allowed to see him twice a month, and most importantly, the challenge of raising kids and maintaining a home without her partner by her side. But she also captures the strength of love in the face of such obstacles, and what it means for a couple, separated for more than 20 years, to survive the “test of time.”
Screened on four intersecting, transparent white flags affixed to copper poles, Garrett Bradley’s America is a 360-degree, twenty-seven-minute odyssey through the United States’s elided cinematic histories. Informed by communities working at Hollywood’s edge in the silent-era as well as those in present-day New Orleans, the film interleaves archival and original footage to offer a more encompassing history of the country. Below, Bradley discusses the film, one of three works in the artist’s first solo exhibition, “Garrett Bradley: American Rhapsody,” which opens December 19, 2019, at the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, and remains on view through March 22, 2020.

**AMERICA BEGAN IN 2014,** when the Museum of Modern Art, New York, debuted what they believed to be the very first feature-length film with an integrated cast: *Lime Kiln Club Field Day*. The production, which is also the oldest surviving film with black actors, was made in 1913 and starred the Bahamian-American recording artist Bert Williams, and struck me for how progressive it was, both in its social and technological formation. A little over a decade prior, in 1896, Plessy vs. Ferguson was decided in New Orleans, enshrining Jim Crow as law. And not long before that, the modern-day cinema projector was invented. Technology was bringing people together as society was being separated. When I discovered a Library of
Congress survey stating that seventy percent of the films made between 1912 and 1929 have gone missing—roughly 7,500 of them—I began to see *Lime Kiln Club Field* as a catalyst for a project. What if this lost body of work were equally progressive as Williams’s film? *America’s* twelve vignettes, interspersed between footage of *Lime Kiln Club Field*, coexist in a visual chronology starting in 1915 and going through 1926. Each story highlights a person or moment in time that has also, in a way, become invisible. The film celebrates historical black achievements, such as the story of Bessie Coleman, a black woman from Florida who was the first American to receive an international pilot’s license, while also highlighting more contemporary narratives in which black presence has been muffled, such as the young black men in the Boy Scouts of America. I’ve added black history to moments that seem unequivocally white and noninclusive in order to insert ourselves into national memory and create new iconographies around what it means to be American. For example, the film opens on an image of a white sheet, and we watch how its associations and power shifts depending on who’s holding it, beginning with the KKK and ending with the Buffalo Soldiers, a still-active, historically black social aid and pleasure club that has been around since the turn of the twentieth century.

We’re living in a time where we’re trying to understand how to deal with our past, and this project doesn’t at all seek to replace what we don’t know. It evokes and echoes the spirit of what already exists. I see *America* as a template for how visual storytelling and the assembly of images can serve as an archive of the past and a document of the present. The nature of the installation is a play on perspective. One’s own curiosity and physical positioning around the work can offer a different way of seeing and experiencing. A viewer can look straight ahead at one screen, for instance, or position themselves within overlapping images from multiple images, multiple years. The use of transparent white flags in the installation was important for me—it became a very simple way of experiencing time as it truly feels: subjective and simultaneous. I also wanted to build on installation as a practice to reinforce the idea of transparency and dialogue not only within the concept of time but between communities. The film was shot on 35 mm and then transferred to video, and while it was originally silent, Trevor Mathison created a beautiful soundscape to accompany each chapter. The audio also includes New Orleans residents describing what they believe is the difference between the “United States” and “America.” All of the elements of *America* combine the historical and contemporary, invoke both silence and the addition of voices, and invite viewers to imagine a future that transpires from acknowledging all of society’s achievements.

When I moved to New Orleans from Los Angeles to make *Below Dreams*, my thesis film for graduate school, I relied on Craigslist ads for casting. Working with local, nonprofessional actors was a process that emerged from necessity and ended up being a lesson on the significance of making connections across communities and their stories. Huey Copeland once pointed out to me that when you work in this way, it challenges the idea of auteursim because the artwork becomes a product of codirection. I felt there was also something to be said for the legacies of racism and removal in the context of New Orleans, which were made horrifically visible in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. *America* provided an opportunity to think not only about the archive, but also the incredible work happening in the city right now. There are many moments in the film that argue for the importance of linking what’s missing with what is.

—As told to Emily Wilkerson
CLOSE-UP: LOST AND FOUND

Amy Taubin on Garrett Bradley’s _Time_, 2020, and _America_, 2019

Garrett Bradley, _America_, 2019, three-channel 35 mm transferred to 4K video projection, black-and-white, sound, 29 minutes 55 seconds. Production still.

