UNIX File System

COS 316: Principles of Computer System Design

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Figure 1: [3]

A Brief History of UNIX: 1970s

- Developed at AT&T Bell Labs following demise of the “Multics” project
- “Unics” began as a rewrite of “Multics” (Multiplexed Information and Computer Services)
  - “Uniplexed Information and Computing Service”, because early versions were single-tasking
  - Naming credit: Prof. Brian Kernighan
- Berkeley Software Distribution (BSD) follows Ken Thompson’s sabbatical at UC Berkeley

A Brief History of UNIX: 1980s

- AT&T free to sell computers after Bell Systems breakup
  - AT&T UNIX versions turn proprietary
- Flurry of non-AT&T UNIX variants
  - Academic: Minix, Mach microkernels
  - GNU – “free” alternative to UNIX
  - NeXTStep (OS X predecessor), SunOS, Xenix

Figure 2: [1]

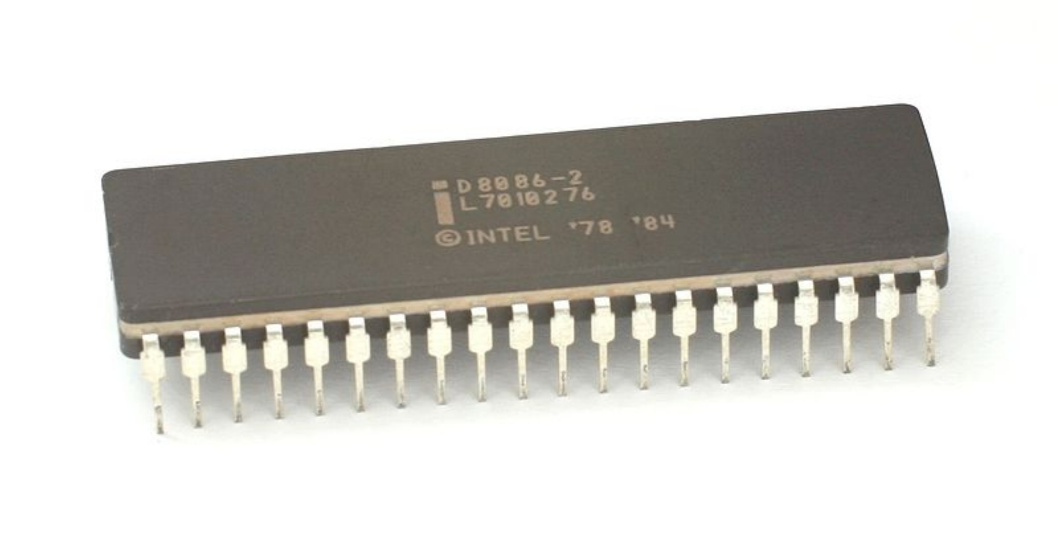

Figure 3: [2]

A Brief History of UNIX: 1990s & Beyond

- BSD rewritten following copyright claims, emerges as various offshoots
  - (FreeBSD, NetBSD, OpenBSD, DragonflyBSD, ...)
- Linux + GNU, fill void during BSD copyright dispute
- Apple uses NeXTSTEP & BSD as basis for OS X
- Android, iOS

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- From “mini”-computers to todays rack-scale servers and personal devices alike!
- The UNIX file system has been even more influential and constant.

Why File Systems?

- Common themes in UNIX systems:
  - User oriented
  - Multiple applications
  - Time sharing
- Need a way to store and organize persistent data

Key question: how to let users *organize* and *locate* their data on persistent storage?

Key Abstraction

- Data is organized into “files”
  - A linear array of bytes of arbitrary length
  - Meta data about the bytes (modification and creation time, owner, permissions)
- Files organized into “directories”
  - A list of other files or sub-directories
- Common root directory named `"/"`
  - Contrast with drive letters in Windows

UNIX File System Layers

Block layer	organizes persistent storage into fix-sized blocks
File layer	organizes blocks into arbitrary-length files
Inode number layer	names files as uniquely numbered inodes
Directory layer	human-readable names for files in a directory
Absolute path name layer	a global root directory

