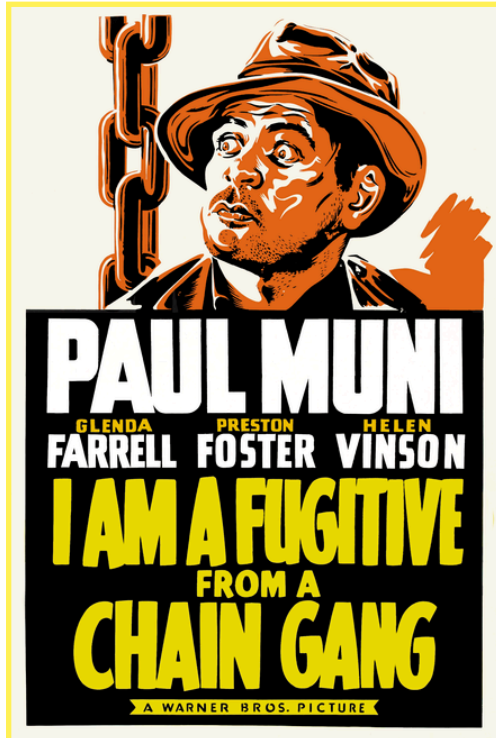


I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG

Based on the book by Robert E. Burns and Directed by Mervyn LeRoy



Impact of the Film

The film was shot in 1932, at the height of the American Depression. Warner Brothers Studios was very hesitant to release a film with such a dark and depressing ending, believing that it would not sit well or be enjoyed by the audience. However, the Director insisted on the original ending and script and the film was released less than a year later. He couldn't have been more right, as the film widely resonated with its audiences, receiving a 91% audience approval rating, and was nominated for three Oscars in 1934. The film was an eye opener to the public on the practice of chain gangs, and while many state prison systems had criticized the film and even in some cases banned the viewing of the film, (This occurred only in Georgia, which was the state in which the author of the book "I am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang" was sentenced to a chain gang in.) it revealed how disproportionately cruel and horrible the conditions that the prisoners experienced at the time were in comparison to how minor some of the charges that the prisoners were put in there for in the first place. Following the public release of the film, Chain Gangs were widely looked down upon and were used significantly less in the following years. Even Georgia eventually banned the practice in 1937.

Film Information and Summary

Ratings:

- Rotten Tomatoes - 96%
- IMDb - 8.2/10

Awards and Nominations:

- NBR Award for "Best Film" (1932) - Winner
- NBR Award for "Top Ten Films" (1932) - Winner
- Oscar for "Best Picture" (1934) - Nomination
- Oscar for "Best Actor in a Leading Role" (1934) - Nomination
- Oscar for "Best Sound, Recording" (1934) - Nomination
- National Film Registry (1991) - Winner

Summary:

After a fight overseas in World War One, Army veteran Sergeant James Allen attempts to become a successful engineer. After slowly slipping into poverty, James is held at gunpoint and forced to participate in a robbery, which results in him getting a ten year sentence to hard labor in a chain gang. After narrowly escaping, James moves to Chicago, where he finds a job in construction and meets Marie Woods, who discovers James' secret and blackmails him into marrying her. James then meets and falls in love with Helen, in retaliation Marie reports James to the authorities and he is placed back into a chain gang. After escaping yet again, James meets Helen one last time before leaving Chicago to lead a life of crime.

Robert E. Burns

Robert Elliott Burns was the author of the book of which the film shares the same title and is based off of. Burn's book was an autobiography of his own experience in a Georgia Chain Gang. The main character of the film, James, is a reflection of Burns, as he too was a WWI veteran who was sentenced to hard labor as a result of a petty robbery. After escaping custody and search parties multiple times, Burns escaped to New Jersey and was not found again until after the release of the film. Fortunately, Burns was not kept there for long, as the uproar of the movie soon resulted in the ban of the practice of chain gangs in Georgia.



Sources

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