

Devoted to African American Film History and Preservation

OSCAR MICHEAUX SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Editors: Charlene Regester, UNC-Chapel Hill • Jane Gaines, Duke University

Program in Film+Video 107A Art Museum Duke University Durham, NC 27708 (919) 684-4130 FAX (919) 684-3598

Volume 3 • Summer '94



MICHEAUX'S WITHIN OUR GATES: NOW AVAILABLE ON VIDEOTAPE

by Jane Gaines (Duke University)

Micheaux's second film, *Within Our Gates* (1919), is one of the titles in the first group of Library of Congress holdings to be released by Smithsonian Video. This is especially remarkable when one considers the circumstances of its recent "discovery."

Identified by Thomas Cripps in the Filmoteca Espanola in Madrid, Spain, just after he completed *Slow Fade to Black* (1977), the film was not returned to the Library of Congress until the late 1980s. *La Negra*, as the Spanish-language version was titled, was acquired in a trade for a print of the Bela Lugosi version of *Dracula* (1931).

The story of exactly how *Within Our Gates* disappeared is still a mystery, however, the controversy it caused in the first year of its release is well documented. When Micheaux tried to exhibit the film in Chicago, the Methodist Episcopal Ministers' Alliance committee successfully appealed to the chief of police and the mayor and Micheaux's permit to show the film was denied. The film finally did open, however, at the Vendome Theatre on January 12, 1920, due to pressure from a more liberal group. The film encountered similar resistance in New Orleans and did little business in Omaha, Nebraska.

Scholars speculate that Micheaux distributed his films in London and on the continent. The even more recent discovery in the Belgian Archive of *Symbol of the Unconquered* (1920) (with intertitles in French and Flemish) is further evidence of Micheaux's international distribution activity.

Audiences here are now seeing this seven-reel film for the first time in English since the 1920s. Before this new 35mm print was available, however, the Spanish-language Library of Congress 35mm print was exhibited in a few U.S. cities, including Chicago and New York, usually with simultaneous English translation of the Spanish intertitles. The new English translation was premiered in May of this year in a special 75th Anniversary celebration in Philadelphia. Each city has featured the seventy-nine minute feature with a different live musical accompaniment, however, the videotape version comes with a piano score performed and composed by Philip Carli.

Former curator of the Library of Congress Mary Pickford Theatre, Scott Simmon, who worked on the intertitle translation and describes the film in the liner notes: "Sylvia Landry," a woman with a scarred past and numerous suitors...finds her real passion in raising funds for a Southern school for black children.... It's long backstory of Sylvia's youth, with the lynchings and attempted white-on-black rape, seems a historically valid response, in both content and intercut style, to D.W. Griffith's racist landmark, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

Released as part of a six-volume set titled "The Origins of American Film," *Within Our Gates*, Vol. 1, can be purchased for \$34.95 plus shipping and handling (\$3.50) from the Library of Congress and Smithsonian Video (see section on AV Resources).

Sources:

Carrie Rickey, "Pioneer Spirit," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 May 1994.

Barbara Bryant, "The Library of Congress Video Collection: Joint Project Makes Rare Films Widely Available." *The Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, Vol. 53, No. 10 (March 16, 1994).

Jane Gaines, "Fire and Desire: Race, Melodrama, and Oscar Micheaux" in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (AFI/Routledge, 1993).



TOWARD A DEFINITIVE LISTING OF OSCAR MICHEAUX'S FILMS

by J. Ronald Green (Ohio State University)

One of many problems those who write about Micheaux have faced is the lack of, and virtual impossibility of, a definitive filmography. Ambitious filmographies do exist, some of which are listed below, but none is adequate. I am developing an annotated chronological list that aims at definitiveness, but it will also fail. The general nature of the problem is that Micheaux was working outside the system, thus the system failed to mark his place; he shares that problem with all alternative work, including underground film and what Solanas and Getina call Third Cinema. Micheaux's marginalism has given rise to specific problems such as the following:

1. More than half the approximately forty films is lost, so it is often impossible to compare conflicting filmographic claims against the films themselves. For example, it seems pretty clear from secondary evidence that the film titled *The Hypocrite* was a film within the film *Deceit*; in some filmographies, however, they are listed separately, sometimes several years apart. Since neither film exists now, no definitive check can be made.

2. All Micheaux's own records, both personal and professional, have been destroyed according to Richard Grupenhoff, who interviewed Micheaux's closest remaining relatives and associates in preparing his book on Lorenzo Tucker, *The Black Valentino*. The principal source of inside information about Micheaux's business is the George P. Johnson Collection at the UCLA Library (available on microfilm), which is very useful for its primary documents, though Johnson himself is unreliable in his own assessments and documentation procedures.

3. Standard organs for reporting and reviewing films, such as *Variety*, which is the semi-official record of the American entertainment industry, and the *New York Times*, which includes all the film news that is "fit to print," did not cover race movies with the same assiduity with which they covered mainstream and art cinemas. The black press—especially the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Age* and the *Amsterdam News*, the Baltimore *Afro-American*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Philadelphia Tribune*—did much better, but none of them approximates a journal of record. For adequate coverage one must search all of them for editorial mention of Micheaux's film releases and for Micheaux's advertisements, and even then one cannot be sure the results are definitive, even for the American releases. Moreover, the black press itself was a relatively marginal institution, compared to *Variety* and the *New York Times*, so news editors often used Micheaux's press release information, with all of its semi-advertising puffery, as editorial material, without perhaps even witnessing a screening of the film. That same marginality means that the black press has not been able to provide the helpful special publications of film reviews that both *Variety* and the *New York Times* provide for the researcher.

4. Censorship was active during the first half of Micheaux's career, and censors were especially attentive to racial material, particularly during periods of racial violence, the greatest outbreak of which occurred around 1919 when Micheaux was just starting to turn out two or three films a year. The editorial integrity of those films was jeopardized continuously during the life of each print; at each screening location the print might be altered by local exhibitors to fit the perceived mood of the audience. For example, when *Within Our*

Gates made a return engagement to Omaha, it was advertised as having had offensive scenes removed, but when such a controversial film arrived in Chicago, it might be advertised as having had all previously-removed material restored.

