

Devoted to African American Film History and Preservation

OSCAR MICHEAUX SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Volume 8, Spring 2000

The Flying Ace from the Norman Collection, Black Film Center/Archive



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Director of Black Film Center/Archive Retires Leaves a Rich and Lasting Legacy

Phyllis Klotman, founder of the Black Film Center/Archive at Indiana University-Bloomington, has served as its director since its inception in 1981. At the close of the decade we marvel at her many accomplishments in the work of facilitating the restoration and preservation of Black films through the archive. The Center was established to preserve Black films, since films by and about Blacks, from 1895 to the present, had been rapidly disappearing due to technical indifference to preservation, lack of established outlets for films, and inadequate teaching resources.

As the Center's holdings expanded the archive made available to scholars and researchers its collection of over eight hundred films (historic and contemporary) in 16 mm and 8 mm and videocassette formats, as well as its collection of film files, manuscripts, correspondence, slides, stills, posters, lobby cards, film company records, memorabilia, etc. The BFC/A conducts screening/lectures for schools and community organizations through its outreach program. It also researches and records current data for a

Black filmography. To date the archive has catalogued some 4,000 films related to the Black experience. The filmography was published in part in 1979 as *Frame by Frame: A Black Filmography (1890-1978)* and in 1997 as *Frame by Frame II: A Filmography of the African American Image, 1978-1994*. Additionally, Klotman was instrumental in compiling the works of some six independent Black filmmakers including the works of Charles Burnett, Kathleen Collins, Julie Dash, Bill Gunn, Alile Sharon Larkin, and Charles Lane which was published as *Screenplays of the African American Experience* (Indiana University Press).

Considering one of the many collections housed in the BFC/A, Klotman relates how she obtained the Richard Norman papers: "Norman was director of the Norman Film Manufacturing Company of Florida and produced all-black cast films during a period when he competed with filmmakers such as Oscar Micheaux and George and Noble

Johnson of the Lincoln Motion Picture Company. Our acquisition of Norman's business records, correspondence, posters, lobby cards, publicity materials, etc. came about in an interesting way." She said that one of her former students had gone to graduate school at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and he called to inform her that several Black cast films had surfaced in Tyler Texas, and advised her to review the collection. "I attended a film premiere with Richard Schickel and discovered that many of these 'lost' Black films already existed in the Library of Congress and elsewhere, but Schickel wrote on the find anyway. Richard Norman, Jr.'s daughter read Schickel's account in *Time* which quoted me, and that's when Norman called from Florida asking if the BFC/A would like to have his father's film materials. ... Most phenomenal [in this collection was the] correspondence between Norman and Oscar Micheaux, George P. Johnson, Anita Bush, Bessie Coleman, Lawrence Chenault, aspiring actors, and theater managers." With the assistance of Gloria Gibson, who served as assistant director of the Center, the collection was inventoried, and Norman's film, *The Flying Ace*, was screened again after spending decades in storage.

Klotman says, "The Norman Collection put the center

in a different place with regard to holdings. Previous acquisitions had been of individual films acquired whenever funding allowed. We were anxious to fulfill our objectives of supporting independent African American filmmakers by acquiring their work, providing screening opportunities through festivals and conferences, and developing ... audiences for the future. The newsletter, *Black Camera*, was initiated to share information about the Black film/filmmakers and news of all the archive's holdings."

The BFC/A continues to encourage filmmakers to deposit original prints and film materials in the archive, and that has happened with Byllye Avery, Louis Guida, Warrington Hudlin, Peter Davis, and a number of others. Davis's work on South Africa has added a new dimension to the center's holdings. To contact the Black Film Center/Archive:

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News of Interest

In May of 1999, The American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco staged a well-received production of *The First Picture Show*, a new play developed by David Gordon and Ain Gordon. *The First Picture Show* concerns the early silent film industry and the forgotten African American, Asian American, and women filmmakers who have been left out of film history. It includes a character based upon Oscar Micheaux. For additional information contact: Jessica Werner, American Conservatory Theatre, Publications Department, jwerner@act-sfbay.org.

Emory University announces the recent acquisition of materials from the Norman Film Manufacturing Company which was located in Jacksonville, Florida and operated by Richard Norman. Norman specialized in producing African American films in the 1920s. The Norman Film Manufacturing Company memorabilia will be added to the already extensive Woodruff Library Special Collections. The new purchase, including advertising materials such as posters, lobby cards, and press books, will be exhibited at the University in the Spring of 2000. For additional information contact: Matthew Bernstein, Film Studies Program, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322, Phone 404/727-3466 or FAX 404/727-6253, email: mbernst@emory.edu.

July 1, 1999: The Association of Moving Image Archivists

profiled the restoration of *The Symbol of the Unconquered* by Turner Classic Movies. The world premiere of the restored early silent film from pioneer Oscar Micheaux appeared on TCM on July 1, 1999.

July 31-August 5, 1999: The 10th Annual Southeastern Media Institute, in conjunction with the Duke University Film and Video Program and its community partners, presented Film Heritage Week July 31 - August 5, 1999, a series of free, public screenings and discussions on the historical and cultural dimensions of cinema. The program explored the importance of reclamation and rediscovery in our understanding of our cinematic archive and national history. Oscar Micheaux's *The Symbol of the Unconquered* was screened at the Hayti Heritage Center in Durham, N.C. as part of the event.

September 25, 1999: *The Symbol of the Unconquered* (1920), with musical accompaniment by Don Shabkie, was screened at the "Orphans of the Storm" conference held at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. The conference organized by Dan Streible was designed to explore film preservation and address the need to save "Orphan Films" in the Digital Age. It was held from September 23-25, 1999 and featured a vast array of archivists, scholars, curators, filmmakers, programmers and collectors.

