

NARRATOR

Since the beginning of cinema, the Black American experience has documented to various degrees with mixed results.

Inserts clips of Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Learning Tree, Shaft, Boyz in the Hood, and The Best Man.

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But some of films about Black America have been by White directors who received praise and accolades for their vision.

Inserts clips of The Color Purple, Cabin in the Sky, Imitation of Life, Blazing Saddles, and In the Heat of the Night.

NARRATOR

It was Black filmmakers like Oscar Micheaux who felt the need to broaden America's view of Black life. This was especially true after the release of 1915's Birth of a Nation.

Inserts a scene from Birth of a Nation.

NARRATOR

Whether intentional or not, Micheaux's seminal film Within Our Gates was a response to the poor, even hate-filled, portrayal of Blacks in the D.W. Griffith classic.

Inserts a scene from Within Our Gates.

NARRATOR

With that said, Within Our Gates' unintentional social commentary can be felt in today's films starring, written, produced and directed by those of the African diaspora.

Insert title card with stills from films for essay.

NARRATOR

Within Our Gates tells the story of Sylvia, an educated mixed race woman, trying to save a school for Black children in the South from being shutdown.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

She faces many adversities over the course of the film from losing her fiancée to facing racism in early twentieth century America. This masterpiece is one of a few films by a Black filmmaker to have survived from the silent era.

Inserts a clip from Within Our Gates.

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Many of the issues brought up in Michaux's film are still being addressed today. This is most evident in the works of director Spike Lee. Do the Right, considered one of Lee's best, addresses the inferiority complex between Caucasians and African Americans through the race rant scene in similar fashion to Michaux's scene between Mr. Landry and Mr. Gridlestone. Steve McQueen's 12 Years a Slave deals with the same issue.

Inserts clips from Within Our Gates, 12 Years a Slave and Do the Right Thing.

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The fight for equality in a white-dominated space in the film can be seen in Justin Simien's Dear White People.

Inserts clips from Within Our Gates and Dear White People.

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There's the social injustices faced by Blacks in the lynching scene similar to Oscar Grant's shooting in Fruitvale Station.

Inserts clips from Within Our Gates and Fruitvale Station.

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Upwardly mobile African Americans overcoming and subverting the systematic barriers set by power players in the film can be seen in Get Out and Sorry to Bother You.

Inserts clips from Within Our Gates, Get Out and Sorry to Bother You.

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The different treatment of light-skinned and dark-skinned Blacks in Within Our Gate mirrors the tension between Africans and African Americans displayed in Black Panther.

Inserts clips from Within Our Gates and Black Panther.

NARRATOR

With social commentary being ingrained in many Black films, Oscar Micheaux's Within Our Gates stands as the watershed moment in film history.