5. Micheaux constantly improvised. Many of his films had several working titles before the final title was decided, and some of those working titles made it into print in newspaper articles about Micheaux's forthcoming releases, thus confusing filmographers. Some apparently-definitive filmographies, for example, still list the film that was released as *Murder in Harlem* by a working title, *Lem Hawkins' Confession*. Critics sometimes claim that Micheaux made some of his films from outtakes or by "cannibalization" of earlier films. *The Hypocrite*, for example, might have been designed as a film within the film, *Deceit*, as discussed above, but it also might have been a film in its own right that was later reduced and used in *Deceit*; one filmography claims, in fact, that *The Hypocrite* received a New York state license in June of 1921 and that it was seven reels longer than the stated length of the finished version of *Deceit*.

6. Micheaux also tended to produce remakes of earlier films, thus a filmographer might confuse versions, especially in a case such as that of *Birthright*, which was remade under the same title. Micheaux also cannibalized his advertising materials in order to keep his business afloat; he used, for example, a production still of his leading stars from *The Spider's Web* (1926) on a poster advertising its remake, *The Girl From Chicago* (1932). Such improvisations were necessary for business reasons, but can cause filmographers additional bewilderment.

7. Perhaps the biggest morass for the filmographer is the certainty that Micheaux distributed many of his films in Europe, and the possibility that he did so in South America. Without Micheaux's business records, those films are lost probes to Venus. Happily, the film archives of Europe have been the suppliers of several of those wayward releases; films thought to be lost, such as the great *Within Our Gates* and the even greater *Symbol of the Unconquered* (both 1920), were discovered in European archives recently. When one of these films turns up in Europe, however, it is certain to have been retitled. *Within Our Gates* was called *La Negra* (*The Black Woman* or *The Negress*) in Spanish, and its Spanish subtitles were liberally translated from the English in ways that changed the political impact of the film; so far there is not nearly enough evidence to reconstruct the original subtitles. [Editor's Note: Compare Green's statement with Scott Simmon's account of working on the English-language translation of this film for the Smithsonian video release, included in the liner notes.] Thus *La Negra* is really a different motion picture from *Within Our Gates*, and the filmographer must decide whether to list *La Negra*, and if so, whether to note *Within Our Gates* as still missing, knowing full well that the film *La Negra* is being distributed in America as *Within Our Gates*.

There are other problems, but it should be evident from the examples above that we are a long way from anything approaching a definitive filmography of Micheaux's films. Similar problems, though much less complex, plague the bibliographer of Micheaux's novels, and this affects anyone interested in Micheaux's films, since those two creative and business realms were thoroughly intertwined.

Thankfully, in spite of all difficulties, dedicated forays into the listing of Micheaux's films do exist, such as the following:



Bowser, Pearl. "Oscar Micheaux," filmnote number seventeen for the New American Filmmakers screening series at the Whitney Museum of American Art, May 24, 1984.

Cripps, Thomas. *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford, 1977), use "Micheaux, Oscar" in index.

Klotman, Phyllis. *Frame by Frame: A Black Filmography* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1979), use "Micheaux, Oscar" in index.

Peterson, Bernard L., Jr., "The Films of Oscar Micheaux: America's First Fabulous Black Filmmaker," *The Crisis*, April 1979, pp. 135-141; revised and republished in Bernard L. Peterson, Jr., *Early Black American Playwrights and Dramatic Writers: A Biographical Directory and Catalog of Plays, Films, and Broadcasting Scripts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1990), pp. 133-143; revised, expanded and republished again as "A Filmography of Oscar Micheaux: America's Legendary Black Filmmaker," in *Celluloid Power: Social Film Criticism from "The Birth of A Nation" to "Judgment at Nuremberg"* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1992), pp. 113-141; useful biographical information included, but unfortunately not well documented.

Sampson, Henry T., *Blacks in Black and White: A Source Book on Black Films* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1977), use "Micheaux, Oscar" in index; Sampson's facts are reliably founded on black press documentation.

World Film Directors: Volume I: 1890-1945, John Wakeman, ed. (NY: H.W. Wilson, 1987), pp. 765-770; Micheaux entry very good, but uncredited.



MIDNIGHT RAMBLE:
OSCAR MICHEAUX AND THE STORY OF RACE MOVIES
 (1994, Northern Light Productions, Bestor Cram and Pearl Bowser, Directors)

AT THE PICTURE SHOW
 (1993, Greg Waller, Producer and Director)

by Arthur Knight (The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA)

Midnight Ramble: Oscar Micheaux and The Story of Race Movies, a handsomely-produced fifty minute documentary which will air sometime this fall in Public Television's American Experience series, and **At the Picture Show**, a lower-budget forty minute direct-to-tape documentary, share the strong conviction that films must be understood in their socio-historical contexts. While both documentaries deploy this conviction differently and toward different purposes, each should be seen by anyone interested in the ways race in the U.S. inflects, and is inflected by, a wide range of U.S. films. Both **Midnight Ramble** and **At the Picture Show** contain useful material for film scholars, and each will work well in the classroom, though together they make a particularly acute and provocative package.

Midnight Ramble weaves its "story" using archival photographs and film; talking-head interviews with elderly "race" film actors and actresses and present-day historians, critics, and filmmakers; a music track; and a voice-over narrative (written by Clyde Taylor). While this technique is unremarkable, it allows **Ramble** to pack an immense amount of information—arranged in a rough chronology from the turn of the century through Micheaux's death in 1951—into its running time.