The Symbol of the Unconquered: Rhythmic Leitmotifs

Perspectives on Max Roach's Musical Score

By Malcolm Miranda-Monsman

Max Roach's film score for Oscar Micheaux's *The Symbol of the Unconquered* is an example of a unique compositional process in the treatment of rhythm in the jazz idiom. As one of the 20th Century's finest "bebop" jazz musicians as well as a true "Master of Time" in the performance of modern drumset, Roach approaches the score for Micheaux's film with solo drumset. Although this ap-

pears to pose severe limitations to his compositional palette, in reality it provides an avenue for a unique rhythmic construct. Roach once stated that as a drummer/composer he was interested in "Doing to rhythm what Bach did to melody." In rhythmic terms, his performance and compositional output has achieved this multilinear complexity of baroque counterpoint as well as the expressive and dramatic value of Wagner's leitmotif. Another aspect of his art is the ability to superimpose rhythms tightly and structurally such as 5/4 over 3/4. This polymetric aspect in spite of its mathematical genesis creates not only lucid rhythmic interplay but also long uninterrupted lines which achieve poetic lyricism. His famous opus Freedom Now Suite is one of the most moving jazz works dedicated to the African-American struggle for liberation in America.

In this essay, the film score to *The Symbol of the Unconquered* will be analyzed in order to illustrate how rhythm affects: Atmosphere; Temporal Motion; Characters' Psychological Frame of Mind; and finally, Inner Dilemma of

Protagonist. The distinguishing feature that pieces all of this together is the use of programmatic elements that successfully illustrate the above criteria through the use of rhythmic leitmotifs. This term refers to "rhythmic signatures" that are individually assigned to each character, important emotion, or situation.



The Hate Motive: Driscoll attacks his mother

cells which will develop as the film progresses. These rhythms are jazz-based and interpreted as "swung eighths." Occasionally they are "straightened out" but this is purely to create tension which is then resolved by resuming the swung eighths. Important in this introduction is the Tension Motive (motive the equivalent of a motif in literary criticism) which through a "sizzling" effect on a cymbal, creates not only tension but is the rhythmic cell of the Hate Motive. The use of cymbals or metallic sounds serves to exemplify unnatural tension that can only be resolved by the warmth of the drums. This is the debut of the Unconquered Motive in its first unaltered stage. This motive is interesting because it is manifested in the form of

many transformations throughout the film. Another element of tension in the atmosphere of this film is the use of hemiola superimposed with polymetric

constructs. The Unconquered Motive is itself a worthy example of this compositional application. As the rhythm is repeated over a standard 4/4 meter it 'stretches' the natural agogic accents to near rupture after looping the figure in a relentless repetition. As the Unconquered Motive stands for heroic struggle under duress, the Hate Motive plays the part of the antagonist first appearing when Driscoll attacks his own mother for exposing the origins of his race to a lady-friend. In Roach's creation of the atmosphere, he is able to conjure images of thunderstorms, beautiful sunrises, complex emotional states, as well as provide comic relief. All of this is accomplished in a very non-Western manner; through the drumset lacking harmonic and melodic capabilities, the musician communicates effectively through the mastery of "musical clichés" that translate through the listener's psychological understanding of music's function.

Temporal Motion

The term temporal motion refers to the manner in which the human mind inter-

prets the passage of time in a linear fashion. Roach controls the pacing of the action, reflective moments, and character's response to external stimuli through the use of orchestration, dynamics, metric modulation and most importantly, the judicious use of silence or



The Storm Motive: Eve stumbles in the driving rain

long temporal distances that extend between successive notes and passages. The first significant effect that Roach utilizes is the "flashback" technique.

This introduces Jefferson Driscoll and his *modus operandi* as the antagonist throughout the film. He has been scarred by his inability to accept his racial origins. Most of his time is spent attempting to hurt other African-Americans in order to distance himself from them. Painful scenes continually haunt him throughout the film—scenes reverberated by the music. In particular, Roach captures this flashback musically by revealing the source of Driscoll's Rhythmic Leitmotif which happens to be a combination of the Unconquered Motive and the Hate Motive.

The Storm Motive employs rapid subdivisions, “straight” rhythmic interpretation, rolls on the tom-toms, and fortissimo hits on the bass drum in order to simulate rain and thunder. The following morning, the Dawn Motive is used to indicate a musical change in character and the swung eighth notes become more prevalent so as to indicate the promise of a new day. The most important use of temporal motion is when the conspirators decide to use the Ku Klux Klan to force Van Allen to relinquish his land claim. In this section Roach slows the subdivisions and introduces the transformation of the Hate Motive into the Evil Deeds Motive. The use of temporal space or silence is used ingeniously when the music stops as Van Allen leaves to town for furniture and the conspirators decide to execute their plan of action. This is the Alarm Motive and it is comprised of a continuous and relentless hemiola at a very loud dynamic level.

Characters' Psychological Frame of Mind

The rhythmic Leitmotifs also emulate

the psychology of each characters' individual personality. For example, Hugh Van Allen's Rhythmic Leitmotif is full of promise with the use of New Orleans “Second Line” drum rhythm. In New Orleans funerals, the sad and somber funeral march is followed by joyous celebratory parade—the second line—with dance rhythms infused by sounds emanating from the percussion section (bass drum, snare drum, and cymbals). August Barr's Rhythmic Motive is a testament to Roach's compositional prowess. This motive is composed of the Unconquerable, Hate, and Corruption Motives. This is accomplished through the disruption of temporal continuity, sharp rhythmic stings, and rim shots; in other words, every thing is jagged and corrugated. This corruption of the rhythmic leitmotifs reflects the fallen clergymen's moral state.

The sharp percussive sounds also imitate the barking of two hounds from a symbolic hell that await you at the entrance of this ex-clergymen's domicile. After Driscoll, Barr, Stanton and Tugi decide to carry out plans to abscond with Van Allen's land then Roach creates the Corruption and Evil/Hate Motive. Tugi's Motive is based on the Unconquered theme, however, it has a foreign flair which is achieved through the use of drum effects such as rim clicks, dead strokes, and pitch bends. With all the coloristic effects it is obvious that Tugi is not at all trustworthy although he arouses one's curiosity.