**AT FIRST GLANCE,** _Time_, 2020, and _America_, 2019, two moving-image works by Garrett Bradley being showcased this autumn, have almost nothing in common. _Time_ is a feature-length documentary portrait edited from two decades of low-tech video diaries kept by Fox Rich, a Louisiana mother of six and a justice-reform activist, as she struggled to win her husband Rob’s release from the prison where he was serving a sixty-year sentence. _America_ is a multichannel installation of luminous, often ecstatic beauty, the touchstone for which is the 1913 _Lime Kiln Club Field Day_, created by and starring Bert Williams and thought to be the first American-made film with an all-Black cast. More than a century later, the movie was discovered and restored by New York’s Museum of Modern Art, which is where Bradley saw it and where _America_ will be installed in a first-floor gallery, beginning November 21, in a joint presentation by MoMA and the Studio Museum in Harlem. _Time_ opens October 9 in select theaters and streams on Amazon a week later.
But anyone familiar with Bradley’s work, including the 2019 twenty-seven minute single-channel version, which, like Time, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, may realize that both of these works speak to Bradley’s commitment to collective production, to bringing largely hidden and even imagined archives to light, and to the expressive relationship between image and music. Bradley, who grew up in Brooklyn, moved to New Orleans in 2010 to complete her thesis film for her master’s degree at the University of California, Los Angeles, and has continued to work in the city as an artist and educator. What began as a short film portrait turned into a feature when Rich handed Bradley a bag filled with about one hundred hours of mini-DV tapes she had recorded so that her husband would be able to see their family’s life in the years while he was unjustly separated from it. Rich is the first-person storyteller of Time, but Bradley, working with editor Gabriel Rhodes, shaped her videos into a movie that is both intimate and epic, where time is not linear but has the synchronicity of memory, coalescing around repeated moments in which Rich waits, phone in hand, to hear from the “authorities” whether her husband will be released. Her tenacity is amazing. It fuses past and present in the hope for a reunion in the future. The piano music, which flows like an undercurrent throughout the film, is similarly unmoored from time. It was composed and played by Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou, a now-ninety-six-year-old Ethiopian nun who was imprisoned during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–37). Bradley found the 1967 recording on YouTube. She said the music evoked the happy ending of a fairy tale.


Sound is just as crucial for America. Trevor Mathison and Udit Duseja’s collaged fragments of music, words, and electronic noise seem beamed in from outer space, where they’ve floated for decades. Given that about 70 percent of the films made in the silent era have been lost, Bradley imagined that Lime Kiln Club Field Day was not an anomaly and sought, in turn, to materialize a missing archive of moving images of Black Americans as joyous and progressive as Williams’s film. Both the single-channel America and the multichannel installation version comprise twelve short films, occasionally intercut, and all set between 1915 and 1926, some depicting scenes from everyday life, some celebrating the achievements of Black historical.
figures such as Bessie Coleman, the first American to receive an international pilot's license. The handmade props and set are accurate to the period, and the performers have a gravity that goes beyond that of actors playing dress-up. Whether children or adults, they are contemporary bearers of their own histories. Shot in luminous, dense, 35-mm black-and-white with a gliding, floating camera, every image is exquisite. The installation at MoMA employs four transparent eight-foot-wide white screens suspended and fanning out from a central support. The digitally transferred film material is projected from opposite corners so that images are superimposed and ghosted (filtered through multiple transparencies). Not simply a collaboration among technicians, performers, and artisans, Bradley’s *America* through its image and sound structure also invites participation by viewers, who may find inside this time capsule a way to envision a new world.
Revealing Lost Archives of Black Cinema and Creating New Ones

Hyperallergic talks to director Garrett Bradley about gaps in film preservation, her new film "America," and the retrospective it’s a part of at BAM.

by Dessane Lopez Cassell
October 10, 2019

From America (2019), dir. Garrett Bradley (courtesy of the filmmaker)
Since 2014, filmmaker Garrett Bradley has been deeply invested in archives both lost and extant. It was that year that she first learned about *Lime Kiln Club Field Day*, one of the earliest feature films with an all-Black cast. It was shot in 1913 but abandoned by its white producers, until years later MoMA curator Ron Magliozi unearthed its unlabelled, unedited footage from the museum’s vaults. Fascinated by the film, and spurred by a report from the Library of Congress on the tenuous physical state of early cinematic works, Bradley embarked on a years-long project to start filling the gaps that existed in the LOC’s archives of Black cinema. The result is a black-and-white cinematic omnibus entitled *America*, which currently exists as both a 30-minute short and a multi-channel installation. Composed of 12 silent interconnected vignettes that draw upon Black history, *America* is deeply rooted in Bradley’s adopted home of New Orleans, where she’s been living and making films for the last ten years.

