Oscar Micheaux (January 2, 1884- March 25, 1951)

Oscar Micheaux, generally regarded as the first black feature film director, was an African-American writer, director, and author of seven novels and more than forty films. Often associated with a spirit of uplift that would become prevalent in the Harlem Renaissance, Micheaux’s work was independently envisioned and yet addressed broader black audiences. In 1917, following the release of Micheaux’s third novel, *The Homesteader*, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company, an early black film company, attempted to purchase the rights to turn Micheaux’s novel into a film. However, Micheaux insisted on creative control and turned down the offer, opting to found his own film studio in 1918: the Micheaux Film and Book Company. Micheaux’s second film, *Within Our Gates* (1920) is considered his most important and is often seen as a response to D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). One of the few black directors in the first half of the twentieth century, Micheaux is known for his race films, which often featured quick cuts, flashbacks and complicated narratives that portrayed America as unstable and fractured. To appease state censors, Micheaux often recut his films, creating different versions in different cities and thus prevented a singular vision of his film. This style combined with the large communal casts and emphasis on uplift, provided a new kind of form and a different type of modernism. Despite his prolific output, spanning the silent and sound era, many of Micheaux’s films are lost today.

References and further reading:

Bowser, P., Gaines, J., Musser, C. (eds.) (2001) *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Green, J. (2000) *Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

List of Works:

Novels:

*Conquest: The Story of a Negro Pioneer* (1913)

*The Homesteader* (1917)

*The Story of Dorothy Stanfield* (1946)

Films:

*Within Our Gates* (1920)

*The Symbol of the Unconquered* (1920)

*Body and Soul* (1924)

*The Girl from Chicago* (1933)

Paratextual:

*Within Our Gates* (1920)directed by Oscar Micheaux (uploaded by The Riverbends Genealogical and Historical Society) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1E0NrcnwAE>

*Murder in Harlem* (1935) directed by Oscar Micheaux (uploaded by The Riverbends Genealogical and Historical Society) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AM3gHmZu42Q>

A 44-cent Stamp released by the United States Postal Service in 2010: <http://www.virtualstampclub.com/2010/2010_micheaux.jpg>

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