

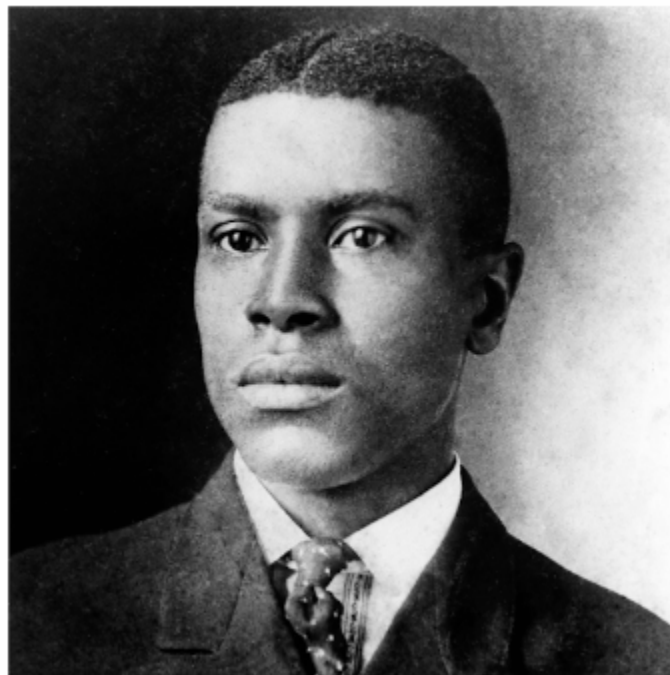
KINO LORBER

presents

OSCAR MICHEAUX

AND THE BIRTH OF BLACK INDEPENDENT CINEMA

**A collection of 15 films, including seven new restorations,
by the prolific independent director whose pioneering explorations of
contemporary Black life paved the way for generations**



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WITHIN OUR GATES

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1920 | U.S. | 73 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

When Sylvia Landry (“race film” super-star Evelyn Preer) gets swept up in the Great Migration from rural South to the big city, she makes discoveries about her own identity. Micheaux’s earliest surviving feature — or of any African American director. “Unfolds the vast political dimensions of intimate romantic crises. With a brisk and sharp-edged style, Micheaux sketches a wide view of black society, depicting an engineer with an international career, a private eye with influential friends, a predatory gangster, devoted educators — and the harrowing ambient violence of Jim Crow, which he shows unsparingly and gruesomely. Micheaux’s narrative manner is as daring as his subject matter, with flashbacks and interpolations amplifying the story; a remarkable twist regarding Sylvia’s identity, slipped in at the end, opens up a nearly hallucinatory historical vortex.” – Richard Brody, *The New Yorker*
4k DCP restoration from materials preserved by the Library of Congress

Written and Directed By: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Evelyn Preer as *Sylvia Landry*
William Starks as *Jasper Landry*
Floy Clements as *Alma Prichard*

THE NOTORIOUS ELINOR LEE

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1940 | U.S. | 72 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

Micheaux's last extant film stars Robert Earl Jones as Benny Blue, a heavyweight contender modeled after Joe Louis, and Gladys Williams as gangster moll Elinor Lee, who buys Blue's 10-year contract with plans to make him throw a championship fight. Lee's scheme is derailed when Blue loses a key fight to a German boxer, clearly modeled off of Max Schmelling. Shot in Biograph studios in the Bronx and produced by pioneering Black aviator Hubert Julian, who hosted the film's lavish world premiere in Harlem.

DCP restoration from materials preserved by the Library of Congress

Written and Directed By: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Gladys Williams as *Elinor Lee*

Robert Earl Jones as *Benny Blue*

Edna Mae Harris as *Fredi Welsh*

BIRTHRIGHT

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1938 | U.S. | 73 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

An idealistic Harvard grad returns to the segregated South to establish a grade school, encountering opposition from both races. With Ethel Moses, aka the “Black Harlow,” and a bevy of moonlighting Cotton Club dancers. BIRTHRIGHT was an early, brutal critique of segregation and Jim Crow laws which received criticism for its graphic depiction of institutionalized racism. In response, Micheaux published a declaration of his intentions as a filmmaker, reflecting the ideals of his lead character: “I have always tried to make my photoplays present the truth, to lay before the race a cross section of its own life to view the colored heart at close range... It is only by presenting those portions of the race portrayed in my pictures, in light and background of their true state, that we can raise our people to greater heights.”

