

Barbara Tapa Lupack: I see what you mean. I'd like to start by adding my thanks to the swelling chorus of thanks and congratulations to the BFC/A. I did most of my work for the Norman Project here and I am immensely grateful for the support and the assistance that I got at that time two years ago and in the two years since. I couldn't have done what I did without the graciousness of that particular archive.

The starting point for my discussion today is the Norman Film Collection. It's housed in the Black Film Archive and also in the Lilly Library. Thankfully for me anyway and I hope for the rest of us as well Norman was an incredible keeper. He saved almost everything. He never threw anything away. As a result, it was much, much easier to document his life story and also to piece together information about his films.

For those of you who don't know much about the Norman Film Collection I have a handout that's going to be coming around to you. It outlines just a sample of the kinds of materials that are available in the collection. It's a virtual treasure trove of material.

I also would like to direct your attention to a small exhibit downstairs, that was mounted by Indiana University Press. Also there is an even bigger exhibit that's currently on view at the Lilly Library. It was mounted by apparently an MLS student named Rebecca Stanwick and she did a remarkable job, not simply in documenting Norman's career but also in tackling what I think are some very intriguing and provocative questions that researchers might tend to ignore.

When Brian [Graney] asked me to provide a title for my remarks this afternoon I thought immediately of the phrase 'it takes a darn good one to stick.' That title I thought was an appropriate one in terms of discussion of Richard Norman and his work because it has a double resonance. On the one level, the most literal level, it's a line from a letter that Albert Fish, one of Norman's colleagues and a fellow film distributor wrote to him to express the limitations of the race film circuit and the problems common to most, if not all, race film producers. But on another level it's also an apt description of the challenges faced by scholars, researchers, archivists and librarians today in their attempts to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct vital black film artifacts in the absence of primary film materials.

Perhaps an even better analogy for the effort that we're all making is a jigsaw puzzle with many missing pieces. We assemble what we have into an imperfect whole and if we're lucky we get some sense, even a good sense, of the original.

The topic of our panel is the race circuit and I realize the key word is circuit. It certainly applies to my research and methodologies. I initiated my research on Norman in a somewhat secutious way. More than ten years ago I started researching a book that was published in 2002 on *Micheaux to Morrison: Literary Adaptations in Black American Cinema*. In the course of that research I came across Norman's name in passing. It was usually misspelled or wrong, Richard L. Norman and from one southern critic Robert E. Norman. At the time Norman was not my focus and so I moved on.

Eight years later when the publisher wanted to revise an expanded version of that book as well as a follow up study I decided to revisit some of the filmmakers whom I had merely touched upon in the original volume. My follow up book was going to be *The Best Black Films Never Made*. One of the chapters was going to be on Norman's ambitious but unproduced pioneering 15 episode race serial from the early 1920's *Zircon*, also called *The Fighting Fool*. As you can image that was a Herculean task. Actually it was more of a Sisyphean task since it was hard enough to research films that were in fact produced much less to speculate on ones that never were.

I started with Google and apart from some, actually there were only three good essays that I found, one of course by Professors Bernstein [Matthew Bernstein] and White [Dana White] and the other by Phyllis Klotman. I found very little material that was germane to my research. What I did find were references to the Norman Collection Indiana University which clearly intrigued me.

I applied for the Everett Helm Fellowship at the Lilly Library and in short order arrived in Bloomington to begin my work. At the Lilly I found an enormous level of support and a virtual treasure trove of rich material. After a week or so on site I felt that I had a good preliminary at least grasp of what the collection contained. Moreover, I realized the material was enough not merely for the chapter I had intended but for an entire book.

But after that same week on campus another interesting thing happened. One Saturday morning with almost no one else in the library, Dave Frazier, one of the incredible staff members of the Lilly was showing me the original three and six sheet Norman posters. Offhandedly he said to me, "And you've seen the materials at the Black Film Center/Archive?" I hadn't. I didn't even know if its existence. I assumed that the Norman Collection at the Lilly was in fact the entire Norman Collection because there was nothing at least to me to indicate otherwise. So I instantly went into a panic, particularly since my time in Bloomington was rapidly winding down.