Inner Dilemma of Protagonist

Jefferson Driscoll's Motive exhibits violent moods by exploiting the metallic sounds of the cymbals. The hi-hat sizzles symbolize his burning hatred. Jefferson's mother Mattie Driscoll serves as his conscience and her motive is the warmth of Mother Earth while based on the Unconquered Motive. Roach uses softer sounds and phrasing to achieve this effect. The attraction between Eve and Hugh is



A softened *Unconquered Motive* for Eve and Hugh

sonically emulated with the use of metallic sounds however; the racial hatred that is associated with the cymbals is changed to signify a strong but taboo attraction as well. Van Allen does not realize that Eve is Black so he hides his feelings for her. Roach must have understood these strong emotions so he invokes yet another interesting transformation of the Hate Motive.

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- Malcolm Miranda-Monsman is en-rolled in the Music Department at the University of Arizona at Tucson.*



The Corruption and Evil/Hate Motive: the conspirators plot against Van Allen

The Beat and Politics of Color in Oscar Micheaux's *Symbol of the Unconquered*

By Darrell Stover

The examination of the only available copy of Oscar Micheaux's *The Symbol of Unconquered* as presented to us from its recent discovery in Belgium replete with a masterful percussive soundtrack by Max Roach offers challenging insights into why Micheaux's films were deemed so controversial. Race discussions are the rage of today, yet the color line and its insidious manifestations continues to impact our daily interpersonal and societal interactions. It could rightly be said that the politics of color portrayed in this film remain with us eighty years hence.

My perspective gained in viewing this film through 21st century eyes and mindset is that color or shall we say the diversity of flesh tones offered many opportunities (in the form of "passing") and hardships (through racist oppression and self-hate). Micheaux leaves none of this to second guessing as the story of our heroine, Eve Mason, and hero, Hugh Van Allen, unfolds. Her ancestral secret is never revealed to Hugh, a fine-standing frontier savvy brother, until the film's end. Max gives their passions a funky "tapita tapita tapita tapita Ddoo Ddoo" beat of marching into love throughout. And of course, black love can't be nothing but funky.

In the dastardly role of greed and villainy, Micheaux provides us with the self-hate filled Jefferson Driscoll, who at the outset of the film has his love-interests in a Pollyanna doll dashed by the arrival of his black momma. Driscoll throughout the film despises not only other black folks, but himself to a high mark in the film. After a long due barroom butt-kicking by Hugh, Driscoll gets involved in a nasty scheme to take away Hugh's valuable land. A plan is developed that ultimately engages the services of the Ku Klux Klan and this is where

Micheaux really raises the roof in those theaters in which the film was possibly shown in the states. Max sticks with a bass backbeat punctuated by splashing cymbals to depict the Klan as he also utilized for Driscoll's thoughts and hateful actions earlier in the film.

Now comes a greater controversy that I'll try not to give totally away. The nightriders, as the Klan were so aptly christened, make their move on Hugh, but not unchallenged. Who is under those sheets? Take a guess. But most importantly who saves the day and how becomes the major topic

for discussion as Max jams the beat in high-hat vibrato and that side of the drum stick action that he has turned into a art form.

A major concern is the missing film segment that elevates the discourse surrounding the politics of color from a passive discussion to one of a heated debate. Who's responsible for removing that portion of the film? Was it Belgium film presenters, Micheaux in a move to get his film

viewed (I doubt it), archivists with race war or race pride on their minds? Will we ever know? While the answers to these questions may play like the Max Roach soundtrack on our minds, a real cerebral celebration can be achieved in Micheaux's masterstroke, of having the real heroes of the film reveal their selves through the love and unity depicted in the final scenes. Max Roach

take it away....tapita... tapita...tapita..Ddoo... Doom!

Darrell D. Stover is Director of Programming at the Hayti Heritage Center in Durham, NC. This piece was prepared to accompany a screening of The Symbol of the Unconquered at the Hayti Heritage Center.



The barroom fight where Hugh kicks Driscoll's butt



The dastardly Driscoll laughs as Eve struggles in the storm

Scratching Around

The Norman Film Manufacturing Company

By Matthew Bernstein & Dana F. White

The complete essay appeared in Griffithania 62/63 (May 1998). An edited version appears below, reprinted with permission of the authors.

It is by now a commonplace of movie history that for the “race” companies producing films for African-American audiences, the film business was a twentieth century variant of the Sisyphus myth. It was an endless struggle to raise the funds necessary for production; if the film was completed, distribution was arduous and inefficient; and the interested exhibitors amounted to a fraction of their Hollywood-affiliated counterparts and were often uncooperative to boot.

The survival rate for race companies was comparable to that of a population after a flu epidemic. From the eight such companies reportedly in business in 1918 to the more than 150 on record through 1948, only a few actually made a single film, and even fewer made more than one. Whether the financial backing came from white or black sources, the failure rate was astonishing. Other than Oscar Micheaux, few filmmakers survived two decades in the business.

The fate of the Norman Film Manufacturing Company, a 1920s white-owned-and-operated concern in northern Florida, ultimately confirms this pattern, and yet filmmaker Richard E. Norman was able to postpone the inevitable until the advent of sound films. Little was known about him, however, until the recent opening up of his business papers—office receipts, advertising materials, and business correspondence—which offer a vivid portrait of a white southern filmmaker who thrived primarily in the southeastern market. Norman excelled at

producing technically polished, highly entertaining low-budget films that were far less costly than Hollywood’s most formulaic action B movies. *The Green Eyed Monster* (1920), for example, became one of the most popular race films of the decade. This essay describes the business operations, filmmaking strategies and distribution practices of the Norman company in the 1920s.

“Scratching Around”: Race Moviemaking

Richard E. Norman (1891-1961) drifted into filmmaking. A native of Middleburg, Florida, he studied chemistry in college at Tampa. His father’s druggist business led him to develop and market several commercially unsuccessful “tonic beverages” such as Passi-Kola, a narcotic-laced passion flower libation. From novelty drinks Norman progressed to film developing and cinematography. At age twenty-one he was working out of Des Moines, Iowa, for one Capital City Film Co. (aka Capital City Manufacturing Company) which he probably owned.