Written and Directed By: Oscar Micheaux,

Based on the novel by: T.S. Stribling

Cast:

Carman Newsome as *Peter Siner*

Alec Lovejoy as *Tump Pack*

Ethel Moses as *Cissie Deldine*

BODY AND SOUL

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1925 | U.S. | 92 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

26-year-old Robeson's magnetic preacher moonlights as gambler, extortionist, seducer, thief, and killer — in his first film, arguably Micheaux's finest. "Robeson is a powerful presence: virile, confident, and intolerably charismatic; he seems completely at ease on screen." — Donald Bogle
4k restoration by the George Eastman Museum.

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Paul Robeson as *Rev. Isaiah T. Jenkins*

Mercedes Gilbert as *Martha Jane*

Julia Theresa Russell as *Isabelle*

THE GIRL FROM CHICAGO

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1932 | U.S. | 70 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

A remake of Micheaux's now-lost 1926 silent film *THE SPIDER'S WEB*, *THE GIRL FROM CHICAGO* explores the cultural rift between the urban and the rural, set in both Harlem and Batesburg, Mississippi. As had become his forte, Micheaux punctuates the dramatic scenes with musical numbers, set both in domestic parlors and the lively The Radium Club.

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Grace Smith as *Liza Hatfield*

Carl Mahon as *Alonzo White*

Eunice Brooks as *Mary Austin*

Star Calloway as *Norma Shephard*

Alice B. Russell as *Miss Warren*

THE EXILE

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1932 | U.S. | 93 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

Micheaux's earliest surviving sound feature, adapted from his 1913 novel *The Conquest*. Tells the story of a young African American man who migrates from Chicago to South Dakota and falls in love with a woman on the other side of the color line.

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Eunice Brooks as *Edith Duval*

Stanley Morrell as *Jean Baptiste*

Celeste Cole as *Singer*

Carl Mahon as *Jango*

VEILED ARISTOCRATS

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1932 | U.S. | 44 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

“Micheaux’s 1932 sound remake of *THE HOUSE OF THE CEDARS* (1925), based on Charles Chesnutt’s novel. One of Micheaux’s most controversial films, *VEILED ARISTOCRATS* addresses the question of the price of success in a middle class black community through the story of racial “passing.” Lorenzo Tucker (known as the ‘Black Valentino’) stars in this story of a lawyer who returns home to find that his light-skinned sister is about to marry a dark-skinned man, while his mother has picked a more suitable candidate.” – *Harvard Film Archive*
4k restoration by the George Eastman Museum.

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Lorenzo Tucker as *John Warwick*

Laura Bowman as *Molly Walden*

GOD'S STEP CHILDREN

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1938 | U.S. | 70 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

“Naomi, a light-skinned Black child, is abandoned by her mother and raised by the virtuous Mrs. Saunders (Alice B. Russell, Micheaux's wife and collaborator). When the girl's fixation with whiteness turns her against her own race, she is sent to a convent. Hopelessly in love with her adoptive brother, Jimmie, Naomi consents to marry his friend, but is repulsed by his darker skin and unrefined ways. The narrative comes full circle as Naomi leaves her own newborn baby and makes a tragic attempt to pass in white society.” – UCLA Film & Television Archive

4k DCP restoration by UCLA Film & Television Archive.

Written by: Alice B. Russell and Oscar Micheaux

Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Jacqueline Lewis as *Naomi*

Ethel Moses as *Mrs. Cushinberry*

Alice B. Russell as *Mrs. Saunders*

TEN MINUTES TO LIVE

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1932 | U.S. | 58 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

In Club Libya, a Harlem cabaret modeled on the Cotton Club, movie producer Gary Martin (Lawrence Chenault) scouts for talent for his new film and has difficulty choosing between two talented singers, both named Ida. Meanwhile, club patron Anthony (A. B. DeComathiere) gets engaged to Letha Watkins (Willor Lee Guilford), whose secret past re-emerges when she receives a note announcing that she has only 10 minutes to live. Based on Micheaux's own unpublished short stories.

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Starring Lawrence Chenault as *Gary Martin*

A. B. DeComathiere as *Anthony*

Laura Bowman as *Ida Morton*

Willor Lee Guilford as *Letha Watkins*

SWING!

