

# Norman Studios Silent Film Museum Opens, Honoring First Films Starring African American Actors in the Nation

---

(source: *The Michigan Chronicle*; by Lynzee Mychael, Multimedia Journalist)

August 24, 2023



Amidst recent headlines of Florida's attempts to erase black history through the controversial banning of critical race theory and books that celebrate impactful black characters and narratives, a striking paradox emerges. In a pointed step towards acknowledging and celebrating the rich history of diversity in the world of cinema, the Norman Studios Silent Film Museum has officially opened its doors in Jacksonville, Florida.

The museum is a tribute to the groundbreaking contributions of Norman Studios, the first film studio in the nation to produce films starring African American actors in positive and non-stereotypical roles during the era of silent films.

Jacksonville, often referred to as the "River City," was once known as the winter film capital of the world and played a pivotal role in the early days of the film industry, particularly during the silent film era. Among its many contributions, Norman Studios stood out for its commitment to breaking down racial barriers and portraying African American characters in a dignified and empowering manner.

The museum's grand opening event was attended by Jacksonville Mayor Donna Deegan, who highlighted the visionary approach of Richard E. Norman, the founder of Norman Studios. Despite being a white man, Norman recognized the discrimination faced by African American actors and the lack of representation in films and art. This drove him to produce films that centered on African American stories and characters, defying the prevailing stereotypes of the time.

Richard E. Norman's pioneering efforts date back to 1916 when he became one of the nation's first filmmakers to feature African American characters playing complex, non-stereotypical roles. This dedication to promoting diversity and inclusivity in film makes the Norman Studios Silent Film Museum a beacon of progress in the history of cinema.

One of the standout features of the museum is the exhibition of items from Richard Norman's personal collection, including his desks, tables, filing cabinets, chairs, and photographs from his film "Regeneration." These artifacts provide an intimate glimpse into the studio's creative process and the environment in which these groundbreaking films were produced.



Barbara Wingo, the museum curator, emphasized the historical significance of silent films, which played a pivotal role in spreading American culture globally from the late 19th century to the 1920s. The preservation of Norman Studios' five-building complex is a testament to their enduring legacy and contribution to the cultural tapestry of not only Jacksonville but the world at large.

The Norman Studios Silent Film Museum represents a labor of love from its organizers and supporters, recognizing the importance of cherishing and sharing this often-overlooked aspect of film history. Joyce Morgan, Property Appraiser, highlighted the historical richness of Jacksonville and the Arlington neighborhood, where the museum is located, as a fitting backdrop for such a tribute.

The museum opened its doors to the public on August 19th, inviting visitors to explore the history of Norman Studios and its impact on the film industry. As a 501(c)3 organization, the museum aims not only to preserve this history but also to transform the studio complex into a thriving community, learning, research, and tourism center. This epic comeback aligns with the vision of Norman Studios, which sought to champion diversity and quality in each era of Jacksonville's history.

In a world where representation and diversity in film continue to be important conversations, the Norman Studios Silent Film Museum stands as a reminder of the strides made in the past and the ongoing journey toward a more inclusive cinematic landscape. As the museum opens its doors to visitors, it also opens a window into the untold stories and contributions that have shaped the world of film as we know it today.

About Post Author



[Lynzee Mychael, Multimedia Journalist](#)

Lynzee Mychael is a Journalist, Creative Director, Music Expert, Content Curator, and proud Detroiter. This culturally inclined writer is a natural with topics around entertainment, hot topics, events, and candid conversations about life.

Her hobbies include reading, concert hopping, traveling with family and friends, and being the life of the party. She resides on the Westside of Detroit with her husband, children, and fur babies.

Lets Connect! Follow me on Instagram [@lamlynzeemychael](#) and send any story inquires to [lmychael@michronicle.com](mailto:lmychael@michronicle.com)