During the late 1910s, besides shooting industrial shorts, Norman traveled the Midwest, producing multiple version of the “Home Talent” motion picture, films he designed to show off “municipal progress” within narrative framework, and starring the most eligible sons and daughters of small-town leaders. Norman chose officials and socialites whose narcissism and connections guaranteed week-long sell-out runs.

In 1920, Norman settled in Jacksonville, Florida, after making a promotional film there and noticing its burgeoning film business, comprised largely of New York and New Jersey

companies decamping south for the winter. In 1924, he purchased the recently departed Eagle Film company’s studio—complete with production stages, processing labs, power plant, klieg lighting, editing rooms, and a projection room—in Arlington, just across the river from Jacksonville. Between leasing studio to Yankees and using it himself, Norman looked to make these facilities pay for themselves.

What exactly drew Norman to race films is uncertain. Perhaps it was his first hand observation of the enthusiastic audiences for them in the segregated theaters where he showed his short films in the Midwest and South. To the Lincoln Motion Picture Company’s George P. Johnson, he wrote, “We were somewhat acquainted with the facts [the market for race films] when we went into the production of Negro Pictures. And

gained this information from our dealing with negro theatres on white pictures that we had made.” From mixed motives came conventional but well-made race films, both comedies and action-packed features. *The Love Bug*, a 1920 all-black two-reeler, survives only in fragmented form, and it features generically familiar Keyston or Ebony-style frantic pacing.

The Green Eyed Monster was an especially impressive feature film debut.



In a Fit of Insanity

and the Race Film Business in the 1920s

One review raved about its “horrible train wreck, a rescue from a burning automobile, a great fist fight in the railroad yards, a pistol duel between police officers and the villain, a startlingly sensational mail race and the hair-raising abduction of the heroine and her rescue by the hero after a thrilling chase on a steel monster.”



Encouraged by *The Green Eyed Monster's* success, Norman continued filmmaking in this vein, combining his staged story scenes with found footage or actualities he shot himself to create gripping five or six reelers. In the summer of 1921, Norman traveled to Oklahoma to shoot a Western, *The Bull Dogger*, at Bill Miller's 101 Ranch, which employed ten black cowboys, the legendary Bill Pickett among them.

The shooting was uncomfortable work. One year later in cool Wisconsin,

Norman would recall how in Oklahoma “I had to get out in the sun and shoot pictures when I was chasing Bulls around the field or being chased by them.” But Norman's efforts paid off. After just a few weeks, he had shot 2600 feet of “bucking, Steer Roping, Bulldogging, Calf Roping, Goat Roping, trick Roping, Steer Riding, Wild Horse Race, etc., which is the best out of the Oklahoma City and Okmulgee Round Up.” Eight hundred feet of the

four-day contest (including, among other things, a contestant thrown and killed) would be suitable for *The Bull Dogger*. For *The Crimson Skull*, he would assemble the leftovers with some purchased footage, intercutting new shots of Pickett doing some “fake rope spinning,” shooting, and “a little riding and views of Sheriffs at Boley pulling off some fake crack shot stuff.”

But *The Flying Ace* (1926), Norman's one surviving feature, attests to the high technical quality of the director's output. Adhering to the stylistic and technical standards of classical Hollywood cinema, full of irises and flashbacks, it is a thoroughly engaging and enjoyable mystery/action genre film. *The Flying Ace* focuses on a trio of small town villains—a dentist, a pilot, and a police officer—who steal a railroad's \$28,000 payroll and frame the station master, who happens to be the heroine's father.

“Abstinence from Entangling Alliances”: Financing Norman Films

There is little documentation of what Norman, or any other race film producer for that matter, spent on filmmaking. In January 1926, he spoke of spending \$4,000 to \$5,000 on a proposed film about black aviatrix Bessie Coleman, because “colored audiences are becoming more critical, especially North, and more money must be spent in production than here-to-fore;” he never contemplated spending more. One reason Norman would spend much less on his productions than Hollywood or Micheaux was because he had less to spend. Just as Norman disliked Micheaux's proselytizing on film, he did not approve of Micheaux's

financing methods, i.e., raising funds by selling stock in particular films or in his own company.

“This Fit of Insanity”: Distributing Race Films

After *The Green Eyed Monster*, Norman had a system for film financing and the formula for race filmmaking sufficiently developed so as to assure some competitive advantage. After “hitting ... only the high spots” throughout the South his first time out in 1920 with *The Green Eyed Monster*, Norman sought to extend and systematize his distribution operation. After *The Green Eyed Monster*, and except for his tour from Wisconsin in fall 1922, Norman preferred to deputize someone to travel the territories to meet and/or deliver prints, observe the showings and count the money with the house manager on the spot; this last was the best way to ensure that Norman collected his proper earnings.

By 1945, Norman had switched from distribution to exhibition, leasing a theater in an Odd Fellows hall in Crescent City, and fixing up and running theaters in Apopka and Orlando, while maintaining his lab and studio. He officially retired in 1952 and died ten years later. His widow sold off his studio in 1976.

Norman's career conforms to the general arc of race filmmaking in America during the 1920s. The struggle to find financing, the distribution inefficiencies, and the variously uncooperative and dishonest theater managers kept Norman weak enough, after the initial gold rush of 1920, to give up feature filmmaking altogether in the early sound era.

The Mad Dash to Honor Oscar Micheaux

Fourth Annual Oscar Micheaux Film Festival—Gregory, South Dakota – August 11–15, 1999

By Charlene Regester

The Fourth Oscar Micheaux Film festival held in Gregory, South Dakota, August 11–15, 1999, seemed like a mad dash either to connect or *reconnect* with Oscar Micheaux. The festival, an annual affair, has grown in size and attendance, the euphoria created by scholars and participants has magnified, the level of interest from those outside of the state has increased to epidemic proportions, and there is an ever growing fascination for those desiring to reconstruct Micheaux on the screen. It seems that the Micheaux quest for memorabilia, the inquiries about his life and his career, and the debates about the meaning behind it all are never ending, as we try to examine the legend of Micheaux, the myth and/or the man.

