

The Champeen

US : 1923 : dir.

Silent : ? min

prod: Hal Roach : scr: : dir.ph.:

OUR GANG: *Johnny Downs; Mary Kornman; Ernie "Sunshine Sammy" Morrison*

Adult cast unknown

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ € Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Johnny Downs, promenading with ms Kornman, finds himself mocked by a mere pickaninny...

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Morrison:

"The happy, wiry Frederick Ernest Morrison, later known as "Sunshine Sammy", began filming at the age of three in a somewhat roundabout fashion. His father, a brilliant

New Orleans family by a yet better offer in Los Angeles. He fell in with film studio people(as Richard Lamparski relates), and on hearing that a little black boy was needed for a short featuring the Pathé moppet [sic] Baby Marie Osborne, took along the next-door-neighbour's

son. The latter proved hopeless, so next day Mr Morrison took along his own Ernie.

Morrison Junior leapt wholeheartedly into the spirit of the thing and smiled like an angel. From 1917-19 he partnered Marie Osborne dozens of times, and seems to have been the first American negro child to be credited by name – not that this saved him from being called, variously, "little Sambo", "Rastus", "Snowball", "the diminutive Nubian", "the frolicsome pickaninny", etcetera. (There was not a lot of Black Power around in those days.) In France he was known simply as "l'Afrique".

During 1919-20 Ernie was featured in many short comedies with Snub Pollard. Hal Roach, who had taken to him greatly, starred him in "**THE PICKANINNY**" (21). It was to have been the first in a series of "Sunshine Sammy" one-reelers, but white distributors didn't see it as spelling home run. However, Roach signed Ernie up as a founder-member of **OUR GANG**, and he was in 28 **Gang** Films, from 1922-24.

In a few of the early ones he was called "Booker T Bacon" or "Sorghum", before they settled once and for all on "Sunshine Sammy". One of his memorably named roles was "Washington Joffre Foch Pershing Johnson" in "**THE OLD MAID'S BABY**". He acted with Harold Lloyd in "**GET OUT AND GET UNDER**", and with Wesley Barry in "**PENROD**".

Apart from a 1929 appearance in "**STEPPIN' ALONG**", the tap-dancing Ernie subsequently concentrated on stage work. Managed by his

father (something of a business wizard, who already owned a grocery chain and was a large candy wholesaler) he now began several years of vaudeville appearances, as "The Sepia Star of Our Gang Comedies". Later he formed a band called "Sunshine Sammy and His Hollywood Syncopators", and in the mid-Forties danced (as a temporary member of the Step Brothers) in "**SHINE ON, HARVEST MOON**" and "**GREENWICH VILLAGE**". He was the jive-talker Scruno in the **EAST SIDE KIDS** series.

Ernie Morrison quit show business around 1950 and went to work as a quality control inspector in the aerospace industry in Los Angeles, quietly proud at having once been the first black millionaire movie actor. He made guest appearances in TV comedy series like "**Good Times**" and "**The Jeffersons**".

[no listing in "Classics of the Silent Screen", "Hollywood in the Twenties", "A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen", "Silent Movies: A Picture Quiz Book", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. Details on individual **OUR GANG** titles are usually scarce.

See subject index under **BOY MEETS GIRL**, **COMEDY** and **SILENT CINEMA**.