The first quarter of **Ramble** covers the beginnings of the Great Migration; the rise, in Chicago, of the Black middle class, the Pekin Theatre, Ebony Pictures (makers of slapstick shorts) and Peter P. Johnson (actuality cameraman); **Birth of a Nation**; and Lincoln Pictures. The narrator (James Avery) intones, "This [urban black] population loved to have their pictures taken." Thank heaven. Images flash by—sometimes more quickly than one would like; for instance, I needed several viewings to glean all the information from Peter P. Johnson's 1915 newspaper ad for "Dawn of the South,"

complete with the signifying line, "Re-Birth of A Nation." **Birth of a Nation** itself is dealt with quickly and effectively. Toni Cade Bambara, one of the interviewees, grounds the film and the protests against it, pointing out that the images from the film were not confined to theaters. In a quick aural sketch she traces the film's lineage, while on the image track we see footage, and for those already too familiar with the film itself, many examples of the elaborate advertisements and hype that accomplished **Birth**.

From here **Ramble** moves through a quick discussion of Lincoln Pictures (accompanied by archival footage that is a treat to see) to focus on Micheaux. It places **The Homesteader**, **Within Our Gates**, and **Body and Soul**, against, respectively, Micheaux's experience in South Dakota, the Red Summer of 1919, and the Harlem Renaissance. To its credit, **Ramble** doesn't neglect the controversies Micheaux's films caused. One interviewee articulates what several others suggest: Micheaux's films were "sort of like being shown nude; you resent that kind of exposure." Nor does **Ramble** overstate Micheaux's "craftsmanship," though it does sometimes—probably inevitably—normalize his baroque and odd narratives and his unique aesthetic. What **Ramble** emphasizes is Micheaux's entrepreneurial energy and his commitment to his vision. One interviewee, a white woman who watched Micheaux shoot **The Homesteader** in South Dakota, articulates what one most wants to celebrate about Micheaux: He had "an idea that, at that time, was way out there someplace; it wasn't a part of everyday life." In other words, say what you will about the content and execution of his films, Micheaux was bold and dedicated to an alternative to Hollywood; he was an iconoclast.

In its last half, **Ramble** enlarges its frame, though it doesn't lose sight of Micheaux. After touching on the Colored Players' **Ten Nights in a Barroom** and

Scar of Shame, **Ramble** covers the transition to sound, Hollywood's Black-cast films, Stepin Fetchit, and the second wave of race films. Here **Ramble** loses some of its surefootedness; it cannot resolve or contain the contradictions of "race" film in the sound era. On the one hand, Bambara questions how reflective race films were of Black life (Pearl Bowser, another interviewee and **Ramble**'s co-director, suggests that at least some of these films served as "Black morality tales") and, more emphatically, claims that during the sound era "we began to go backward." On the other hand, Herb Jeffries turns up to narrate his experiences in **Harlem on the Prairie**, **Harlem Rides the Range**, and **Two Gun Man From Harlem**, his series of singing westerns. Despite the fact that these films imitate Hollywood models and seem to have no critical component, **Ramble** does not question the affirmative character Jeffries claims for them (indeed, in the face of Jeffries' considerable charm, such questioning could only appear as an act of bad faith). Within this schema, Micheaux's last films are described as, on the one hand, "scolding" and "out of touch" but, on the other, of such interest that Harlem residents stood in long lines to see them. That **Ramble** permits these contradictions contributes to the film's usefulness. **Ramble** raises important issues and questions, and I can imagine it provoking many good classroom discussions. Toni Cade Bambara gets the final word in **Midnight Ramble**—"the existence of a body of films from that period is proof that we were there" and that African Americans were resisting and answering negative portrayals in Hollywood film and U.S. culture in general. The penultimate moments of **Ramble**, however, are dedicated to the demise of the "race" film business and the "midnight ramble," the all-Black picture show, in the face of integration.

At the Picture Show specifically examines movie-going in Campbellsville,

Kentucky. Because 130 of Campbellsville's 2,000 residents in the 1930s were Black, **Picture Show** also concerns the "midnight ramble," though it never uses that term, and it places the ramble firmly within the textures of a small, rural, multi-racial community. In fact, at one point in **Picture Show** the camera scans a newspaper ad for the town's Alhambra theater and we see that **Cabin in the Sky** is on the bill, with a special midnight show for "colored" patrons.

At the Picture Show combines interviews of five Campbellsville residents with photographs that the Alhambra's owner commissioned in the 30s for a regular slide feature called "Campbellsville on Screen." These photographs are stunning. They seem to show the entire population of the town, including several Black families, a young white girl and her Black doll (one that does not appear to be a stereotyped Topsy but rather an "ordinary" doll), and Blacks and whites mingling on the sidewalks in front of the theater. Most of the interviews, which organize the film thematically, limit the function of the Alhambra in town life—a function that included movies of course (westerns every weekend) but that also included

attractions such as beauty contests, the high school girls' basketball team, country singers, "womenless weddings" and "Negro minstrels."

A man named H.R. Richardson provides a Black perspective that draws attention to the complexities of race in Campbellsville—and at the Alhambra. Like all the interviewees, Richardson went to the Alhambra regularly (he liked westerns, too). Early in the film he recalls the "fairness" of the Alhambra's owner, Paul Sanders, saying Sanders "did right" and "nobody disrespected him for it." But a little later, in a section of the film captioned "white lines" (after lines painted on the floor to show where children could sit), it turns out that doing right means African Americans could always enter by the front door but that seating was segregated—first in a special section, and after one was constructed, in a balcony. Richardson explains, "I was told that Blacks had requested it." One of **Picture Show**'s white interviewees ponders, "It was just like it was; you just didn't think about it... they probably thought about it."

Midnight Ramble emphasizes that indeed "they" did "think about it" and that

African Americans acted on their thoughts. Some acted in ways that were conventionally available—by going to segregated film showings, for instance, or as in one of H.R. Richardson's stories, by winning dance contests against white competitors—and others, like Oscar Micheaux, acted by insistently clearing space for themselves and other Blacks in "unconventional" arenas like filmmaking. **Midnight Ramble** and **At the Picture Show** begin to show why, across the century, the movie picture theater has been—and continues to be—an important place for resistant and creative "race" activity.