Yet busy as she’s been with this ambitious, multi-layered project, Bradley’s also been on a roll in other realms. Her 2019 short *AKA* was included in the Whitney Biennial, and earlier this year she won the Philip Guston Rome Prize. This month, she’ll return to New York to present *America* as the centerpiece of Garrett Bradley’s America: A Journey Through Race and Time, a film series kicking off at BAM tomorrow.

Having spent the better part of a year assisting with elements of the *Lime Kiln* project while a fellow at MoMA, I’d been eagerly awaiting an opportunity to see the finished version of *America* since I first met Bradley on one of her visits to the museum. Fascinated by the film, I reached out to discuss her work in New Orleans, recreating history, and her interest in revealing lost archives while simultaneously creating new ones.
Hyperallergic: Let’s talk about what pushed you to first start thinking about making America.

Garrett Bradley: In 2014, which seems like so long ago now, an article had been written in the New York Times about MoMA’s recent discovery of what they thought to be the very first feature-length film with an all-Black cast and integrated production starring Bert Williams, who at the time was making more money than the president and was a performer, a recording artist, and a vaudeville actor. [The film, Lime Kiln Club Field Day] was made in 1913 and had never been finished. It was found basically as a series of assembled outtakes at the museum. Ron spearheaded its restoration; he really took it on and assembled it into the narrative structure that [it has now], bringing in literal detectives to come in and read lips to figure out what the dialogue was. They identified members of the cast and put a ton of resources into understanding why it was so significant, validating it in a lot of ways.

I think, for the first time I had seen in work that early, it was able to be beautiful and depicted these acts of leisure and joy. And it really came to me that [Williams wearing blackface] was actually a bit of a strategy — that he in many ways was sacrificing himself for that purpose and for the visibility. That really attracted me to the work.

Cinematically, it was also just beautiful. There were these incredible tracking shots. One of them was on a merry-go-round, and I just thought it was incredibly formally innovative, given the time period. And Bert himself is incredibly nuanced as a performer, which is not something that I think we’re used to seeing from work that early.
And then, at the bottom of that article that I’d read in the *Times*, there was this little survey that the Library of Congress had done that stated that 70% of American feature-length films made between 1912 and 1929 were missing. A lot of them were made of nitrate and not preserved. So [America] is really an assumption and a visual chronology of what it would mean to have all of that work still around. I liked this question of, well if there are 7,500 films that are missing and they found this one film from 1913 and it’s super progressive, what would it mean if all of that body of work was super progressive? How would we understand ‘Black cinema’ as being something that isn’t just a wave or movement in time, but this continuous simultaneous thread in ‘American cinema’? And so I basically was like, well, I’m going to start with 12 films, and I want to start with 1915 because its ... an interesting year to begin, because it’s what potentially foregrounded and ended the source material that I’m looking at.

H: You allude to Birth of a Nation. It’s a film that looms large in any discussion of cinema, and specifically any discussion of the representation of Black people in cinema [some even speculate that it may be the reason Lime Kiln was never released]. Because [its legacy] has persisted through these really nefarious anti-Black stereotypes in cinema for many decades, I wonder if you could also discuss the importance of mining history, and specifically the role of recreation of that history in your work.

GB: Yeah, with *America* in particular, it was such an exciting, and for me at least, very rare opportunity to both recreate history and also work with communities and individuals who are actively building history in New Orleans. Blacksmithing, for instance, and iron work in general, was a huge part of the industry in Louisiana for hundreds of years, and it’s less so now, but there are families that are still actively doing this kind of work and who are less visible. So being able to document them in the shop and the types of work that they did ... and working with some of the
Buffalo Soldiers, which is a historically Black social aid and pleasure club, a horse riding club. (They’re not so much cowboys, but really more connected to a sort of militaristic history.) Being able to work with the Sojourner Truth Neighborhood Center, which is a place where I taught for a long time and opens its doors to a wide range of students who are looking for stuff to do after school and keeps them off the street ... being able to work with those communities in the process of re-illustrating history was this great opportunity to both document and archive at the same time.

![From America (2019), dir. Garrett Bradley (courtesy of the filmmaker)](image)

**H:** I’m actually glad that you bring up New Orleans, because I know the film is really anchored there. You’ve lived there for 10 years now, and I know a few of your other films have also revolved around the city, like your first feature [Below Dreams] and your 2017 short Alone, among others. Could you discuss what first attracted you to the city, and the ways it continues to influence your practice?

