**Oscar Micheaux**

* Oscar Micheaux was born in 1884, in Metropolis, Illinois, one of 13 children
* His parents were former slaves and Oscar learned very early to appreciate his freedom and to take full advantage of it.
* He would move to Chicago when he was 17 looking for a good job.
* He would shine shoes, work in a meatpacking warehouse, and work at a steel factory before landing a job as a porter for the railroad. This was one of the better jobs for an African-American during this time and would allow him to establish relationships with wealthy people that would be beneficial to his film career.
* After a few years on the railroad, Oscar moved to South Dakota in 1904 to become a homesteader. The government's Homestead Act allowed citizens to acquire a free plot of land to farm. He participated in a lottery to distribute homesteading lands on the Rosebud Reservation. Over 100,000 people participated in the lottery and only 2,400 homesteads were awarded. Oscar was not one of the lucky individual that were selected in the lottery. Still determined to have his own land become self-made, he hired a land locator to help him locate other lots of land and was able to purchase a relinquished homestead.
* Oscar enjoyed farming his land and was very good at it. Over the next few years he was able to expand on the land he purchased and gained the admiration of his fellow neighbors.
* Oscar had been journaling his experience on the homestead and submitting articles and short stories to the press. The press and locals loved his stories about life on the homestead
* Eventually, Oscar started to write novels instead of the articles and short stories. He published his first novel, ***The Conquest: The story of Negro Pioneer***, in 1913 through the Woodruff Press. The novel depicted his life on the homestead.
* He would sell his first novel by going door to door. Oscar used the proceeds to start his own publishing company due to the prejudice ways of other publishing companies of the era, which had little interest in authentic accounts of the Black experience. Oscar wanted to bring authentic black narratives to the writing world. He would be quoted saying the following regarding the move, “I want to see the Negro pictured in books just like he lives, But, if you write that way, the white book publishers won't publish your scripts, so I formed my own book publishing firm and write my own books, and Negroes like them, too, because three of them are bestsellers.”
* His second novel named ***The Forged Note*** would become his first book under his new publishing company, Western Book Supply.
* Oscar married Orlean McCracken in 1910.
* During their marriage, Orlean would suffer a miscarriage while Oscar was out of town due to work. Her family, especially father, didn’t like that Orlean was alone on the homestead, and convinced her to move back to Chicago with them. In the midst of the move, Orlean’s father sold some of Oscar’s property and kept the proceeds. Oscar attempted to reconcile with Orlean and retrieve his land but to no avail. The couple would divorce in 1917.
* On top of his divorce, Oscar had been experiencing a drought on the homestead for the last couple of years.
* In 1917, following his divorce, Oscar wrote his third novel, ***The Homesteader.*** The novel was categorized as fiction but was believed to based off his life experiences on the homestead, including
* The novel received critical acclaim, and garnered the attention of The Lincoln Motion Picture Company. The company was founded by two brothers, Noble and George Johnson, and considered the first all-black production company. They wanted to turn ***The Homesteader*** into a film but negotiations fell apart when the brothers did not want to allow Oscar to be involved in the film’s production.
* Oscar decided to start his own production company and produce the movie himself. He figured that he had started his own book publishing company, so he was surely capable of starting his own film production company. He would reorganize Western Book Supply as the Micheaux Film and Book Co. based out of Chicago.
* To raise money for the film he went to the wealthy businessman he had met during his time on the railroad, farmers from the homestead in South Dakota, and businessmen who he had befriended in Sioux City, Iowa while forming Western Book Supply. He sold stock to these people to raise capital for the film.
* In 1919, Oscar released ***The Homesteader*** to positive reviews. The film ended up being 8 reels long making it a feature-film. Oscar became the first African-American to produce a feature-film. The film was also the first film to touch on taboo subjects like interracial relationships while also depicting African-Americans in a more realistic light outside of the typical stereotypical roles blacks had been previously reduced to.
* Staying true to his objective of being able to “see the Negro pictured in books just like he lives”, Oscar’s second film came a year later and was a rebuttal to the popular ***The Birth of a Nation.*** The film was called ***Within Our Gates***. Oscar set out to depict the true reality of racism in America from a black man’s perspective and even included the depiction of a lynching to fully illustrate the racism that was occurring throughout the country.
* He would go on to release over 30 films and become recognized as the first black film producer, as the Lincoln Motion Picture would be short lived and only release 5 films. Oscar released silent films, talkies, short films, and feature films. He provided roles for black actors that differed from the typical roles of being lazy, an Uncle Tom, or a House maid. Roles in his movies gave black actors the chance to play roles of doctors, businessman, detectives, and lawyers.
* Some of his most popular works were ***Body and Soul*** in 1925 which told the story of a priest who struggled with his faith which was very controversial due to the religious content. In 1935, he produced ***Murder in Harlem*** which was a murder mystery where Micheaux played a detective investigating a murder in which a fellow white officer had blamed the murder on an innocent black man. In 1948 he produced ***The Betrayal***, which had his biggest budget of $100,000 and told the story of a black farmer who fell in love with a mixed-race woman. The film became the first film with an all-Black cast to premier in a Broadway-area theater in New York City.
* <https://www.nps.gov/people/oscar-micheaux.htm>
* <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/civil-rights-leaders/oscar-micheaux>
* <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0584778/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm>
* <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/micheaux-oscar-1884-1951/>
* <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Oscar-Micheaux>
* <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/646954/oscar-micheaux-first-black-movie-mogul>
* <https://www.micheaux.org/oscar-micheaux/>
* <https://friendsofhpph.org/2022/03/27/oscar-micheaux-the-superhero-of-black-filmmakers/>
* <http://normanstudios.org/nsdrc/project/oscar-micheaux/>
* <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/oscar-micheaux-31072.php>

Oscar Micheaux was born on January 2, 1884 in Metropolis, Illinois. He was the 5th child of 13 born to Belle and Calvin Michaux. At the age of 17, Oscar moved to Chicago to live with his brother and in hopes of finding a good job. He would shine shoes, work in a meatpacking warehouse, and work at a steel factory before landing a job as a porter for the railroad. This was one of the better jobs for an African American during this time and would allow him to establish relationships with wealthy people that would prove to be beneficial later in his life.