That same day I contacted Mary Huelsbeck, who was the archivist at that time of the BFC/A. She is now the assistant director for the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. She is, to be sure, the patron saint of researchers. She made arrangements for me to view the Center's Norman materials and gave me an inordinate amount of access and assistance, as did everyone at the BFC/A, but more about that later.

In a discussion with Mary and again with Dave Frazier at the Lilly about copyright and use of some of the materials in the respective collections I learned that the copyright holder was Captain Norman, Richard Norman's son, who had donated the materials to Indiana University. I contacted him and he was quite encouraging though in truth I think he was a bit apprehensive about my intentions. In other words, would the book that I proposed reflect positively or not on his father.

Captain Norman is, it turns out, a founding member of the Norman Studio Silent Film Museum in Jacksonville, Florida, a nonprofit recently formed to preserve the Norman Studios, the only surviving silent film studio in the country. He put me in touch with several board members, Devan Stuart, Rita Reagan, and also mentioned that some local

Florida museums might have other relevant materials as well. In turn, Rita gave me the address and the name of Katherine Hyatt, the daughter of Bruce Norman, who was Richard's brother, and his early partner in the Norman Film Company. Fortunately for me, Kay was an amateur genealogist and the family historian. Over the months she shared with me incredible photographs and information about the family, information that even Captain Norman did not know or remember.

For example, she told me a great anecdote about the filming of Norman's second western, *The Crimson Skull*, in which a drop of blood being passed through the titular crimson skull determines the hero's guilt or innocence. Kay Hyatt told me that her father Bruce and her uncle Richard spent hours sitting at their mother's kitchen table with a human skull. She didn't tell me how they got the skull and I didn't want to know, trying various liquids until they came up with the perfect blood substitute, which was chocolate syrup.

Other leads came fortuitously but unexpectedly from colleagues like John Kisch, the director of the *Separate Cinema* for whom I had curated several exhibits. I mentioned to him the progress I was making in my latest research and was surprised to discover that he knew Captain Norman personally and had in fact purchased materials from him many years earlier. One of those items was a handbill for Norman's first western, *The Bull-Dogger*, filmed in 1922 starring rodeo legend Bill Pickett.

So it was back to Google for me to Google Bill Pickett's name. I found very little but I did come across a reference to his spurs, which are archived at the Autry Museum of Western Culture in Los Angeles. That led me to the Autry where again a miracle of an archivist helped me to discover some amazing Norman treasures that even they did not know that they had, including the original shooting scripts for several of Norman's earliest white cast westerns and for one of his race westerns, along with other material that I eventually realized was a scenario and a partial script for Norman's second race western.

So within six months the research was completed, the book was written, and Indiana University had accepted the manuscript for publication. The book was, I believe, as complete as it could be with material and images from the Lilly and the BFC/A, family recollections, and the original script which I had discovered and was able to include in full in the appendix.

And then every scholar's nightmare. With the book in final proofs I was surfing the internet doing some shopping late at night and I found an item advertised on eBay. It was purportedly the original shooting script of *The Bull-Dogger*, a script presumed lost for almost 90 years. What followed was a kind of comedy of errors, although admittedly I didn't think so at the time. I tracked down the seller and antiques dealer in Brewster, Massachusetts. I begged to see a sample of the script ostensibly to authenticate it before placing a bid and then to my husband's horror I calculated what our tax refund would be for the coming year and I made a bid. There is no happy ending to this particular story. Ultimately, I lost the auction. The final bid was more than three times what I had offered but at least among the losers for the script I was in good company. One of the other

underbidders was the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Maybe Leah [Kerr] and I were bidding against each other.

The script is now in private hands with the owner choosing not to be identified and the script itself unavailable for view or researching. But in what I can only describe as kismet, the opening and closing pages of the script that the seller had sent me for authentication purposes together with the scenario and the fragment from the Autry allowed me to reconstruct the entire script.

That's one good example, one small snapshot of the difficulties, challenges and rewards of researching this subject area. More about that too in just a moment.