For more information on renting or purchasing **Midnight Ramble** contact:

African Diaspora Images
P.O. Box 3517
Brooklyn, NY 11202
(718) 852-8353

For information on **At the Picture Show** contact:

Greg Waller
Department of English
1215 Patterson Office Tower
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40506-0027

THE MICHEAUX FOUNDATION

Named for African American novelist and filmmaker Oscar Micheaux, The Micheaux Foundation is a relatively new organization dedicated to supporting and promoting emerging independent screenwriter/directors of color and their films.

Founded in 1993 by a group of professional filmmakers and legal as well as financial professionals, The Micheaux Foundation actively seeks to nurture artists through production grants, workshops, educational activities, and an annual film festival. Typically full or partial grant funding is provided for the production of non-commercial dramatic short films and documentaries, with emphasis placed on Washington, D.C. area filmmakers with films to be shot in Washington, D.C.

The Foundation's premier film project, a 20 minute short about one Black man's quest for love, aptly titled **L.S.O. (In Search Of...)**, has been featured at screenings in Atlanta, Dallas, and D.C. Its first workshop, a critical two hour discussion which focused on race and gender imagery in film and music video, titled "Developing Positive Images of Self: Connecting Mind, Media and Impressions," was held on April 23, 1994 at the Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington, D.C.

As a newly formed non-profit organization, The Micheaux Foundation is in need of further funding to implement its programs and produce more films by emerging filmmakers. It currently has seven grant applications pending. (Donors can receive a tax deduction while contributing to the growth of the independent film community.)

Those interested in contributing to or receiving further information about The Micheaux Foundation contact:

The Micheaux Foundation
Clifford E. Pulliam, Executive Director
611 Pennsylvania Ave., S. E.
Washington, D.C. 20003

Phone (202) 728-3381 or Fax (202) 546-7372



Separate

Cinema

All Black Cast Movie Posters

BOUGHT AND SOLD

Oscar Micheaux, Norman Film Studios, Paul Robeson,
Dorothy Dandridge, Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five,
Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Joe Louis, Lena
Horne, Spencer Williams, Josephine Baker, Mantan Moreland,
Jackie Robinson, Sidney Poitier and many others.

Also rare European and foreign material

Send a large self addressed 2 stamped envelope for catalogue

Separate Cinema • Box 114 • Hyde Park, New York 12538

Always buying new material • will travel • highest prices paid

Call (914) 452-1998 collect

MINUTES FOR OSCAR MICHEAUX SOCIETY MEETING
SOCIETY FOR CINEMA STUDIES CONFERENCE
MARCH 5, 1994
SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

Members in attendance included: Marilyn Jimenez, Charles Musser, Gregory Waller, Corey Creekmur, Adam Knee, John Hess, Arthur Knight, Matthew Bernstein, Jane Gaines and Charlene Regester

The following agenda provided the forum for the meeting:

- I. Old Business - Review of Minutes from Previous Meeting held in 1993
 - a) Progress Report on Restoration of **Uncle Tom's Cabin**
- II. Discussion of the Restoration and Preservation of Micheaux Films
- III. Upcoming Conferences: Yale University - January 27-29, 1995
- IV. Legal Status of Micheaux Society Board of Advisors
- V. Report on **Midnight Ramble**-Pearl Bowser

Jimenez provided a report from the Black Caucus of SCS indicating that they had planned to organize a pre-constituted panel or workshop for students of color for the next SCS conference. The Black Caucus expressed an interest in obtaining the mailing list of members of the Oscar Micheaux Society.

I. Old Business:

The previous minutes were reviewed by members in attendance.

II. Restoration and Preservation of Micheaux Films:

It was reported that since **Symbol of the Unconquered** was currently being restored, this film should be exhibited at the Conference on Black Films to be held at New York University in the Spring of 1994.

Charles Musser provided an update on the touring package, "Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: The Silent Era." Films to be included in this package are: **Within Our Gates** (1919), **Body and Soul** (1924), **Symbol of the Unconquered** (1920), **Ten Nights in a Bar Room** (1926), **Eleven P.M.** (1928 - Richard D. Maurice Productions of Detroit), and **Scar of Shame** (1926) or **The Flying Ace** (1926 - Norman Film Manufacturing Co. of Jacksonville, Florida).

III. Upcoming Conferences - Yale University

The touring package of Micheaux films, in addition to others, will be supplemented with a conference currently being scheduled for the January 27-29, 1995 at Yale University. Papers presented at the conference will be featured in a catalog which will accompany the tour. This effort has been designed to make Micheaux films more accessible and to situate Micheaux in a larger context. Members expressed the need to insure that the touring package be distributed to a wider audience other than those largely associated with the industry such as the Museum of Moving Images.

Discussion of **Uncle Tom's Cabin** was deferred because efforts to restore Micheaux films were of primary concern. It was suggested that securing funds to preserve such films deserved consideration such as establishing non-profit status, thereby allowing us to receive donations for this purpose.

IV. Fan Mail:

Fan mail received by Roland Jefferson was shared with the audience (See Excerpts in Newsletter).
A letter received from John Byrd was also read.

V. Newsletter:

It was reported that in the upcoming edition we would make reference to new publications in addition to providing a list of Micheaux films on video. A survey of videotapes, their availability, as well as quality will be conducted and reported in the newsletter. A review of **Midnight Ramble** will also be provided. Archives and museums that house collections on early black cinema or Micheaux should be compiled.

VI. Legal Status of Board of Directors:

There was some discussion regarding the establishment of a board of directors for the society. It was agreed that this, however, was a little premature as we have only been in existence for a short period of time.

VII. Papers Presented:

Members were encouraged to submit articles and papers presented for future publication in the newsletter.

CONFERENCES:

Visible Evidence II: Strategies and Practices in Documentary Film and Video, Second Annual Conference, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, **August 18 - August 21, 1994**, Contact: School of Cinema-Television, Division of Critical Studies, USC, Los Angeles, California, 90089-2211 Phone (213) 740-3334, Fax (213) 740-9471.