After a few years working as a pullman porter on the railroad, Oscar decided to move to South Dakota in 1904 to become a homesteader. At the time, the Homestead Act allowed citizens to acquire a free plot of land to farm. To acquire a homestead, Oscar had to enter a lottery with over 100,000 citizens who were looking to gain a homestead as well. Only 2,400 homesteads were awarded in the lottery and unfortunately Oscar was not one of the lucky individuals that were selected. Oscar was still determined to have his own land like his parents when he was growing up. He decided to hire a land locator to help him locate other lots of land and was able to purchase a relinquished homestead. Oscar enjoyed being a homesteader and was very good at it. Over the next few years he was able to expand on the land he purchased and gained the admiration of his fellow neighbors.

Micheaux’s time in South Dakota came with just as many lows as highs. On one hand, Oscar enjoyed being a homesteader and was very good at it. Over the next few years he was even able to expand on the land he purchased and gained the admiration of his fellow neighbors. Oscar still faced racism like other African Americans throughout the country. He started to write short stories of his experiences as a homesteader. Some of those early stories would be published in The Chicago Defender. During this time, Oscar met Orlean McCracken. The two fell in love quickly and Orlean would move to South Dakota with Oscar. Transitioning to life on the homestead was difficult for her and Oscar’s budding writing career did not help matters. Oscar frequently traveled for business and Orlean started to feel neglected. Her family had been encouraging her to return home, and eventually she would take their advice. On one of his business trips, Orlean emptied out their bank account and returned to her parents’ home in Chicago. Orlean’s father would sell Oscar’s land on the homestead and take the money from the sale. Once Oscar returned from his business trip, it was too late to retrieve the land or his money despite trying to do so. He would take experiences and craft a mostly autobiographical book named “The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Homesteader” in 1913. He would sell the book by going door to door and use the proceeds to establish his own publishing company. Oscar felt the need to start his own company because he wanted to be able to present authentic accounts of the black experience to the world. His second novel named “The Forged Note” would become his first book under his new publishing company, Western Book Supply. The novel was well received similar to his first book but it would be his third novel, “The Homesteader”, that received the most critical claim. The novel was released in 1917, and was such a hit that Oscar was contacted by The Lincoln Motion Picture Company to turn the story into a movie. Oscar was initially interested in the opportunity but his interest ceased when the owners of The Lincoln Motion Picture Company did not want to allow Oscar to be involved in the film’s production.

Despite not taking the opportunity with The Lincoln Motion Picture Company, Oscar still wanted to bring “The Homesteader” to film and decided he would start his own production company to produce the movie himself. He figured that he had started his own book publishing company, so he was surely capable of starting his own film production company. He would reorganize ***Western Book Supply*** as ***The Micheaux Film and Book Co*** and be based out of Chicago. To raise money for the film he went to the wealthy businessman he had met during his time on the railroad, farmers from the homestead in South Dakota, and businessmen who he had befriended in Sioux City, Iowa while forming ***Western Book Supply***. He sold stock to these people to raise capital for the film. In 1919, he was able to release “The Homesteader” film version to positive reviews. The film ended up being 8 reels long making it a feature-film, which made Oscar the first African American to produce a feature-film. The film was also the first film to touch on taboo subjects like interracial relationships while also depicting black people in a more realistic light outside of the stereotypical roles they had been previously reduced to. When Oscar started his book publishing company he stated the following regarding the move, “I want to see the Negro pictured in books just like he lives, But, if you write that way, the white book publishers won’t publish your scripts, so I formed my own book publishing firm and write my own books, and Negroes like them, too, because three of them are bestsellers.”. He had the same objective when it came to his films, he wanted to make sure that blacks were depicted in a realistic light. His second film, “Within Our Gates, was a great example of him staying true to that purpose. The film was a rebuttal to the popular “The Birth of Nation”, and Oscar used the film to depict the truly reality and harshness of racism in America from a black man’s perspective. He would include the depiction of a lynching to fully illustrate the racism that was occurring throughout the country. The controversy would only help his name grow within the film and entertainment world and propel him to further success.

Oscar Micheaux would go on to release over 30 films and become recognized as the first black film producer and owner of a production company. He would release silent films, talkies, short films, and feature films. He provided roles for black actors that differed from the typical roles of being lazy, an Uncle Tom, or a house maid. Roles in his movies gave black actors the chance to play roles of doctors, businessman, detectives, and lawyers. Some of his most popular works were “Body and Soul” in 1925 which told the story of a priest who struggled with his faith which was very controversial due to the religious content. In 1935, he produced “Murder in Harlem” which was a murder mystery where Micheaux played a detective investigating a murder in which a fellow white officer had blamed the murder on an innocent black man. In 1948 he produced “The Betrayal”, which told the story of a black farmer who fell in love with a mixed-race woman. The film became the first film with an all-black cast to premier in a Broadway-area theater in New York City. On March 25, 1951, Oscar Micheaux died due to heart failure in Charlotte, North Carolina. He left behind a legacy of being a pioneer in the entertainment industry as well as providing inspiration for future entrepreneurs.