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# Alice B. Russell

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**Also Known As:**

Alice Burton Russell, Alice Micheaux

**Lived:**

June 30, 1889 - January 1, 1985

**Worked as:**

film actress, musician, producer

**Worked In:**

United States

## by Kyna Morgan

Alice B. Russell, the second wife of Oscar Micheaux, played a large part in the professional life of her husband, starring in several of his films as well as helping to administer the Micheaux Film Company. There are several conflicting dates for her birth, ranging from 1889 to 1899. Patrick McGilligan believes that the date, June 30, 1889 recorded on the 1900 US Census, is the most reliable one (223). Her acting work began in 1928 with the *Broken Violin*, and she continued working in various capacities until Micheaux's last film, *The Betrayal*, in 1948.

In recent years she has come out of obscurity as film scholars such as Ron Green began to argue that she effectively worked as producer on some of his later films. Alice Russell appears briefly in *Darktown Revue* (1931), a variety-show style short, in a non-speaking role and may also be a member of the choir. This extant film was first produced as a prologue to Micheaux's first sound film, *The Exile* (1931), but was eventually released as a separate film, according to Bowser, Gaines, and Musser (Green 274). In 1926, Russell married Micheaux in Montclair, New Jersey. Their marriage license lists her as "concert soloist." J. Ronald Green postulates that one of Micheaux's female characters in his novel *The Case of Mrs. Wingate* who takes on many aspects of the motion picture business including both film editing and film sales, might represent Russell (27-28). According to Green, it is a reflection on both Micheaux and his wife that he appears to have appreciated her superior education and took her black middle-class background into consideration when assigning her roles (27-28, 151). Following Green's suggestion, we might see that this treatment of the characters that Russell played not only spoke to the esteem in which Micheaux held his wife but also is indicative of the refined image he wanted to project to an audience wider than the African American community, and in this Micheaux and his wife were typical of the uplift aspirations of the "race cinema" producers. It also seems likely that Alice B.

Russell downplayed her indispensability to the motion picture business. In a letter Russell wrote to her sister Ethel in 1948, she mentions Micheaux's travel to Chicago to make a motion picture, but only of her work that "He took me along to help him." And again, the image of herself as nothing more emerges in the 1930 New York City Census record where "Alice Micheaux" has apparently listed her occupation as "Helper – Motion Pictures." Today, however, we read this entry as leaving no doubt that she was actively engaged in many aspects of production.

With additional research by Aimee Dixon.

## Bibliography

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The bibliography for this essay is included in the "[African-American Women in the Silent Film Industry](#)" overview essay.

## Filmography

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### A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

#### 1. Alice B. Russell as Producer (Micheaux Film Corporation)

*The Darktown Revue*. Prod.: Alice B. Russell, dir: Oscar Micheaux (Micheaux Film Corporation US 1931) cas.: Alice B. Russell, si, b&w. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

### B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

#### 1. Alice B. Russell as Actress

*The Broken Violin*, 1928; *The Wages of Sin*, 1929; *Easy Street*, 1930.

## Citation

Morgan, Kyna. "Alice B. Russell." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project*. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013.

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