"Contemporary Perspectives on U.S. Southern Culture," University of Warwick Conference, Coventry, England United Kingdom, **September 21 - 22, 1994**, Plenary sessions will be addressed by Charles Joyner (South Carolina, Coastal College) on 'African and European Roots of Southern Culture,' Richard Dyer (Warwick) and Jane Gaines (Duke) in dialogue about D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of A Nation* and Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates*; Judith McWillie (Georgia) on 'African-American Self-Taught Artists'; and Simon Frith (Strathclyde) on 'The Academic Elvis.' For more information contact: Ann Kelly/Helen Taylor, Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, Phone (0203) 523323, Facsimile (0203) 524750.

Modern Language Association Conference, San Diego, California, Panel Entitled "Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates*: Between Social Comment and Middle-Class Entertainment" Chaired by Mark Reid, **December 1994**, Panelists: Scott Simon, Producer of Library of Congress Video Collection "The Library of Congress Restoration of Micheaux's *Within Our Gates*;" Louise Spence, Sacred Heart University and Pearl Bowser, Curator and Executive Director of African Diaspora Images, "Oscar Micheaux's Strategic Use of Stereotypes in *Within Our Gates*;" and Jane Gaines, Duke University, "*Birth of A Nation* and *Within Our Gates*: Two Tales of the American South."

The Twentieth Annual Conference On Literature and Film - "The Dynamics of Change," Florida State University, Comparative Literature and Film Circle and The School of Motion Picture, Television and Recording Arts sponsors, **January 26 - 28, 1995**, Tallahassee, Florida.

"Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: The Silent Era," Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, **January 27-29, 1995**. Papers presented will address a variety of topics relating to Oscar Micheaux including: Black Aesthetics, Religion and Micheaux, Micheaux's Novels, Theatrical Connections, Micheaux and Gender, The History of Race Movies, The Micheaux Film Company, Exhibition, The 1920s Jazz Scene, Micheaux and Griffith, Micheaux's Collaborations, and Filmmaking Techniques.

Console-ing Passions: Television, Video, and Feminism, Fourth Annual Conference, University of Washington, Seattle, **April 6 - 9, 1995**, Contact: Susan Jeffords, 1995 Conference Coordinator Women's Studies Program, GN-45, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 98195, FAX (206) 685-9555 or Lauren Rabinovitz, Program Committee Chair, American Studies, 202 Jefferson Bldg. University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242, Phone (319) 335-0315 Fax (319) 335-2930

Screen Studies Conference, Glasgow University, Glasgow, Scotland, **June 29-July 1, 1995**, Contact: The Editors, Screen, John Logie Baird Centre, Glasgow University, Glasgow G12 8QQ, Scotland, United Kingdom. The 1995 Screen Studies Conference is being held to overlap with the biennial conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, which is to be organized around the topic of 'Music on Show,' and will run 1 - 6 July. A joint day with IASPM on 'Music on and off screen' is being planned and papers for this session and on all aspects of music, film and television are invited.

CONFERENCES IN REVIEW:

OSCAR MICHAUX: FILM PIONEER, held at the Museum of Moving Images from January through March of 1994 and organized by David Schwartz, Head of Film and Video. This retrospective featured:

Sunday, February 6, 1994

- **Body and Soul** (1924) with violin accompaniment by Leroy Jenkins and talk delivered by Charlene Register, (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, co-editor of Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter).
- **Within Our Gates** 1920 with piano accompaniment by Donald Sosin and talk delivered by Jane Gaines, (Duke University, co-editor of Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter).

Sunday, February 13, 1994

- **Midnight Ramble: Oscar Micheaux and the History of Race Movies**, North Lights Productions, 1994 in addition to trailers for *Swing*, *Temptation*, *Harlem After Midnight*, *Birthingright*, and *God's Stepchildren*. Pearl Bowser, co-director, introduced the documentary.
- **The Exile and The Darktown Revue**.

Sunday, February 20, 1994

- **Veiled Aristocrats** with talk delivered by Richard Grupenhoff (Rowan College, author of The Black Valentino: The Stage and Screen Career of Lorenzo Tucker) & *Swing*.

Sunday, February 27, 1994

- **Ten Minutes to Live** with talk by Richard Foreman (dramatis).
- **Lying Lips** with talk by Manthia Diawara (New York University, editor, AFI Film Reader Black American Cinema).

Sunday, March 6, 1994

- **The Girl From Chicago** with talk by James Hoberman (film critic, The Village Voice) & *Murder in Harlem*.

Sunday, March 13, 1994

- **God's Stepchildren** with talk by Ken Jacobs (Harpur College/SUNY Binghamton, filmmaker).
- **Imitation of Life** with talk by Clyde Taylor (Tufts University, author of the forthcoming book, Breaking the Aesthetic Contract).

Sunday, March 20, 1994

- **Underworld** with talk by Ed Guerrero (Univ. of Pennsylvania, author, Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film).
- **The Notorious Elinor Lee** with talk by Toni Cade Bambara (writer and filmmaker, author, The Salt Eaters).
- **Birthingright** with talk by David Schwartz (Head of Film & Video, American Museum of Moving Image).

INTERNATIONAL SCREENINGS:

BODY AND SOUL - AMSTERDAM, HOLLAND

On May 31, 1993, a special screening of Oscar Micheaux's **Body and Soul** took place at the Rialto film theater in Amsterdam, Holland. This screening was organized by Diaspora New Dutch Filmmakers Foundation. Diaspora is a foundation which makes works for filmmakers who are living in the 'diaspora' in Holland (i.e. people from Surinam, the Dutch Antilles, Israel, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, etc.). Because **Body and Soul** marks the film acting debut of Paul Robeson, the well-known pianist Frank Mol accompanied the film by playing improvisations and variations on African American spirituals made famous by Robeson. For many of the audience this special Diaspora screening was their first acquaintance with Oscar Micheaux. With this first screening, Diaspora enlarged interest in the history of African American cinema and especially in the career of Oscar Micheaux, film pioneer.