**GB:** I’m from New York originally, and I was going back during my summer break [from school in Los Angeles], and I started taking these Greyhound buses between New York and New Orleans and became kind of addicted to it. I was meeting a lot of people my age from many different walks of life and taking their photos and then recording them with my little tape recorder, asking them broad questions about where they were going, what they wanted in life, what they thought was preventing them from [getting those things].

And around that same time, there was an article published — it was the *New York Times Magazine*, actually — called ‘What Is It About 20-Somethings?’ And it was this really beautiful layout of mostly kids from Brooklyn who were our age who just looked amazing, and it was like, ‘Oh my God, everyone’s so overeducated and can’t
get a job. Isn’t that shitty and unfair? And it was such the antithesis of the narrative I was directly experiencing, of the people I was meeting who were also very much part of this generation. And so that became my first film, or my first film that other people saw.

[Both laugh]

GB: And it premiered at Tribeca.

H: This was Below Dreams.

GB: Yeah. And in the process, I decided to leave school, leave Los Angeles and move to New Orleans specifically to make that project, because I had actually tried to find the people who I had met to be in the film and couldn’t. I also didn’t have any money or resources to hire a casting director. And so I moved there … I went on Craigslist and cast people from there. Everyone in the film, I met through
Craigslist. After about six months of rehearsing with them, shooting, and rewriting the material, I stayed in touch with a lot of them. Desmond [Watson] was one of the guys in the film. I became very close friends with his girlfriend, who seven years later was in *Alone*. And [in that film] we see that Desmond’s been arrested and [sent to] a private prison for about a year and a half, and that was the beginning of that short.

And so my work, it’s all kind of tied together. If you watch any of it consecutively, you see a lot of the same faces. And I stayed in the South because I’m interested in the beginning of our history. I’m interested in the genesis of America, and I find that New Orleans has been a place that has allowed me to both be in commune and community with people, and also in observance of the problems that exist there. And that’s what my work is about, trying to sift through the past and through these problems from a contemporary point of view. It’s harder to do, I think, in cities like New York or LA, where it’s all very focused on the future.

![Image](From *Alone* (2017), dir. Garrett Bradley (courtesy of the filmmaker))

**H:** That brings me back to America again, and specifically to the way you’ve framed it, as a sort of ‘challenge’ to a dominant and often very belittling conception of cinema from the African diaspora. You propose it instead as a way of refuting ‘cultural amnesia’ through the lens of achievement. I’m curious to hear more about your decision to emphasize achievement when it comes to representing blackness and what you’re hoping that will do.

**GB:** Yeah, that’s a really good question. In some ways it’s an opportunity for me to make a distinction between proving achievement and just kind of showing it and documenting it. I’m definitely understanding the world, and myself, through images more than anything else ... One of the insecurities and challenges that I’ve always had as a filmmaker — when I was in film school, for instance — was that I’ve always believed in beauty as something that does actually incite action. And so a lot of the time I would lose the narrative arc of things or the structural elements of traditional narrative cinema. It sometimes made me feel that I wasn’t a good
traditional narrative cinema. It sometimes made me feel that I wasn’t a good filmmaker or that I shouldn’t be making films, because I wasn’t good at telling stories in this more linear way. But images were always where I felt like I could say everything that I needed to say.

So working on this project was an opportunity for me to tell history in a way that anybody who was watching it could push pause at any moment, and that image would have everything in it. We would have all of history in it, and that would include achievement, you know? It could be on a cereal box, or a billboard, or on a family table. And so that was a goal, to be like ‘Fuck it, this is what I can do.’ This is how I can offer something in this space, you know?

**H:** Definitely, and I love the intimacy of what you’re saying, this idea of any still frame of America acting almost like a keepsake for a Black family, which we don’t think of with arthouse cinema.

All of this brings me to another question that I had about the film. You shot it on black and white 35mm film, which is the kind of stock that was used for old Hollywood films, much like the ones you’re referencing at various moments. While you later transferred it to video, this ends up producing a vision that, to me, blurs the line between the contemporary and the archival. I’m wondering if you could talk about some of the reasons behind your choice to shoot on physical film.
GB: Well, first and foremost, I wanted to shoot on film because it has the highest lifespan of any format that exists. I think it’s like 500 years, which far surpasses any hard drive or disc or anything. And so I think that starting with something that I knew would be preserved and saved was really important. The project itself is in very close alignment with the Library of Congress. We built an archive there called ‘America,’ and its purpose was to then take the negatives and have them stored there.