The excitement that inspired the first festival has continued as evident by the activities of the fourth festival which began on Thursday, August 12th. First there was a slide presentation led by Jack Broome (local historian); this was followed by a presentation by Janis Hebert Hausmann (historian and writer), who examined Micheaux's early novels that focused on life in the West; then a discussion by LeArlie Barry (local historian), who focused on Micheaux's homesteading years in Gregory; and next a historical overview of buffalo soldiers and black pioneers, led by Jack Ravage (author and historian on blacks in the West). The presentations were moderated by Marie Wirsing (faculty member of University of Colorado, Denver) and were interspersed with tours of Micheaux's homesites, of local establishments that commemorate Micheaux (such as Frank Day's Place), and of the local library to review Micheaux land documents and novels. Pearl Bowser of African Diaspora Images and director of *Midnight Ramble* led a roundtable discussion on Micheaux, followed by a screening of *Body and Soul*.

Thus Thursday seemed to establish why we had convened in Gregory—to reconnect with Micheaux's humble beginning and to engage the Western experience. As the weekend progressed, the spirit of euphoria really took hold. On Friday the festival was launched by Joyce Jefferson (researcher of black women homesteaders) and Sally Roesch Wagner (scholar and author on women pioneers in the

West) who assumed character roles of women homesteading in the west and role-played the struggles that they must have endured as they ambitiously attempted to settle the Western frontier. Drawing upon knowledge of the lives and experiences of women pioneers, these two attempted to recreate Western life, with emphasis on both gender and racial politics. This was followed by a discussion between

Dave Strain (South Dakota historian who was instrumental in having Micheaux's novels reprinted) and the author of a recent Micheaux biography, Betty Van Epps. They reviewed the publication of Micheaux's previous novels as well as contemporary writings on Micheaux. Richard Papousek (organizer of the festival) provided a time-line of Micheaux's whereabouts in Gregory and I provided a brief re-examination of Micheaux, in which I suggested that Micheaux was much more of a visionary than originally believed, and cited his revolutionary position as an almost/feminist filmmaker.

Friday's afternoon sessions focused on the contributions of Native Americans to the West and were led by Joyzelle Godfrey (local historian) who addressed the loss of land and culture by Native Americans in the Dakotas. Kevin and Pat Locke shared their Native American experience on the reservations in South Dakota. Lionel Bordeaux (president of a local college) provided an engaging discussion of his own life as a Native American attempting to become integrated into the larger culture. Victor Donville (local historian) provided a history of Native Americans. The evening ended in a most fitting manner with a dinner held at the Micheaux homestead followed by Native American dancing and the showing of a film, *Smoke Signals*, at the local drive-in theater—an experience that brought back memories for some and provided new memories for others.

A highlight of Saturday's excitement was the attendance by one of Micheaux's few living relatives, a cousin, Harley Robinson, who has roots in Kansas but resides in California. Robinson has always managed to garner attention with his first hand reports and accounts of Oscar Micheaux. The festival was also attended by Preston Holmes (an HBO producer) and Robert Bone (HBO screen



writer), apparently interested in and fascinated by Micheaux's story. Michael Unthank (Motion Picture Commission of New York) who attended a previous Micheaux festival returned because of his unending interest in Micheaux's South Dakota experience. Historian Learthern Dorsey (faculty member at University of Nebraska at Lincoln) provided an engaging discussion on Micheaux entitled "A Different View of Micheaux." This was followed by the presentation of a local resident and landowner, Emmett Kotrba who discussed the procedure required to file on a homestead and explained homesteading land claims. Pearl Bowser and I led a discussion on Micheaux's films and the reconstruction of Micheaux as both novelist and filmmaker. Micheaux's film *Swing* was screened and audiences reacted to the film in a discussion led by Bowser. The Stuckel family of South Dakota then shared their experience as homesteaders and landowners in the Dakotas, conveying a vivid

picture of how difficult life was for anyone attempting to settle in the West. The evening ended with a dinner for the festival attendees and a screening of an early film, *Eleven P.M.*, by Richard D. Maurice, an African American filmmaker from Detroit.

Sunday's events concluded the festival with a sunrise breakfast at the Micheaux homestead and a presentation by Lynette O'Neill on prairie-living. As always, I came away from this festival feeling a bit perplexed regarding how Micheaux had managed to live in the West, with few and meager resources and at a time that might at best be called insecure, racially. And I was especially happy that this festival—already the fourth of its kind—was far from disappointing. Quite the contrary; it was a mad dash—the maddest yet—to become reacquainted with the story of Oscar Micheaux, an American legend in his own right and a vital figure in the history of American film.

Oscar Micheaux "In Progress"

Books:

Robert C Leitz, III, is currently editing a volume of the Charles W. Chesnutt letters from 1906-1932., and is scheduled to be published by Stanford University Press. This project includes correspondence exchanged between Chesnutt and Oscar Micheaux and may be of interest to Micheaux scholars. Leitz also co-edited with Joe McElrath the Chesnutt Letters from 1889—1905 which was published by Princeton University Press. Leitz revealed that in compiling his current volume "there are some very interesting correspondents in the volume—my favorites are Carl Van Vechten, Micheaux, and Arthur Schomburg. Also, there is quite extensive correspondence with the NAACP leadership." For further information you may contact Robert Leitz at rleitz@pilot.1sus.edu

Documentary/Films:

Black South: The Life Journey of Zora Neale Hurston is currently in production by Los Angeles Film School auteur Julie Dash, in collaboration with producer Kristy Andersen. This documentary will represent Dash's return to the big screen in the first major release about writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. The documentary intends to chronicle the late 19th century migration of southern blacks moving north through the

wry cultural lens of Hurston's life and fiction. Hurston is described as a flamboyant woman whose overwhelming presence startled those she met, though she left them laughing at her side-splitting tales of the old South. As heir to two generations of hell-fire Baptist preachers, she would weave her own history into her comic tales, mocking the religious fervor of her ancestors. She seemed to some to embody the essence of the old South—and to blacks who fled the South, she was exactly what they were trying to forget. This led Langston Hughes to label her a walking caricature of the black South. *Black South* will attempt to capture and reconstruct Hurston on screen. The documentary has a tentative release of January, 2001. For more information contact: Kristy Andersen, Bay Bottom News, 4309 Watrous Avenue, Tampa, Florida, 33629. Phone 813/289-8554 or FAX 813/289-0758.