So to recap and contextualize my experience I wanted to give you a visual of the highs and the lows, the pleasures and the frustrations. I have another Xerox coming around to you because I'm a luddite and I don't use the electronic equipment. The flow chart that's going to be coming around to you details the avenues and the deadends that I encountered just in researching material for Norman's two westerns, both of them produced in 1922, both of them produced within weeks of each other and both of them with the same cast, which was very common practice at the time.

Using my experience I came up with a short list of issues, challenges and concerns that I feel are important for researchers, scholars, archivists, and librarians to address. Looking first at the flow chart you can see some of the bizarre and often arcane twists and turns that I took to get to where I had to go. I know my time is running short so I will leave that for the question and answer period if you would like to discuss that further.

But now to get to the other sheet, that other sheet is a list of issues and challenges and suggestions that I've outlined. The first one and many of these have already been discussed this morning. How do and how should institutions provide access to materials? Access really does vary widely and wildly. It often depends on the personality of the curator or the director. Some are most welcoming, some are utterly forbidding. A corollary question for archives and archivists and libraries and librarians how should institutions select material for their collections and how can they and how should they satisfy the demands of their various constituencies? How do they prioritize requests, since obviously it's not possible to accommodate every request that comes into them? Another question, how do we learn about and then access material in private hands? I think this is a very important question especially if we try to investigate material that we don't know exists at this particular time. How to digitize existing archival material and develop finding aids that offer fuller and pertinent descriptions of individual items? I'm referring to extensive and appropriate metadata that will allow researchers and archivists to make the necessary connections.

I've noticed that problems often arise especially when the bequest is made to a particular collection over time. That's true certainly with the Norman Collection because in my research I found that often times there would be something in the Lilly Library and there would be a response to that particular letter in the Black Film Archive

and, again, there would be a response to that in the Lilly. So it was a matter of going back and forth and back and forth and trying to pull the pieces together.

Also, again, the final issue is now to facilitate research by establishing links across archives. As for the challenges I've outlined a few as well. How better to utilize existing resources, how do we develop good, strong links between, for example, the BFC/A and the Lilly, between the Indiana Archives and other museums such as the Norman Studio Silent Film Museum and UCLA, for example.

Here's one that we really haven't talked about yet, how to minimize the transmission of errors in research. Since access to primary materials are often limited what one scholar reports and construes or perhaps misconstrues is often passed on as fact in subsequent research. So I think it's a very, very important issue and also, how to secure funding both institutional and outside support for digital projects and how to maintain such projects over time.

And finally, at least this was a concern for me, a negotiating the unique challenge of dealing with living donors. That wasn't so much a problem with doing work with the Norman archive because Captain Norman was very accommodating but in another bit of research that I did with the writer Jerzy Kosinski or Yashinsky, I was dealing with the family. It took five years of litigation in order to resolve some of those problems before that book finally came out.

I'd like to conclude with a couple of suggestions. The first is to establish a better information and referral network. One of the things that I was recently involved with was through the Norman Studio Silent Film Museum was the Antiques Roadshow. The Antiques Roadshow was filming in Jacksonville, which is the site of the museum. What they did is they put out a call for any kind of Norman materials, what people might have in their attics, what people might have in their basements, what might exist in churches and schools in the various different locations in which his films were played and perhaps still exist today.

Another suggestion would be for crowd sourcing, social media and blogs to share existing materials and to discover new resources. Then the final suggestion which seems so obvious is utilizing opportunities to gather firsthand information. Chris [Jan-Christopher Horak] alluded to that earlier today.

Last week when we were at the Eastman House I happened to see a very interesting film called *Roman Polanski: A Film Memoir*. It was essentially an hour and a half of conversation with Roman Polanski and it was simply compelling. My suggestion would be for institutions, perhaps the Black Film Center/Archive and the Norman Studios could do something to interview Captain Norman or these other people who are now in the 80's and their 90's who still have a personal connection to that studio. If we lose that opportunity I think we lose a tremendous resource.

Again, thank you very much for the invitation.