



Bert Williams REDISCOVERED

Featuring live music by **Theaster Gates &
The Black Monks of Mississippi** with **Marvin Tate**

Introduction by **Jacqueline Najuma Stewart**
University of Chicago

Commentary by **Ron Magliozzi**
Museum of Modern Art

May 15, 2015 | 7pm
Logan Center for the Arts Performance Hall
915 E. 60th St., University of Chicago

Bert Williams Lime Kiln Club Field Day (USA, 1913) MoMA archive assembly. 64 min at 17fps. Produced by Biograph Co. for Klaw and Erlanger in Bronx, New York studio and locations, Directors Edwin Middleton, T. Hayes Hunter, Sam Corker Jr. With Bert Williams, Odessa Warren Grey, Walker Thompson, Henry Troy, Abbie Mitchell, J. Wesley Jenkins, Sam Lucas, Julius Glenn, J. Leubrie Hill, Emma Reed, Billy Harper, Sam Corker, Jr., Tom Brown and members of The Frogs and J. Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies stage companies

The Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film Biograph Collection.

The unassembled rushes for 'Bert Williams Lime Kiln Club Field Day' survive without inter-titles which would have served to help decipher its storyline. Lacking that guide, we tentatively offer this summary:

Man about town and resident schemer Bert Williams is on the lookout for the next opportunity to advance his interests. As a member of the fraternal Lime Kiln Club headed by Brother Gardner, he becomes involved in a contest with rival suitors to win the hand of the local beauty. Serenading with his banjo under her window one night, Bert is doused with a bucket of water dumped on him by the Girl's unsympathetic mother.

Backed by white speculators, the club organizes its annual field day for black townfolk who assemble outside the club bar and parade to the fairground led by a marching band. The day's activities include dining on fried chicken and ice cream, wrestling for loose shoes and a greased pig, a watermelon eating contest and a footrace which Bert wins against a pint-sized competitor.

Eyeing a man with a jug of gin, Bert sees the drink being hidden and retrieves it for a taste before accidentally knocking the jug into a well. Undaunted, he writes "Gin Spring" on the well enclosure and calls fairgoers over to sample the tasty polluted waters. Suddenly finding

himself an entrepreneur, he sells his "discovery" to his rivals for a handful of cash and goes off with the girl for a day of food and fun. On an open air merry-go-round, they share candy and grab for the brass ring as a jealous suitor stalks them.

That evening, Bert and the Girl arrive at the Lime Kiln Club dressed in their finest for the Grand Ball and join in the performance of a jubilant Cakewalk. Meanwhile, Bert's rivals, having discovered the "gin well" to be nothing but water by day's end, gather angrily in the ball's ante room. Brother Gardner telephones a white solicitor who appears on the dance floor and forces Bert to sign what appears to be an IOU. His rivals are satisfied, but the evening is spoiled and ball goers leave the hall. Bert and the Girl share their frustration with this turn of events as they walk arm in arm to her gate.

At this point the rushes contain a choice of in-camera fades that suggest alternate endings may have been contemplated. The final scene

- a. ends with an in-camera fade out on a shot of Bert and the Girl stealing a long goodnight kiss at the gate;
- b. is interrupted by the return of the Girl's mother, ending with an in-camera fade out on Bert alone in contemplation at the gate;
- c. is interrupted by the return of the Girl's mother, ending with an in-camera fade out on Bert as we walks away;
- d. is a combination of in-camera fades: Bert alone at the gate with in-camera fade to an imagined longer kiss ending with in-camera fade out as Bert walks off screen.

Ron Magliozzi, Associate Curator, Department of Film, MoMA, 2015

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