Blackside, Inc., Emmy award-winning producers of the landmark documentary *Eyes On The Prize*, have completed a documentary series entitled, *I'll Make Me a World* celebrating the extraordinary achievements of 20th-century African-American writers, dancers, actors, painters, and musicians who changed forever who we are as a nation and culture. The six-part product includes a profile of

Oscar Micheaux and the impact of black filmmakers on the national landscape. The documentary was produced in association with Thirteen/WNET New York with producers Sam Pollard, Betty Ciccarelli, Tracy Heather Strain, and Denise A. Greene. The PBS 1999 documentary series is now available on videotape.

Available Films:

A Paul Robeson centenary celebration included George Eastman House's prints of two silents, *Body and Soul* (1924), Robeson's film debut directed by Oscar Micheaux, and *Borderline* (1930). Costarring Robeson's wife, Eslanda, *Borderline* is an avant-garde Swiss film made by the group that created *Close-Up* magazine. Completing the Robeson trio was the British film *Big Fella* (1937), which was never released in the United States but was preserved by the Library of Congress from an original negative in the Rohauer Collection. The film was recently made available on VHS by Kino on Video, 800/629-6889, www.kino.com. In *Big Fella*, Robeson portrays a Marseilles dock worker who is blackmailed when a missing child he finds threatens to say he was kidnapped if he is returned to his parents.

—from *Cinema Journal*, vol. 37, No. 4, Summer 1998, 106.

Minutes For The Oscar Micheaux Society Meeting

The meeting was held on Sunday, April 18, 1999, at the Society for Cinema Studies Conference West Palm Beach, Florida. Present: Corey Creekmur, Phyllis Klotman, Jan Loveland, Charles Musser, Charlene Regester, Jacqueline Stewart, Brian Taves, Gary Keller, Pamela Brown Clarke.

I. Exhibition Tour-Micheaux and His Circle

Charles Musser continues to work with the Museum of Modern Art on "Oscar Micheaux and his Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema." The project, a touring package of Micheaux films, is aiming for a June completion. Following Turner Entertainment's restoration of *The Symbol of the Unconquered* last summer, MOMA will translate the French intertitles into English under the supervision of staff member Steve Higgins. An accompanying catalog including articles by Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, Charles Musser, Louise Spence, Ron Green, Clyde Taylor, Charlene Regester, and Michele Wallace, is under development while Corey Creekmur completes his filmography.

Creekmur's filmography, several years in the making, demonstrates the difficulties of producing an uncontested account of Micheaux's history. Discussion continued about whether to publish Creekmur's project in this newsletter or in the forthcoming MOMA catalog.

II. Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter

The *Oscar Micheaux Newsletter* continues under the editorial direction of Jane Gaines and Charlene Regester with assistance from Duke graduate student Mikki Brunner. Article ideas for upcoming issues include: an in-depth report on Phyllis Klotman's black film archive at Indiana University, a transcription of *Girl From Chicago* by Sergio Mins, and a soon to be published article from Corey Creekmur on Micheaux's adaptations of Charles Chesnutt. New ideas are always welcome.

III. Fourth Annual Oscar Micheaux Film Festival—South Dakota

Charlene Regester announced the date of the 1999 Oscar Micheaux Film Festival, to be held August 11-15 in Gregory, South Dakota. Please see insert for further details. A first-person account of last years' festivities can be found in Volume 6, Winter 1997 of this newsletter.

IV. Report on Additional Micheaux News, Screenings, etc.

Oscar Micheaux Society member Ron Green has developed another Micheaux filmography. Plans have not been formalized to combine Green and Creekmur's project although this remains a possibility.

One current puzzle surrounding Micheaux involves the location of his lost business records. Like the southern reception of his films, the issue remains unresolved. Although a letter owned by Duke University's Lilly Library suggests that Micheaux's business office was located in Chicago, the records have not been found.

—Compiled by Jan Loveland

The Library of Congress Film Preservation Tour

Saturday, February 5—Special Early Black Cinema Double Feature.

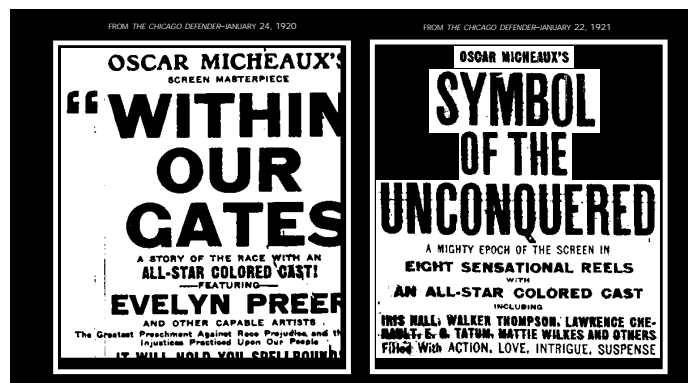
Silent films directed by Oscar Micheaux, with musical accompaniment—just as the original audience viewed them!

Oscar Micheaux's
Within Our Gates

10 am

Page Auditorium on Duke
University's West Campus.

Screening will be followed
by a panel discussion.



Oscar Micheaux's
Symbol of the Unconquered

1:30 pm

Page Auditorium

Screening will be followed
by a panel discussion.

The Tour is part of the Library of Congress's Bicentennial celebration and highlights the need for film preservation to ensure a permanent record of this portion of our American heritage. Presenting in each of the 50 states, the Tour is hosted in NC by the Duke University Film & Video Program, also home to the Oscar Micheaux Society. Admission is \$5 per program, free to students. For more information, call the Film & Video Program Events Information Line at 660-3099 or check the web-site: <http://www.duke.edu/web/film/preservation.html>.

