

THE LITTLE RASCALS TO THE RESCUE;

A Feature-length film exploring the story behind the creation of the Little Rascals and how they changed Hollywood forever.

The Little Rascals to the Rescue is the feature-length story of how Hal Roach changed race relations in America without any fanfare or demonstrations. It is a story told by not only Mr. Roach, but former 'gang' members Spanky McFarland and Jackie Cooper as well as several film historians. The Our Gang Story explores the journey they all shared in creating the legendary series

At the turn of the twentieth century, veteran filmmaker Hal Roach moved to Hollywood, California. He started as a bit player at Universal Studios and within two years had worked his way up to running his own studio based in downtown Los Angeles. For the next several years, working with his talented lead actor Harold Lloyd, Roach became nationally known for great short comedies.

By 1920, Roach took the giant leap forward and opened up a large studio in Culver City, California. Over the next five decades, Roach Studios created some of the motion picture industry's most famous stars. Roach's stable of talent included Laurel and Hardy, Harold Lloyd & the Our Gang/Little Rascals comedies.

Mr. Roach came up with the idea for the Our Gang comedies in 1922. Upon their release in 1923, they became an instant hit, demanded by audiences and theatres eager to see the next adventure of these group of kids.

The Little Rascals to the Rescue traces the history of the Our Gang series, set against a segregated America that they were released into. When Roach first broached the idea with his studio executives, few were encouraging of the possible success. They noted that nothing like this had been done before. When Roach signed "Sunshine Sammy" one of his kid actors to a contract, the executives really thought their boss had lost his mind. Sunshine Sammy was a charismatic African American boy, and the idea of a group of white kids having him as a best friend to play with went against the heart of a nation that was segregated at every level.

The documentary explores 1920's America, where African American kids were raised in segregated neighborhoods, went to segregated schools and had few job opportunities available to them in life. Transportation was segregated. Hotels were segregated and demeaning racial stereotyping could be found at every level of society.

Hollywood reflected these values and minorities were shown in demeaning light in shorts, feature films and cartoons. The most successful commercial film of this period was *Birth of a Nation*, the story of the rise of the KKK, a film President Woodrow Wilson was said to be like 'history written with lightning.'

Against this background was a gutsy producer who was the first studio head to sign an African American actor. Equally bold was his vision of a group of kids whose playful adventures showed a vision of America that was truly color-blind.

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