The intention was always that when we screened the work — whether as an installation in a museum or in a theatrical space — we’d tie it to an educational component. At the New Orleans Museum of Art, where I did a big installation [for *Bodies of Knowledge*], [we did] a free film workshop where young people got an opportunity to learn about making their own films. [Those films] then went into the archive with the 12 films that I made, with the idea being that we’ll fill this gap of 7,500 films with work that’s been made not just by me, but by many, many other people, and specifically young people, with the focus being on kind of anything they want.

![From America (2019), dir. Garrett Bradley (courtesy of the filmmaker)](image)

Shooting on film was also an important way of constraining myself to the formal limitations of this time period that we were working in. I liked having to be as precise as possible with my shot lists. I drew out every scene and then gave that to the camera person. Every image you’re seeing came from a drawing, and that was my way of making sure we weren’t running through film right away, but also a way
of bringing two things I love together [filmmaking and drawing].

**H:** I want to pick up on what you said earlier about your casting process. In America, there are a few moments where children play a really big role. I’m thinking of this one beautiful scene, where a group of boys are huddled and laughing together. Could you talk about why that was important for the film?

**GB:** There were several different reasons that came to be. The kids we see are ones I had relationships with as an educator at the Sojourner Truth Center. My job there was to teach them video, and so after school, we would do these classes that were really about just allowing them to create a visual language that was free and not necessarily bound by limiting expectations of what it means to make ‘real’ or ‘good’ film. It was very much about them finding their own aesthetic, and they also happened to be Boy Scouts. So for me it was just a great opportunity to include them in a project that I was working on outside of the classroom. They could see what I did for my other job and have an opportunity to see what they could be doing one day if they chose to keep making films. I also just loved the idea of having Black and brown Boy Scouts, in cinema on celluloid, archived and documented in a way that we don’t typically see. I wanted to give them an opportunity to see themselves with an American flag behind them, to have the camera be looking up at them as if they were new icons, you know?

*From America (2019), dir. Garrett Bradley (courtesy of the filmmaker)*
H: Absolutely, and this idea of creating new icons and specifically positioning Black children with an American flag behind them strikes me as a way of reinforcing the fact that Black Americans are ‘American’ too and have the right to claim that identity, regardless of what others say, similarly to what you do with the title of the film.

GB: Yeah, to be honest with you, [the title] was something I was a little bit shy about, giving my project such a huge weighted name. But I think for me, it was twofold — reinforcing this idea that you just beautifully articulated, which was to make a case for inclusivity and the beauty of that, and it also was something I thought of in terms of the way in which projects live in the world once they’re made, with the internet and these marketing and outreach campaigns. And so it was a great opportunity to think, ‘Okay, well why don’t we use a really common word?’ In the same way that we’re trying to create new images, new icons.

H: I do want to discuss your upcoming film series, which starts October 11 at BAM. For a full week, America is going to be screening every night as the centerpiece of a program that will pair it with classics like Stormy Weather, and also more contemporary films like Hale County This Morning, This Evening, some of Julie Dash’s trailblazing shorts, and of course, with Lime Kiln Club Field Day. I’d love to hear from you about some of your hopes for what viewers will take away from the film by seeing it in these different contexts.

GB: [pauses]

H: It’s a big question.
GB: Yeah, it is, and I really appreciate it because it offers an opportunity to go back
to the heart and soul of what the project is, which for me was always about
generosity, and about inclusion and discovery. And I learned so much in the process
of doing research to make this film and watching hundreds of films who had no
credits associated with them. And then I think about Julie Dash being the first Black
woman to ever get major distribution for a feature film in the ’90s and having not
made another feature since then, despite being a genius.

And so this trend [of exclusion] continues, but I think that for me, it’s less about
having a conversation about what’s wrong and more about an opportunity to just
start doing [the work]. And I really credit Ashley [Clark] for spearheading this, for
just starting to include people and talk about what’s been missed while
simultaneously breaking trends. I think that America is a pretty abstract short black-
and-white silent film about Black history, about American history, and how that
history shows. It’s aiming to both reveal a lost archive while also creating a
contemporary one. And I hope the whole program, as a riff on that spirit, offers a
meditation on what we’ve missed, but also how to make up for it simultaneously.

Garrett Bradley’s America: A Journey Through Race and Time screens October 11
through October 17 at BAM Rose Cinemas (Peter Jay Sharp Building, 30 Lafayette Ave,
Brooklyn). The series is curated by Ashley Clark, Senior Programmer of Cinema at BAM.