❧ *Conferences—2000/2001* ❧

2001 Conferences:

“Oscar Micheaux Golden Anniversary Memorial Celebration.” On the 50th anniversary of Oscar Micheaux’s death, Great Bend, Kansas, is going to give this talented man the recognition he deserves. Join the Barton County Arts Council’s on the weekend of March 23-25, 2001 in Great Bend. For more information contact Martin J. Keenan 3600 23rd Street, Great Bend, Kansas 67530. Visit the Oscar Micheaux website at <http://www.greatbend.net/gbcc/history/micheaux/index.html>

2000 Conferences:

Twenty-Fifth Annual Conference On Film And Literature, January 27-29, 2000, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida: “On the Edge of Time.” Possible topics include: Millennium Themes and Images, Re-volutions, History/Myth, Colonial/Post-Colonial Film, Utopia/Dystopia, Science Fiction, Nostalgia, Technologies, Revisions. And related to any of the above: Genre, Liminality, Race/Class/Gender, Self/Other, Sexuality, Insider/Outsider. Deadline for submissions was October 1, 1999. Contact: Sheryl Kormondy, Center for Professional Development, Florida State University, 555 West Pensacola Street, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1640, Phone (850) 644-2118, Fax (850) 644-2589, E-mail skormondy@cpd.fsu.edu

The Society For Cinema Studies Conference, March 2000, Chicago. The deadline for proposals was October 1, 1999. Possible topics include: contributions to film of Stanley Kubrick; media attention to blacklisting, industry politics, and the Elia Kazan Oscar controversy; media technologies and the future of media studies; representation of the body within media and its ties to identity politics; new methods of film historiography; the place of textual analysis within media studies; violence and the media; American film and the millennium. For additional information contact: The SCS Homepage: <http://www.cinemastudies.org>

Technology in Film, San Francisco State University Symposium, April 28-30, 2000

The graduate students of the Cinema Studies M.A. program are hosting a symposium for the spring of 2000. Held on the SFSU campus, the topic will involve aspects of Technology in Film. Proposed papers and discussions will cover: Technology and Art; How Technology Changes our Perception of Self; Future of Marketing Films Digitally; Ethics of Digitizing Images for Profit; Who Controls Technology?; Technology’s Influence on the Fragmentation of Society; Ethics of Digital Censoring; Technological Special Effects’ Influence on the Narrative; Technology and Film Preservation; Simulations of Reality.

This is an open call for papers, workshops, film proposals, and special event suggestions. To join in our discussions or to present a paper, please provide us with a short biography and a brief (250 words) topic proposal. You may also submit a paper at this time, please no more than 12 pages, and be sure to include your email, address, and/or phone number in your application. The deadline for submission is January 31, 2000. Email us at techimage@yahoo.com, or mail us your submissions or applications to: Symposium 2000 c/o Bill Nichols, Cinema Department, 1600 Holloway Ave., San Francisco, CA 94132.

Point Blank: Tough Guy Film and Culture-A National Conference, May 18-20, 2000, University of Arizona. With Special Guests: Alex Cox, Monte Hellman, Tom Thurman, Donald Westlake, Rudy Wurlitzer, and more.

The focus of the conference will be films dealing in “tough guy” imagery, examining themes of violence, masculinity, and class in cinema. Areas of interest include the tough guy role in genre-filmmaking, the B-film, relationships between hard-boiled fiction and “tough guy” film, gender and sexuality, the tough guy’s influence in foreign popular culture, an appreciation of the role of the character actor in “tough guy” cinema, and more. The conference will feature a dynamic of

blend of academic discourse and unabashed cinephilia, scholarly discussions and screenings, bringing together some of the creators of the genre with the scholars and public who appreciate them.

The conference will feature papers, poster sessions, and panel discussions. The deadline for submissions was December 15, 1999. For more information: Visit the conference Web Site at <http://conferences.arizona.edu/PointBlank> or contact: Noah Lopez, University of Arizona, Extended University, 888 N. Euclid Ave., Room 301, Tucson, Arizona 85721-0158, Phone (520) 626-9060, Fax (520) 621-3269, email: noahl@u.arizona.edu

Black Women In Africa And The African Diaspora: Identity, Culture, And Politics to be held June 1-4, 2000 at the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign. The Afro-American Studies and Research Program and the Center for African Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign will host this international and interdisciplinary conference. Panels and papers will address the broad topics of identity, culture and politics in both the historical and contemporary lives of Black women in Africa and the African diaspora. The goal is to foster cross cultural dialogues and discussions on Black women's research and further course development in Black Women's Studies. For more information contact: Alice Deck, BWAAD Conference Chair, Afro-American Studies and Research Program, University of Illinois, 1201 West Nevada Street, Urbana, IL 61801. Phone (217) 333-7781 FAX (217) 244-4809 email a-deck@uiuc.edu

Screen Studies Conference will be held at the University of Glasgow, in Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom, July, 2000. Contact Caroline Beven, *Screen*, Gilmorehill Centre for Theater, Film and TV, Glasgow University, G12 8QQ, Scotland, UK, Fax 0141 330-3515, e-mail: screen@arts.gla.ac.uk.