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1932 | U.S. | 68 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

“After a woman discovers her no-good beau is two-timing her, she sets her sights on Harlem to make it big as the lead of a show but becomes a diva just as the producer is trying to bring the show to Broadway.” – Black Film Archive

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

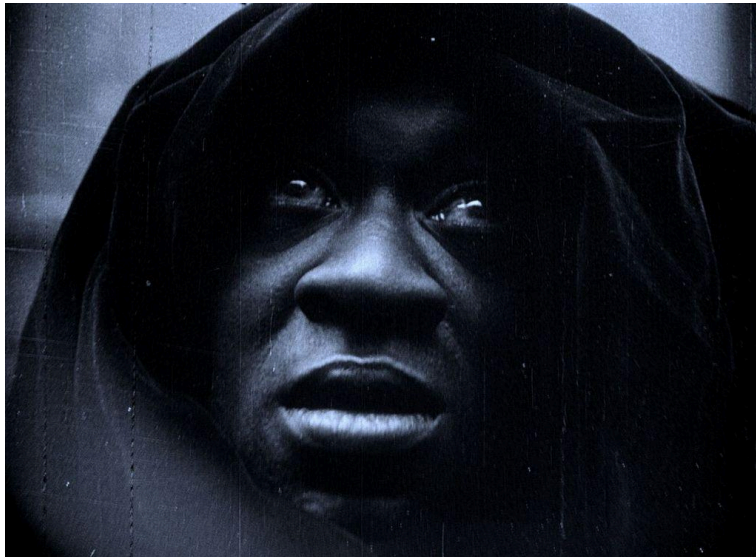
Cora Green as *Amanda Jenkins*

Hazel Diaz as *Eloise Jackson*

Dorothy Van Engle as *Lena Powell*

THE SYMBOL OF THE UNCONQUERED

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1920 | U.S. | 60 min | *Silent with English Subtitles*

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

“A love story between an enterprising young black homesteader, Hugh Van Allen (Walker Thompson), and a young woman named Eve Mason (Iris Hall), who moves to the Northwest upon being willed a mine by her grandfather. When Van Allen discovers oil on his property, he is targeted by the whites who want his land. In a visually stunning sequence, Micheaux shows Klan night riders with their white sheets, hoods, and torches set in stark contrast against a black sky. Perhaps no other film in history has quite encapsulated the nightmarish, threatening madness of the Klan. THE SYMBOL OF THE UNCONQUERED raised the question of racial identity as well as that of the miscegenation laws. Van Allen fears professing his love for the young Evon because he believes she is white. Only at the film’s conclusion does the hero learn that he is free to proclaim his love to a woman who, as it turns out, is indeed African American.” – Donald Bogle

DCP restoration by the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique.

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Iris Hall as *Eve Mason*

Walker Thompson as *Hugh Van Allen*

LYING LIPS

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1939 | U.S. | 73 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

“The story of a young social club manager named Benjamin (Carman Newsome) who risks his own livelihood to protect the virtue of a pretty entertainer named Elsie (Edna Mae Harris). The Italian mobsters (played by black actors) who run the club want Elsie to ”socialize” after hours with their best customers. But Benjamin refuses to coerce Elsie into doing their bidding and eventually quits his job, planning to enter government service.” – *The Chicago Tribune*

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

Edna Mae Harris as *Elsie Bellwood*

Carman Newsome as *Benjamin Hadnot*

Robert Earl Jones as *Detective Wenzer*

UNDERWORLD

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1937 | U.S. | 76 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

“When recent college graduate Paul Bronson (Sol Johnson) moves from the South to Chicago, he becomes involved with Leroy Giles (Alfred 'Slick' Chester), a local gambler. He also begins dating Dinah Jackson (Bee Freeman), a singer who is seeing Leroy although she is married to Sam Brown (Oscar Polk), a nightclub owner. While living in Chicago, Paul reconnects with Evelyn Martin (Ethel Moses), a beauty parlor owner and acquaintance from his college days. One day, Leroy spots the duo having lunch and informs Evelyn, who instructs Leroy to drug and rob Paul and to kill Sam. Just as Dinah walks into the room, Paul wakes up to Sam's dead body and the murder weapon beside him; she accuses him of the murder. Paul is however acquitted when an eyewitness comes forward with exculpatory testimony.” – *National Museum of African American History & Culture*

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Based on the novella by: Edna Mae Baker

Cast:

Bee Freeman as *Dinah Jackson*

Sol Johnson as *Paul Bronson*

Alfred 'Slick' Chester as *LeRoy Giles*

Oscar Polk as *Sam Brown*

MURDER IN HARLEM

A Film by Oscar Micheaux



1935 | U.S. | 96 min | In English

[Press Materials](#)

Synopsis:

Micheaux's remake of his own GUNSAULUS MYSTERY (1921), based on an actual case in which a Black night watchman becomes the primary suspect after he discovers a white woman's body. Micheaux himself appears in a cameo as a detective.