U.S. SCREENINGS:

VEILED ARISTOCRATS - SYRACUSE, NEW YORK,
March 3 - 6, 1994 at the Society For Cinema Studies Conference.

BODY AND SOUL-SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, February 19, 1994, screened as part of a collaborative effort between the University of Washington and the Tacoma Film Society at the Tacoma Little Theater.

WITHIN OUR GATES - PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA,
May 1994, shown at the Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema, reviewed in the **Philadelphia Inquirer**.

SEE MUSEUM OF MOVING IMAGE CONFERENCE

BIBLIOGRAPHY UPDATE

"Race to Race," James Hoberman, Village Voice, 22 February 1994. In this article Hoberman writes: "Although not infrequently shown, the movies constituting his complex, troubling, outlandish, enjoyable, and unique oeuvre were rarely written about - and then almost always from a historical perspective. Recently, however, Micheaux has become a hot academic property, the subject of essays, conferences, and **scholarly newsletter** (although appreciations of his films as film remain the exception)."

The African American Mosaic: A Library of Congress Resource Guide For the Study of Black History & Culture, Debra Newman Ham (Washington: Library of Congress, 1993). This source provides an extensive discussion of black films and filmmaking from the early 1900s to the present in a section entitled, "Popular Culture and Fine Arts."

Black Film Bulletin (Autumn/Winter 1993/94 Vol. 1 Issue 3/4-Special Issue-21 Stephen Street, London W1P 1PL Tel 071 255-1444). Excellent resource for locating information on new black film releases, black film publications, contemporary black filmmakers, archives, film collectors, and bibliographic sources. This source reports on black film festivals, black films in production in the United Kingdom, in addition to those in the U.S. and black video news.

In an interview conducted with black filmmaker Arthur Jaffa, he comments on black film aesthetics and provides a review of Micheaux's works: "At the time I was looking at the works of Oscar Micheaux an African American film-maker, producer of over 38 feature films and the first film I saw was **God's Stepchildren** and after that I saw **Two [Ten?] Minutes** which I think is an amazing piece of work. The work was being described to me as bad cinema - an example of what not to do primarily because of his use of light-

skinned people and because they understood his control of spatial continuity and screen direction as being deficient quite frankly. The point I'm making is that some of the 'accidents' he made are in fact not accidents per se but have been dictated by some deep cultural logic. That logic is more apparent in his first silent films where he is not as burdened by notions of what is correct to do with film. What I came to believe is that what black people do is not arbitrary. It is tied to a deeply situated cultural system that dictates how we approach various things. The question of African retention is linked to what I call core stabilities, core things which really have to do with who we are on a neurological level if you want to call it that. If you look at the Middle Passage as a clear example of this what you see is that African American artforms tend to be particularly developed in music, rhythm, dance, orature, the things you can carry around with you."

Edward Guerrero, Framing Blackness: The African American Image In Film, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). Chapters include: "From Birth to Blaxploitation: Hollywood's Inscription of Slavery," "Slaves, Monsters, and Others: Racial Fragment, Metaphor, and Allegory on the Commercial Screen," "The Rise and Fall of Blaxploitation," "Recuperation, Representation, and Resistance: Black Cinema Through the 1980s," and "Black Film In the 1990s: The New Black Movie Boom and Its Portent."

Black Arts Research Center, Director John Gray, 30 Marion Street, Nyack, New York 10960. The Black Arts Research Center is an archival resource center dedicated to the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of the African cultural legacy. Resources include some 1300 recordings, cassettes and videotapes, 500 books and journals, 250 clipping files and a bibliographic database with more than 35,000 entries. The materials now offer one of the richest resources ever on the Black presence in the performing arts.

A/V RESOURCES:

by Corey Creekmur (Wayne State University)

Oscar Micheaux films on 35mm (film), 16mm (film), and Video (VHS 1/2 inch). The dates provided with each film do not necessarily reflect the accurate release or production of the film.

I. 35mm Film Sources:

Films housed at the Library of Congress Motion Picture Division (Editor's Note: 35 mm films may be viewed by scholars in these public archives at the discretion of the institution. Appointments are necessary. Whereas there is no charge for viewing at the Library of Congress, there are hourly fees at MOMA - Museum of Moving Images and Eastman House.)

WITHIN OUR GATES (1919)
BIRTHRIGHT (1924, trailer)
DARKTOWN REVUE (1931, short)
THE EXILE (1931)
TEN MINUTES TO LIVE (1932)
VEILED ARISTOCRATS (1932, fragments, trailer)
THE GIRL FROM CHICAGO (1932)
THE TEMPTATION (1936, trailer)
THE UNDERWORLD (1937)
SWING (1938)
LYING LIPS (1939)
MURDER IN HARLEM (1939, a.k.a. LEM HAWKIN'S CONFESSION, 1935)
THE NOTORIOUS ELINOR LEE (1940, incomplete)

Films housed at George Eastman House International Museum of Photography (Rochester, New York):
BODY AND SOUL (1924)

Films housed at the Museum of Modern Art :
SYMBOL OF THE UNCONQUERED (1920)

II. 16mm FILM RENTAL AND SALES

BODY AND SOUL (1924): MoMA (\$150 [Sale: \$800]; Rohauer (call)
TEN MINUTES TO LIVE (1932): Budget (\$60); EmGee (\$27.50)
THE GIRL FROM CHICAGO (1932): Standard (call)
GOD'S STEPCHILDREN (1938): Budget (\$60)
LYING LIPS (1939): Budget (\$60)
MURDER IN HARLEM (1939): Phoenix (\$125) [Sale: \$1150]

16mm Film Sources:

Budget Films • 4590 Santa Monica Blvd. • Los Angeles, CA 90029
(213) 660-0187; FAX (213) 660-5571
EmGee Film Library • 6924 Canby Ave., Suite 103 • Reseda, CA 91335 • (818) 981-5506
Phoenix Films, Inc. • 468 Park Ave. South • New York, NY 10016
1-800-221-1274
The Museum of Modern Art • Circulating Film and Video Library
11 W. 53rd St. • New York, NY 10019 • (212) 708-9530