1999 Conferences:

Orphans of the Storm: Saving "Orphan Films" in the Digital Age. University of South Carolina September 23-25, 1999. A symposium on film presentation, this conference considered the dilemma of "Orphan Films" the "homeless" footage for which clear ownership cannot be established. Films most at-risk are newsreels, silent films, experimental works, films out of copyright protection, significant amateur footage, documentaries, and features made outside the commercial mainstream, in short, much of the living record of the Twentieth Century. The conference was organized by Dan Streible, Department of Art, University of South Carolina, Columbia and highlighted the University of South Carolina's Newsfilm Library which houses 11 million feet of Fox Movietone newsreels, including all existing out-takes from 1919-34 and 1942-44. <http://www.scedu/newsfilm>

18th Pordenone Silent Film Festival, Teatro Zancanaro, Sacile, October 9-16, 1999. The 18th edition of the Giornate del Cinema Muto took place on the island of Sacile (Sa-chee-ley), the Garden of Venice. Legendary silent diva Fay Wray was scheduled to attend the October 15th screening of *The Wedding March*. For additional information contact: La Giornate del Cinema Muto, c/o La Cineteca del Friuli, Via Bini, Palazzo Gurisatti, 33013 Gemona (UD) Italia, Tel: (+39) 0432-980.458

Micheaux Mania

WWW.OSCARMICHEAUX.COM

Need a gift for the Micheaux scholar who has everything? Floyd Webb offers a splendid reproduction of the handsome homesteader in a 100% preshrunk cotton. The E22funk Designed T-shirt is now available.

ebay, the web's premiere auction site, recently hosted the offer of a "highly rare lithographic poster" of *Birthright*, Micheaux's 1924 film, which was purchased for \$1700.

The Miller Brewing Company included Oscar Micheaux in its yearly calendar for the year 2000 in its *Gallery Of Greats*, an ongoing tribute to "Pillars of the Past: Architects of the Future."

Bibliography Update

African-American Newspapers and Periodicals: A National Bibliography, Eds. James P. Danky and Maureen Hady (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.) The *Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter* was recently included in this bibliography. The volume provides a valuable resource for African-American and Micheaux scholars.

A biography on Oscar Micheaux is provided in the 24-volume of the ***American National Biography*** recently published under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies by Oxford University Press. The American Library Association has awarded the ANB the Dartmouth Medal for best new reference work produced in the United States. The bibliographic reference for this work is as follows: *American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, 24 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

"Portrait of a Pioneering Spirit" by Pearl Bowser, *African Voices* (Spring 1999), 16-19. Bowser weaves a brief biography of Micheaux including his homesteading years in South Dakota with her attendance at the 1998 Oscar Micheaux Film Festival held in Gregory, SD. Bowser writes "Land for the young Micheaux would be the pallet upon which he built his dreams and ambitions. Land would insure the independence and freedom he craved. In one of his later novels, the hero shares his wealth and parcels out his land with livestock and seed to poor families to create a utopian society capable of banishing poverty. Stories of his early experience as a homesteader and his 'beloved Rosebud' are recurring themes in the novels he wrote and the films he produced in a career that lasted thirty years."

"Stranger in a Strange Land": An African American Response to the Frontier Tradition in Oscar Micheaux's *The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Pioneer*, appeared in *Western American Literature*, Volume XXXIII, Number 3, 1998. Author M.K. Johnson writes: "Oscar Micheaux's *The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Pioneer* (1913) presents an ambivalent representation of African American western experience. The journey westward of Micheaux's protagonist moves him further away from an African American community at the same time that it enables his economic success, making him 'a stranger in a strange land, inhabited wholly by people not my own race' (77). Although the frontier symbolizes freedom from white racism for Micheaux, it also represents escape from a black community that he represents as having as great a detrimental effect on individual African American achievement as race-based restrictions."

"Headlines to Highlights: Oscar Micheaux's Exploitation of the Rhinelander Case" in *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, Volume 22, Number 3, Fall 1998. Charlene Regeister writes: "In 1924, a media frenzy erupted surrounding the annulment of a marriage between an African American, Alice Jones, and white millionaire Kip Rhinelander. Tensions ran high, and the presses, both white and black, sank their teeth into this lurid case, which was a tantalizing microcosm of interracial relationships. The case received extensive coverage, particularly in the African American press. At this point, African American Oscar Micheaux, a writer and a filmmaker of perhaps unequaled entrepreneurial skill, recognized that the Rhinelander-Jones case had great promotional value for his own films. The essay that follows will examine the Jones/Rhinelander case itself and will take note of how Micheaux strategically capitalized on the attention this case received, utilizing the coverage to promote his own works."

"Micheaux's Chesnutt," Susan Gilman, *PMLA*, vol.114, no.5 (October 1999), pp.1080-88. A breakthrough article by an important literary critic, published in the flagship journal of the venerable Modern Language Association.

A forthcoming issue of *Cinema Journal* will feature an essay by Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence on Oscar Micheaux's *Body and Soul*.

Oscar Micheaux...Dakota Homesteader, Author, Pioneer Film Maker: A Biography by Betti Carol Van Epps-Taylor (Sioux Falls, SD: South Dakota Press, 1999). In this comprehensive biography, Van Epps-Taylor considers the influence of the unforgiving Great Plains on Micheaux's artistic and philosophical vision. As a social historian specializing in African American history of the upper Midwest, Van Epps-Taylor situates Micheaux's films and novels within the unique context of turn of the century South Dakota.

Struggles For Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video, Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). A survey of the evolution of African American documentary films and video, *Struggles for Representation* examines over 300 nonfiction films by more than 150 African American film/video-makers and includes an extensive filmography, bibliography, and excerpts from interviews with film/videomakers. Included are essays by Paul Arthur, Mark Frederick Baker and Houston A. Baker, Jr., Pearl Bowser, Janet K. Cutler, Manthia Diawara, Elizabeth Amelia Hadley, Phyllis R. Klotman, Tommy Lee Lott, Erika Muhammad, Valerie Smith and Clyde Taylor.



Cowpoke from *The Symbol of the Unconquered* looks askance.

The Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter is dedicated to providing a medium through which we can promote discourse, debate, and discovery about filmmaker and novelist Oscar Micheaux and others who were active in early African American cinema. Unfortunately, much of their work remains inaccessible. It is through this medium that we hope to provide an avenue for inquiry into Micheaux and others who contributed to early African American cinema.

The Oscar Micheaux Newsletter is a publication of the Film & Video Program at Duke University. We welcome your contributions, questions and comments. Information and articles for editorial review should be sent to:

The Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter
Duke University Film & Video Program
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Durham, NC 27708-0671

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Mark your calendars. . .

The next meeting of the Oscar Micheaux Society will be held at the Society of Cinema Studies Conference on Saturday, March 11, 8-9 am in the Parkview room on the third floor of the Congress Plaza