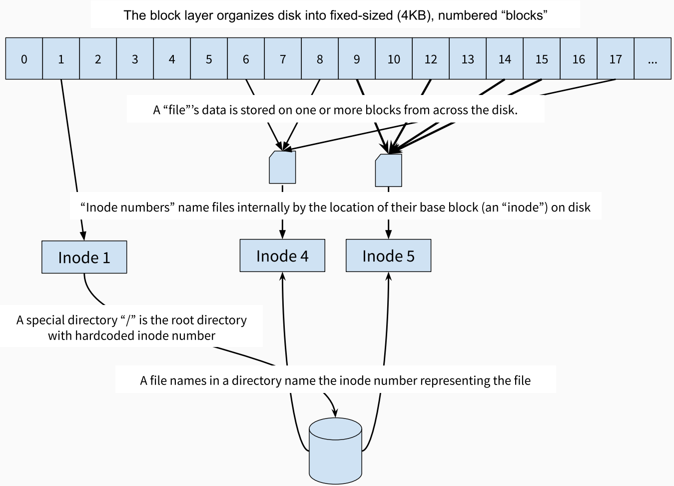

Figure 4: The UNIX File System's Naming Hierarchy

UNIX File System Layers

For each of these we'll look at:

- Values
- Names
- Allocation mechaniem
- Lookup mechanism

And ask:

- How portable?
- How general?
- Can it isolate? Multiplex?

Principle

Names in a system should minimally abstract underlying resources to achieve goal

Block layer

- Underlying resources differ
  - Tape has contiguous magnetic stripe
  - Disk has plates and arms
  - NAND flash (SSDs) even more complex to deal with wear leveling, data striping...
- ***Values***: fix-sized "blocks" of contiguous persistent memory
- ***Names***: integer block numbers

Block layer: Allocation

Hardware specific, but let's just pretend our storage device is in-memory

```
typedef block uint8_t[4096]

# There is some hardware-specific translation from
# blocks to, e.g., plate number and offset
struct device {
  block blocks[N]
}
```

Block layer: Allocation

Super Block: a special block number to keep a bitmap of occupied blocks

```
struct super_block {
  int32_t total_size
  int32_t free_block_map
}
```

Superblock	Free Block Map	34	35	36	37	...

Block layer: Lookup

```
struct device {
  block blocks[N]
}

def (device *device) block_number_to_block(int32_t block_num) returns bloc
    return device.blocks[block_num + 1]
```

Block layer: Portable? General? Isolation? Multiplexing?

How portable?

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How portable?

- Can be (and has been!) implemented efficiently for most persistent storage media
  - Tape, HDDs, floppy disks, optical drives... even network attached storage!
- SSDs not a great fit due to need for wear leveling
  - Flash controllers are complex and obscure computers that hide flash behind block interface

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Isolation? Multiplexing?

- Block numbers are global, they always represent the same physical location
- Enables *some* multiplexing, because layer keeps track of free/used blocks

File layer

A *file* is a linear array of bytes of arbitrary length:

- May span multiple blocks
- May grow or shrink over time

How do we keep track of which blocks belong to which file?

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Names: References to inode structs

Values: arrays of bytes up to size `N`

Allocation: reuse block layer to store new inode structs in blocks

File Layer

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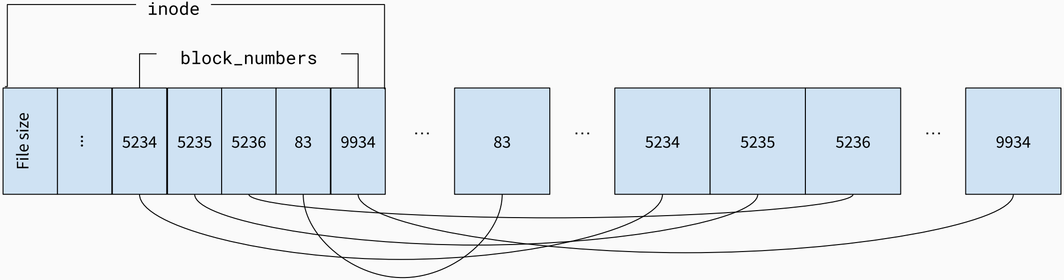

Figure 5: The inode struct is stored in a block and points to blocks containing file data

