

Carol Munday Lawrence, Producer. *Oscar Micheaux, Film Pioneer.* (Nguzo Saba Films, Inc., 1981) 16mm film, 29 minutes, color, rental fee \$19.75; purchase \$650.00. Distributor: Beacon Films, P.O. Box 575, Norwood, MA 02062 (617/762-0811).

Oscar Micheaux, Film Pioneer is one of seven films in the "Were You There" series produced by Carol Lawrence (the others include *The Black West, The Cotton Club, The Facts of Life, Portrait of Two Artists, Sports Profile, and When the Animals Talked*). This film's story revolves around Bee Freeman's (the Sepia Mae West) and Lorenzo Tucker's (the black Valentino) recollections of their relationships with Micheaux and their perceptions of his character. Danny Glover plays the role of Oscar Micheaux, Richard Harder is shown as the young Lorenzo Tucker, and Janice Morgan portrays the vamp that was Bee Freeman in *Shuffle Along*.

The film is technologically superior—better than anything that Micheaux ever produced between 1918 and 1948—and visually pleasing. The only significant problem with *Oscar Micheaux, Film Pioneer* is the overall veracity of the information provided by Freeman and Tucker. Three examples will suffice: Freeman says that "In South America they went crazy over all [of Micheaux's] pictures"; what she probably meant was the Southern United States, which is the truth. Tucker says that Paul Robeson was in the *Homesteader* (1918); Robeson was in only one Micheaux film and that was *Body and Soul* (1925). He also says that *God's Step Children* (1938) was Micheaux's final film, but there were at least three others after *God's Step Children*, including *The Notorious Elinor Lee* (1940), *Lying Lips* (1940), and *The Betrayal* (1948), which was a flop. The problems are serious, but not fatal.

The viewer can easily relate to the high esteem held by these artists for Micheaux. Freeman says:

Oscar Micheaux was the first negro producer of moving pictures of any note at all. He wrote the story, directed the story, he did all of the booking, and he wouldn't let anybody, anybody tell him what to do He was a pioneer . . . [who would use] anybody's house, church, dance hall, farm, anyplace he could get for his story He was all business, and that's what I liked about him.

Freeman admits that the movie stories were corny, but the excitement of seeing a colored cast not picking cotton or not playing comedy parts—really dressed up, really living, and talking like people talk—was uplifting.

Tucker says Micheaux thought that

Having a type like me . . . to play a decent . . . clean-type of young fellow in a picture . . . would sort of uplift the black of the South.

And of course this is why . . . he wanted beautiful girls, chorus girls, in his shows, because he thought this would give them something they didn't have down South and in the rural districts . . .—a smart showman.

Tucker also movingly describes how Micheaux helped him survive between pictures.

Carol Lawrence is to be commended for recording Freeman and Tucker in this documentary, because the film medium is a powerful vehicle in constructing history and forming images in the minds of people. She has made it possible for millions to learn something that "Hollywood" has yet to admit: blacks are people, no better or worse than any other folk.

—Charles C. Irby
Ames, Iowa

Editor's Note: As one of the viewers of *The Last of the Caddoes*, I invited David Gradwohl to write a review essay of the film. Although we are not in the habit of publishing such lengthy reviews, I believe the review will serve the membership, for our responsibility as an Association is to help eliminate social injustice (Charles C. Irby).

Ken Harrison, Producer. *The Last of the Caddoes*. 1982. 16mm film, 29 minutes, color, one-day rental \$52.50; purchase \$525.00, order #22180. Distributor: Phoenix Films, 468 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. (212/684-5910).

Several staff members and students in anthropology and Indian Studies programs at Iowa State University had the opportunity to view the film, *The Last of the Caddoes*, during the spring of 1984. The University's Media Resource Center had obtained the film on approval and sought our advice as to whether it should be purchased for on-campus classroom use and for rental to interest groups off campus. The film came with a respectable-looking pedigree: it was based on a short story by William Humphrey, an author of considerable repute in Texas; it was produced by Ken Harrison with funding from the Texas Committee for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities; and it was being distributed by Phoenix Films whose flyer advertised the film's subject area as "American Indian Folklore and Literature, Anthropology, Language Arts-Secondary, Social Studies,