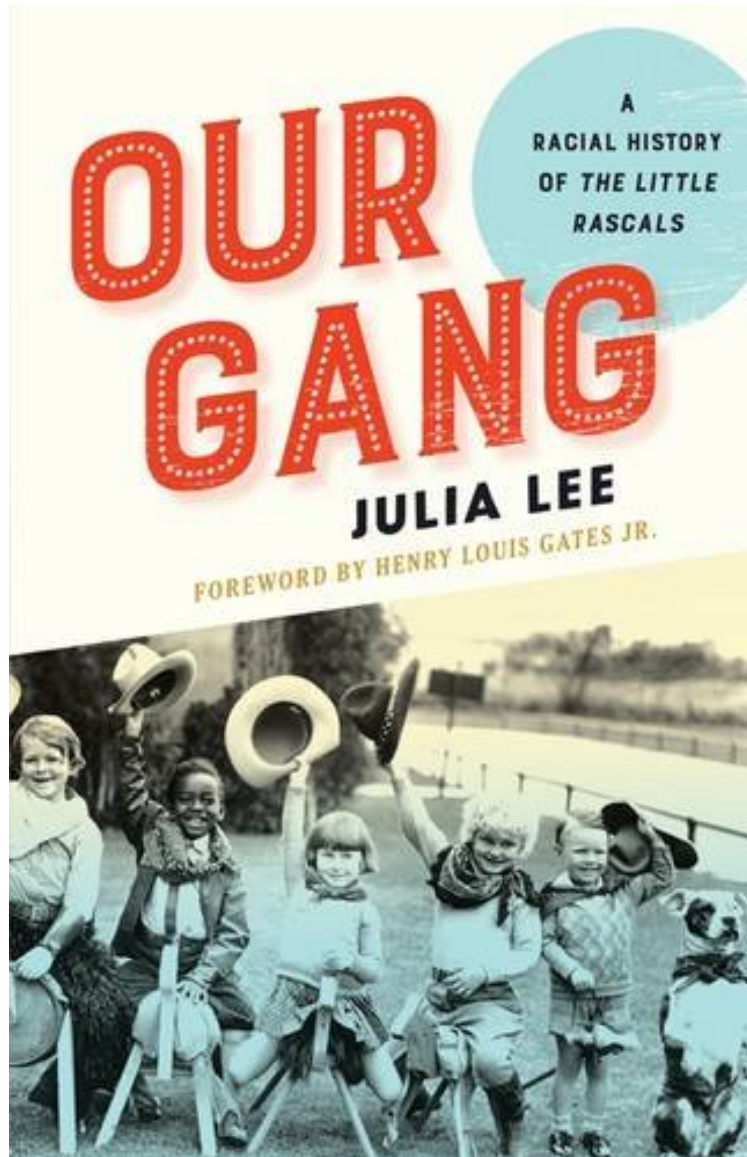


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Our Gang: A Racial History of The Little Rascals

Julia Lee

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Julia Lee : Our Gang: A Racial History of The Little Rascals before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Our Gang: A Racial History of The Little Rascals:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A great start at properly studying some under-rated films.By pisherThis crossed my desk at the library I work at, and rather than waiting for it to be available in the stacks, I got it for my kindle (I don't know who in his right mind would pay over 80 bucks for a hardcover copy, the perils of

academic book pricing). There aren't enough books about these films, and there's been no real scholarship before Julia Lee. I was very impressed by her research, and I agree with most of her reading of the Our Gang comedies and their place in American life and culture. The book is not without some flaws. We probably didn't need a whole chapter on the early life of Hal Roach, thrilling though it was (it was revealing to learn he claimed to have met Mark Twain several times as a boy). I would have liked more information about Robert McGowan, who directed the best Our Gangs, but maybe there just wasn't much she could find out (I certainly knew a lot more than I did before, after reading this). Her choice of films to analyze in depth is odd. Many of the best shorts heavily featuring Farina and Stymie are ignored--never even mentioned. She ignores *The Pooch* (both versions) and focuses on *For Pete's Sake*, trying to make it into a metaphor for lynching, which I think is a real stretch. Might as well try to turn *Gus Meins' Babes in Toyland* into a veiled metaphor for classic anti-semitism and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. She doesn't talk about *Baby Brother*, a silent short where Farina 'sells' an infant sibling to Joe Cobb, passing the baby off as white, but then Joe, having discovered the ruse, grins and says "She smiled at me--I'll keep her." Did Ms. Lee actually watch all the available films, because I don't see how you DON'T talk about this one in the context of confusing (yet strangely moving) racial messages that these films were putting out at a time when segregation was an overwhelming fact of American society. I think there needed to be much more analysis of the individual films--particularly the silents and very early talkies (I think she does recognize that the McGowan era was where the truly important work was done). But her emphasis on what was going on while these films were being made, and then re-discovered was important. Context matters. This book is well worth reading (not worth 80+ bucks, but that's what Kindle is for). However, it's a starting point. Much more needs to be done. Buy it for its own sake, but also because the better it does, the more books like it we'll see in future, and I certainly hope some of them are from Julia Lee.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Unbiased Story By Irv Hyatt Julia Lee did a great book, totally unbiased. I had the privilege of meeting many of the Our Gang and spent a great evening in a bar with Ernie "Sunshine Sammy" Morrison in Detroit in 1982 with a few friends. Great person, interesting life. Ms. Lee knows the difference between "Stereotypes" and "Racism" and writes a great book! Recommend it to fans and casual readers alike!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. While there were some interesting stories and pictures, the ... By ML Spence While there were some interesting stories and pictures, the book focused a lot on the socio-economics of the times. While some of that was necessary for perspective, it was too much and too repetitive. I wanted more on the stories of the characters and actors.

It was the age of Jim Crow, riddled with racial violence and unrest. But in the world of Our Gang, black and white children happily played and made mischief together. They even had their own black and white version of the KKK, the Cluck Cluck Klans and the public loved it. The story of race and Our Gang, or *The Little Rascals*, is rife with the contradictions and aspirations of the sharply conflicted, changing American society that was its theater. Exposing these connections for the first time, Julia Lee shows us how much this series, from the first silent shorts in 1922 to its television revival in the 1950s, reveals about black and white American culture on either side of the silver screen. Behind the scenes, we find unconventional men like Hal Roach and his gag writers, whose *Rascals* tapped into powerful American myths about race and childhood. We meet the four black stars of the series: Ernie Sunshine Sammy Morrison, Allen Farina Hoskins, Matthew Stymie Beard, and Billie Buckwheat Thomas, the gang within the Gang, whose personal histories Lee pursues through the passing years and shifting political landscape. In their checkered lives, and in the tumultuous life of the series, we discover an unexplored story of America, the messy, multiracial nation that found in Our Gang a comic avatar, a slapstick version of democracy itself.

"Thoroughly engaging, Our Gang makes historically and politically clear the discriminations of the Jim Crow south and the ways the series softened, and in many cases contradicted, the virulent studio and audience racism of the day." Ed Guerrero, New York University

"Like the series it traces, Julia Lee's book is a gem." Henry Louis Gates Jr.