



TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

FRIDAY
DECEMBER 11, 2015
7:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

WITHIN OUR GATES

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



Oscar Micheaux (1884-1951)

Oscar Micheaux was born in 1884 in Metropolis, Illinois, the son of former slaves. After working a variety of jobs, from waiter to steel worker, from Pullman porter to farmer, Micheaux wrote a memoir based on his experiences homesteading in South Dakota. The book, titled *The Homesteader*, attracted the attention of the Lincoln Motion Picture Company, a producer of race films. The project fell through due to a dispute over control of the film, so Micheaux set about turning the book into a film on his own, under the auspices of his company, the Micheaux Book & Film Company. Micheaux completed and released the film in 1919, becoming the first African-American to direct a feature film. He followed *THE HOMESTEADER*, which is now lost, with his second feature, *WITHIN OUR GATES*, the following year.



Drawing on the familiar tradition of melodrama and making powerful use of flashbacks within the story, *WITHIN OUR GATES* tells the story of Sylvia Landry (Evelyn Preer), a young African-American woman from the South who heads north to raise money for a rural school for black children. The film's depiction of a brutal lynching in a flashback sequence led to much of the most controversial material being removed shortly after its release, through censorship cuts that varied for each city in which it was shown. Advertised as "8000 feet of sensational realism," the film now exists in a print that is less than 6000 feet in length, indicating a loss of approximately 30 minutes of the film's original two hour running time.

Based on what remains, film scholar Michele Wallace places *WITHIN OUR GATES* into the context of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *The Birth of a Nation*, both Thomas W. Dixon's novel and D.W. Griffith's subsequent film adaptation, which was released five years before *WITHIN OUR GATES*. Wallace writes

The film's overall plot is highly convoluted, constituting a fascinating and cogent response to the racist accusations of Griffith and Dixon, the paternalism of Harris, and the naiveté of Stowe and subsequent versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Micheaux moves his narrative to the present, the Jim Crow era, and contrasts black rural existence, which seems to represent the past, with black urban existence and the future of the race. By situating his narrative in the present of the early twentieth century, Micheaux wasn't just curbing his production budget. His emphasis is firmly placed upon what blacks are suffering now, not why they came to suffer or even whose fault it is.

The version of *WITHIN OUR GATES* that screens tonight is likely quite different from what moviegoers saw in 1920, but the fact that it can be seen at all is a minor miracle. The film was thought lost for decades, until a film scholar identified a print titled *LA NEGRA* held in the Filmoteca Española in Madrid as *WITHIN OUR GATES*. That print was repatriated to the Library of Congress in 1990 and subsequently preserved. The print screening tonight is a product of that preservation effort.

PRODUCED, WRITTEN, AND DIRECTED BY
OSCAR MICHEAUX (1920) 83 MIN.,
18 FPS

A PRODUCTION OF
THE MICHEAUX BOOK & FILM CO.

STARRING **EVELYN PREER, WILLIAM STARKS, MATTIE EDWARDS, GRANT EDWARDS, E. G. TATUM, JACK CHENAULT, S. T. JACKS, GRANT GORMAN, FLO CLEMENTS, JIMMIE COOK, CHARLES D. LUCAS, RALPH JOHNSON, JAMES D. RUFFIN, BERNICE LADD, MRS. EVELYN, WILLIAM SMITH, AND LAFONT HARRIS**

DID YOU KNOW: ONLY THREE OF MICHEAUX'S SILENT FILMS STILL EXIST TODAY. IN ADDITION TO *WITHIN OUR GATES*, A PRINT OF HIS 1920 FILM *THE SYMBOL OF THE UNCONQUERED* WAS FOUND IN THE BELGIAN CINEMATHEQUE ROYALE AND PRESERVED BY THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, AND A CUT-DOWN VERSION OF HIS 1925 FILM *BODY AND SOUL*, WHICH MARKED THE FILM DEBUT OF PAUL ROBESON, HAS BEEN PRESERVED BY GEORGE EASTMAN HOUSE.

NEXT UP: CURL UP WITH A COEN BROTHERS CLASSIC IN JANUARY. AS THE TELEVISION ADAPTATION ENJOYS ITS SECOND SEASON, REVISIT THE ORIGINAL **FARGO**, CELEBRATING ITS TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY IN 2016. THE FILM STARS WILLIAM H. MACY, STEVE BUSCEMI, PETER STORMARE, AND FRANCES MCDORMAND IN HER ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING ROLE AS MARGE GUNDERSON. A 35MM PRINT FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE SCREENS **SUNDAY, JANUARY 31 AT 2:00 PM.**