

The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Ernest Frederick Morrison, Jr. (December 20, 1912 – July 24, 1989)

“First Black Actor to be Signed to a Long-Term Acting Contract”

Ernest Frederick “Sunshine Sammy” Morrison, Jr. was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on December 20, 1912, to father, Ernest Morrison, Sr. Not much is published about his mother. His father, who worked for a wealthy Los Angeles family with connections to the film industry, brought Ernest Jr. to Southern California shortly after he was born. One day a producer asked Ernest Sr. to bring Ernest Jr. in as a replacement for a child who wouldn't stop crying. Ernest Sr. brought his young son to the set, and the producer and crew were delighted with his pleasant disposition. The crew nicknamed him “Sunshine” and his father added the name “Sammy,” giving him the stage name of “Sunshine Sammy.” He made his film debut in the 1916's “The Soul of a Child” at the age of 3.

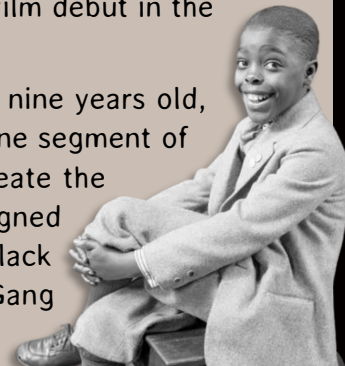
Sammy appeared in several Baby Marie Osbourne silent film features. By the time he was nine years old, a feature show called “The Sunshine Sammy Series” was created for him. Although only one segment of



the show was filmed, it inspired comedy producer, Hal Roach, to create the popular “Our Gang/Little Rascals” film/television show. Hal Roach signed Sammy to a contract in 1919, making Sammy the first Black actor to receive a long term acting contract. As the oldest Our Gang cast-member, Sammy earned \$10,000 a year, making him the highest

paid Black actor in Hollywood. Sammy appeared in 28 episodes between 1922 and 1924 as the character “Scruno,” before accepting an offer to perform full time in New York vaudeville shows. After performing for 16 years in New York, Sammy returned to Los Angeles where he was a regular on the television mystery show series, “Dead End Kids” and “East Side Kids.”

Ernest “Sunshine Sammy” Morrison poses for a newspaper photo in Chicago in



He was drafted into the army during World War II where he performed as a singer-dancer-comedian for troops stationed in the South Pacific. For several years after the war, Sammy turned down a series of offers to return to show business, saying that he had fond memories of the movies but no desire to be part of them again. He left show-business entirely and began working as a quality control inspector for an aerospace company in Compton, California. Sammy once noted that he had put his stamp of approval on some of the parts used to get the country to the moon, referring to the moon landing in 1969. Sammy worked in the aircraft industry for 30 years, and was financially secure.



Later in life, Sammy was brought out of acting retirement by film buffs who rediscovered him after the revival of the Little Rascals in the 1970s. He made several guest appearances in a few tv shows, including “Good Times” in 1975 and later on “The Jeffersons.”

In total, Sammy appeared in 145 motion pictures and was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame in 1987 along with Sammy Davis, Jr., Scatman Crothers and Jeni Le Gon.



Good Times 1975.

Ernest “Sunshine Sammy” Morrison, Jr. died of cancer in Lynwood on July 24, 1989. He is interred at Inglewood Park Cemetery in Inglewood California. He was 76 years old.

