

Vachel Lindsay Home to host Early African American Cinema Series January – March

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The home of one of America's first film critics will host a cinema series with showings of early African American films on January 21, February 4 and March 3.

The Vachel Lindsay Home State Historic Site at 603 S. Fifth Street in Springfield will host the "Early African American Cinema Series: Silent and Sound" in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday in January, African American History Month in February and Women's History Month in March. All showings will be on Saturdays – January 21, February 4 and March 3 – and all begin at 2 p.m. Since seating is limited, free reservations must be made by calling (217) 524-0901.

"People from all across the country visit the Vachel Lindsay Home specifically due to Lindsay's writing about film, and we are thankful for the opportunity to partner with Dr. Angela Winand and the University of Illinois at Springfield to present this important program," said the Lindsay Home's Jennie Battles.

Saturday, January 21

Within Our Gates (1920) This silent film was writer-director Oscar Micheaux's second feature-length film, which was also produced and distributed by his company as a response to D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915). Starring Evelyn Preer as Sylvia Landry, Flo Clements as Alma Prichard, James D. Ruffin as Conrad Drebert, and Jack Chenault as Larry Prichard, it is the story of a young schoolteacher's struggle to keep a black Southern school from closing. (78 minutes.)

Saturday, February 4

Hallelujah! (1929) This MGM musical directed by King Vidor, starring Daniel L. Haynes, Victoria Spivey and Nina Mae McKinney, is the story of a sharecropper who becomes a famous preacher. Filmed in Tennessee and Arkansas, *Hallelujah!* was one of the first all-black films produced by a major studio, intended for a general audience and considered so risky a venture by MGM that they required King Vidor to invest his own salary in the production. Vidor's vision was to attempt to present a relatively non-stereotyped view of African American life, and he was nominated for a Best Director Oscar for the film. In 2008, *Hallelujah!* was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." (90 minutes.)

Saturday, March 3

The Scar of Shame (1927) This crime drama from the Colored Players Film Corporation uses the

conventions of the genre to teach a moral lesson as an orphaned heroine searches for love and meaning in her life. The story by David Starkman, as directed by Frank Perugini, is melodramatic yet effective. The “all colored” cast is led by Harry Henderson, Lucia Lynn Moses, Norman Johnstone and Lawrence Chenault. (79 minutes.)

Following each screening, a discussion will be led by Dr. Angela Winand, assistant professor of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield, where she teaches courses on black women in film history, African American women's biography and autobiography, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and on African Americans and Afro-Creoles in New Orleans history and culture.

Any portions of the series cancelled due to inclement weather will be presented on March 24. Independent companies, both black-owned and white-owned, competed with mainstream Hollywood productions to serve new black movie-going audiences in urban areas during the decade of the 1920s, making acting careers possible for African American entertainers. Black audiences wanted to see their lives and experiences reflected on screen truthfully and meaningfully, without exaggerated stereotypes of minstrelsy and vaudeville. These films give us a glimpse of the kinds of stories told with the new technology of moving pictures. *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), arguably the first study of film as an art form, earned Vachel Lindsay the respect of film theorists and filmmakers. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, which administers the Vachel Lindsay Home, is providing guests with the opportunity to view and discuss these significant early films in the historic home of one of our nation's first film critics.

The Vachel Lindsay Home State Historic Site is the birthplace and longtime residence of poet, author and artist Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, 1879 – 1931. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for free public tours.

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