The Rohauer Collection • 209 South High Street Suite 310 •
Columbus, OH 43215 • (614) 469-0720; FAX (614) 469-1607

Standard Film Service • P.O. Box 52 • Frankenmuth, MI 48734
(517) 652-8881

III. VHS VIDEO SALES:

WITHIN OUR GATES (1919): Library of Congress/Smithsonian
BODY AND SOUL (1924): AV, FT, NYS, PTB
TEN MINUTES TO LIVE (1932): AV, FH, FT, MU, NF, NYS, PTB
VEILED ARISTOCRATS (1932): AV, GV
THE GIRL FROM CHICAGO (1932): AV, FH, FT, MU, NF, NYS, PTB
GOD'S STEPCHILDREN (1938): AV, FH, MU, NF, NYS, PTB
SWING (1938): FH, FT, NF, NYS
LYING LIPS (1939): AV, FH, FT, MU, NF, NYS, PTB
MURDER IN HARLEM (1939): PX

VIDEO SOURCES:

[Note: prices listed do not include shipping]

• AV = Alternative Videos, 857 Expositional Ave., Dallas, TX 75226 - (214) 823-6030 [\$29.95 each]
• FH = Foothill Video, P.O. Box 547, Tujunga, CA 91043 (818) 353-8591; FAX (818) 353-7242 [\$7.95 each]
• FT = Facets Video, 1517 W. Fullerton Ave., Chicago, IL 60614 1-800-331-6197 [\$24.95 to \$39.95] [Note: source for African-American Film Heritage Collection]
• GV = Grapevine Video, P.O. Box 46161, Phoenix, AZ 85063 (602) 245-0210 [\$14.95]
• MU = Movies Unlimited, 6736 Castor Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19149 • 1-800-523-0823 [\$29.99 each]
• NF = Nostalgia Family Video, P.O. Box 606, Baker City, OR 97814 - (503) 523-9034 [\$19.95 each; buy three get one free]
• NYS = New York State Black Film/Video Archives, 163 W. 125th St., Suite 909, New York, NY 10027 - Contact: Dr. Ernest Norman Steele, Jr., Administrator - (212) 749-5298; FAX (212) 749-3745 [29.95 each; Body and Soul \$39.95]
• PTB = Proud to Be: A Black Video Collection, 1235-E East Blvd., Suite 209, Charlotte, NC 28203 -Contact: Barbara A. Holston (704) 523-2227 [\$29.95 to \$34.95]
• PX = Phoenix Films Inc., 468 Park Avenue S., New York, NY 10016 - (212) 684-5910, 1-800-221-1274 [\$575]
[Note: source for Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection]

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS AND SMITHSONIAN VIDEO PRESENT

The African American Cinema, I : **Within Our Gates** (1919)

The African American Cinema, II: **The Scar of Shame** (1926) with the early sound short **Sissle and Blake** (1923)

The Library of Congress Video Collection is available for \$34.95 per cassette in the Library's Sales Shop and in Smithsonian museum shops and other retail outlets throughout the country. The videos are also available through the American International Distribution Corp. Shipping and handling is \$3.50. For additional information, call (800) 669-1559 or write Smithsonian Video, 64 Depot Road, Colchester, VT 05446.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

There could be no better time for members of your organization to seize the moment and fuse a coalition of support for the establishment of the Oscar Micheaux pioneer Filmmaker Award by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Micheaux, an independent filmmaker some 5 years before Irving Thalberg assumed the head of production at MGM, and continuing to produce through and beyond the Thalberg era, clearly indicates that he may well have contributed more to the motion picture industry than Thalberg himself. Yet Thalberg is deified by the Academy Awards telecast.

There is no valid reason why the Academy should not establish an award in Micheaux's honor that is of equal stature, prestige and recognition to that of Thalberg. It is time the world knew that the motion picture industry's survival beyond the 'Golden' years of studio dominance is in fact due largely if not solely to Micheaux's creation and pioneering development of the concept of 'Pre-sales' as a way of financing the production of films. This mechanism is now considered the most acceptable if not the only way of financing contemporary films the world over. But no one knows that Micheaux is wholly responsible.

I call upon you to engage in dialogue with America's black political and entertainment leadership as well as with Jack Valente, the president of the Motion Picture Association of America and Mr. Arthur Hiller, president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. ... The world awaits your efforts.

SUBMITTED: January 26, 1994 by Dr. Roland S. Jefferson, Producer, Los Angeles, California

ERRATA:

Lois Weber was incorrectly spelled in the previous newsletter.

Oscar Micheaux's novel, The Wind From Nowhere, was originally published in 1941.

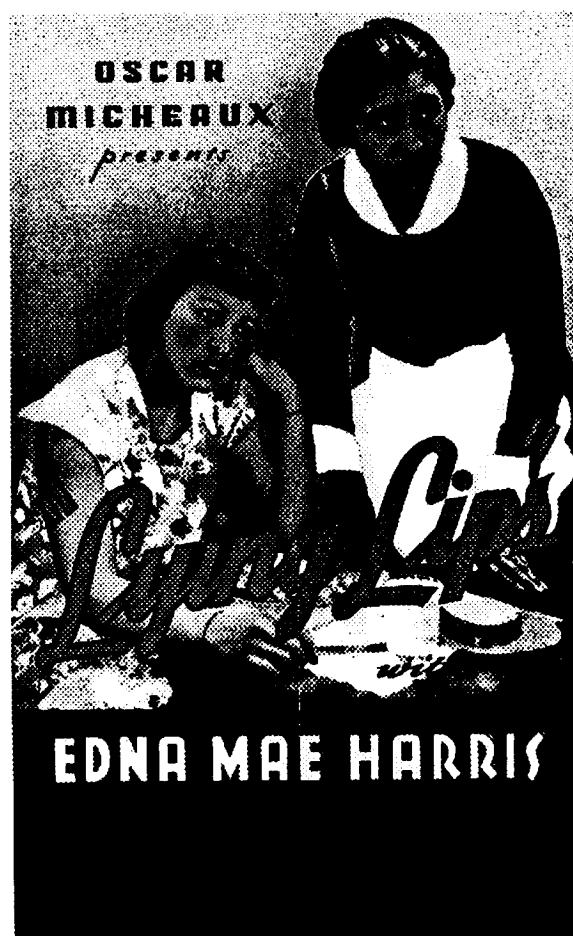
PERSONAL NOTES:

The editors of **The Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter** would like to thank and congratulate dedicated members of the staff at Duke University. Sheila Smith McKoy, editorial assistant, has completed her Ph.D. in English and taken a job as Assistant Professor at Vanderbilt University. Delicia Dunham, staff assistant, has been accepted into the masters program in Performance Studies at New York University.

The Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter is a publication of the Film and Video Program, Duke University. We welcome your contributions, questions, and comments at 107 A Art Museum, Program in Film and Video, Duke University, Durham, N.C. 27708, (919) 684-4130 or FAX (919) 684-3598.

Editors: Charlene Regester, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Jane Gaines, Duke University

Editorial/Research Assistant: Delicia Dunham



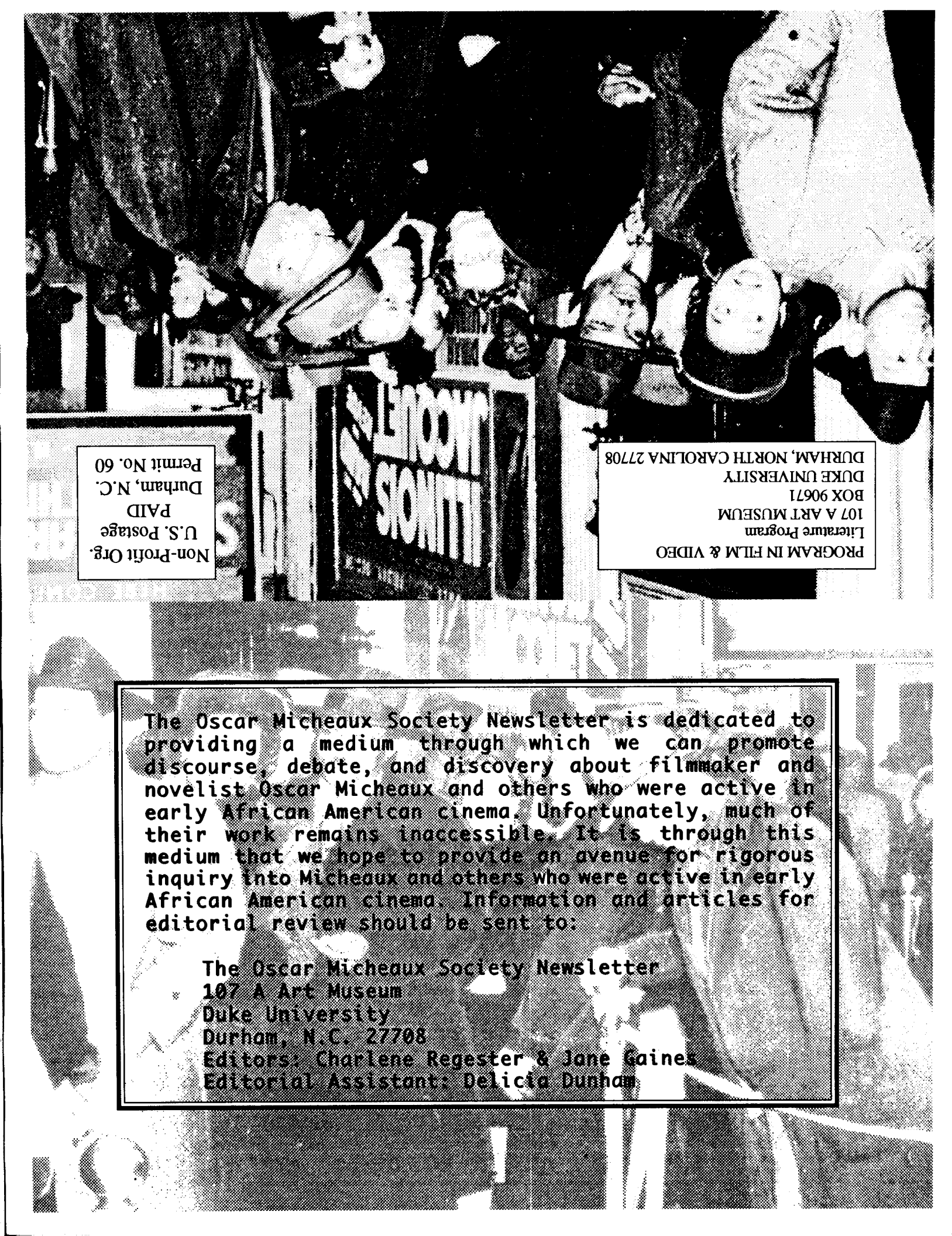
If you would like to be added to our mailing list, please complete the following form and mail, along with your check or money order, to the **Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter**, Program in Film and Video, 107 A Art Museum, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708. Subscriptions cost: \$10.00, in the U.S. and \$15.00 abroad. Check Payable to Program in Film and Video Micheaux Newsletter

NAME: _____

PHONE #'S: _____/_____

ADDRESS: _____

FAX & E-MAIL _____/_____



Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Durham, N.C.
Permit No. 60

PROGRAM IN FILM & VIDEO
Literature Program
107 A ART MUSEUM
BOX 90671
DUKE UNIVERSITY
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA 27708

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 rigorous inquiry into Micheaux and others who were active in early African American cinema. Information and articles for editorial review should be sent to:

The Oscar Micheaux Society Newsletter
107 A Art Museum
Duke University
Durham, N.C. 27708
Editors: Charlene Regester & Jane Gaines
Editorial Assistant: Delicia Dunham