4K DCP restoration from materials preserved in the G. William Jones Film and Video Collection, Southern Methodist University.

Written and Directed by: Oscar Micheaux

Cast:

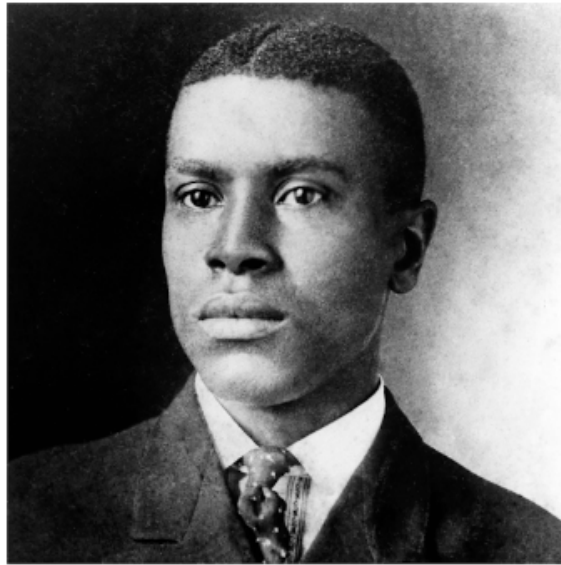
Clarence Brooks as *Henry Glory*

Dorothy Van Engle as *Claudia*

Andrew S. Bishop as *Brisbane*

Alice B. Russell as *Mrs. Vance*

About Oscar Micheaux



Operating on shoestring budgets, **Oscar Micheaux** (1884-1951) directed and produced more than 40 films between 1919 and 1948, shifting from silent to talkies, and depicting such complex and taboo subjects as religious hypocrisy, interracial marriage, police violence, and lynching, often with all-Black casts and producers. His work explored the Black experience with nuance and depth, often challenging the negative stereotypes so commonly portrayed in films of the era. Micheaux's films were the first made by a Black filmmaker to be shown in white cinemas, and they were often hugely successful, with Micheaux working directly with theater owners to finance, distribute, and market them.

Born to formerly enslaved parents in 1884, Micheaux moved to Chicago from a small town in Illinois and took on work shining shoes and laboring in the meatpacking and steel industries. He later worked as a porter for the American railway system, which allowed him the stability to travel, save money, and make connections with wealthy people who would help finance his films. In 1904, he moved to South Dakota and became a successful homesteader among a predominantly white, blue-collar population. Micheaux began writing about his experiences on the frontier, submitting articles to the press, and writing his first novel, published in 1913, *The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Pioneer*. The novel attracted the attention of a Los Angeles production company, which offered to adapt the book into a film, but Micheaux's commitment to being directly involved with the film's production dissolved their negotiations, and he went on to produce the film himself. *The Homesteader*, released in 1919, is now considered lost, along with most of Micheaux's silent work.

He followed his successful debut with the drama **WITHIN OUR GATES** (1920), featuring “race film” superstar Evelyn Preer as an educated Black woman who gets swept up in the Great Migration from the rural South to the big city, and dedicates herself to helping a near bankrupt school for impoverished children. Micheaux's earliest surviving feature – and of any African American director – is considered his most provocative, controversial film, with sequences deemed so incendiary that the film was repeatedly cut by censors, until the Library of Congress restored the film as close to the original as possible in 1992.

The great stage actor Paul Robeson appeared on the screen for the first time in Micheaux's **BODY AND SOUL**, a 1925 silent film that showcased his versatility and charisma in a dual role as an escaped convict and the Right Rev. Isiaah T. Jenkins. It is the only film Robeson made with an African American director. Alice B. Russell, the actress, producer, and Micheaux's second wife, played a large part in the professional life of her husband, starring in several of his films – **THE GIRL FROM CHICAGO** (1932), **MURDER IN HARLEM** (1935), and **GOD'S STEPCHILDREN** (1938) – as well as helping to run his production company, Micheaux Film Company.