File layer: Lookup

```
struct inode {
  int32_t block_numbers[N];
  int32_t filesize
}
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def (inode *inode) offset_to_block(int offset) returns block:
  block_idx = offset / BLOCKSIZE
  block_num = inode.block_numbers[block_idx]
  return device.block_number_to_block[block_num]
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$((4096 - 4)/4) * 4096 \approx 4MB$

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Isolation or multiplexing?

A name always refers to particular data, so no inherent isolation here.

But, multiplexing is provided by allowing efficient allocation of underlying shared resource

Inode number layer

- Names: Inode *numbers*
- Values: Inode structs

Inode number layer

- Names: Inode *numbers*
- Values: Inode structs
- Allocation
  - Can re-use block allocation and block numbers
  - File systems often use special inode allocation to avoid slow seeks on disk for common operations
- Lookup
  - If re-using block allocation:
    $inode\_number\_to\_inode \equiv block\_number\_to\_block$

Recap so far

- Name files by inode number (e.g. 43982), translate to inode structs
- Inodes translate to a list of ordered block numbers that store the file's data
- Block numbers translate to blocks—the actual file data

Given a inode number, we can get an ordered byte array.

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Remaining issues:

1. Numbers are convenient names for machines, but not for humans
2. How do we *discover* files?

Directory layer

Structure files into collections called “directories”. Each file in a directory gets a human readable name—i.e. an (almost) arbitrary ASCII string

- ***Names***: Human readable names within a “directory”
  - `resume.docx`, `a.out`, `profile.jpg`…
- ***Values***: Inode numbers

Directories can contain files as well as other *sub-directories*

Directory layer

File name	Inode num
docs/	432
mail/	512
.bashrc	3
todo.txt	54

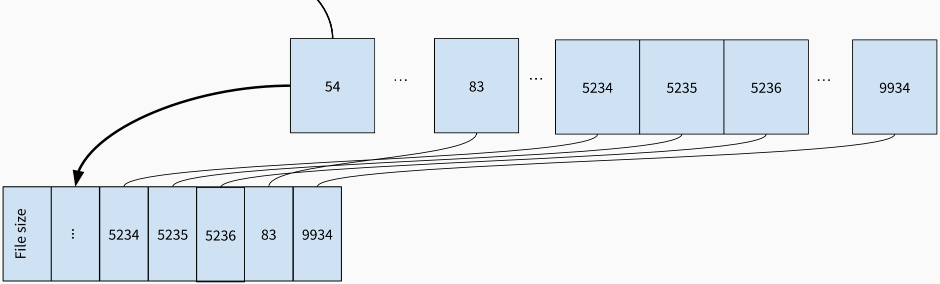

Figure 6: A directory is a special type of file that maps filenames to inode numbers

Directory layer: Allocation

```
struct dirent {
  char[MAX_NAME_LENGTH] filename;
  int     inode_number;
}

// Add type field to inode
struct inode {
  ...
  bool directory;
}

typedef directory inode; // Only when directory == true
```

Directory Layer: Lookup

```
def (dir *directory) lookup(string filename) returns inode_number:
  for block_num in dir.block_numbers:
    directory = block_number_to_block(block_num) as struct dirent[]
    file_inode = directory.find(|dirent| dirent.filename == filename)
    if file_inode >= 0:
      return file_inode
  return -1
```

Directory Layer: Lookup

Paths name files by joining directory and file names with /: `path/to/file.txt`

```
def (dir *directory) lookup(string path) returns inode_number:
  let (next_path, rest) = path.split_first('/')
  for block_num in dir.block_numbers:
    directory = block_number_to_block(block_num) as struct dirent[]
    if inode = directory.find(|dirent| dirent.filename == filename):
      if rest.empty():
        return inode
      else
        next_dir = block_number_to_block(inode)
        if !next_dir.directory: panic("Uh oh, can't traverse a file")
        return next_dir.lookup(rest as directory)
  return -1
```

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- Assumes a hierarchical struture to file system.
- Works poorly for relational or structured data
  - “please find all YAML files with the field `foo`”
  - Alternate approaches: relational model: WinFS, GNOME Storage (both defunct)

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Isolation? Multiplexing?

- All lookups are relative to some base directory!
- Can isolate applications by giving them different starting points (e.g. working directory)

Absolute path name layer

- Each running UNIX program has a "working directory" (`wd`)
- File lookups are relative to the `wd`
- What if we want to name files outside of our `wd`'s directory hierarchy?
  - E.g. share files between users
- What if we want globally meaningful paths?

Absolute path name layer

Solution:

- Special name /, hardcoded to a specific inode number
- All directories are part of a global file system tree rooted at /
  - the "root" directory

Names: One name, /

Values: Hardcoded inode number, e.g., 2

Allocation: nil

Lookup: $\lambda\_ \rightarrow 2$

Naming in UNIX File System: Recap

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5. Inode structs translate to an ordered list of block numbers

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6. Block numbers translate to blocks—the actual file data

Up Next

- Problems with location-addressed naming (e.g. UNIX file system)
    - Transactions
    - Versioning
    - Data corruption
- We'll look at Git's content addressable store
- Please read chapter 10 of the Git book: Git Internals

References

[1]
A Commodore 64, an 8-bit home computer introduced in 1982 by Commodore International.

[2]
Intel 8086. Wikimedia Commons.

[3]
PDP11/40 as exhibited in Vienna Technical Museum. Wikimedia Commons.