

# Stepin Fetchit: The Life and Times of Lincoln Perry



Stepin Fetchit was one of the most popular and controversial African American comedians of the early 20th century. His signature character was a lazy, shiftless, and dim-witted black man who was always getting into trouble. Fetchit's routines were often criticized for perpetuating negative stereotypes about African Americans, but he also had a large following among both black and white audiences.



## Stepin Fetchit: The Life & Times of Lincoln Perry

by Mel Watkins

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 368 pages



This biography tells the story of Fetchit's life and career, from his humble beginnings in Florida to his rise to stardom in Hollywood. It explores the complex factors that shaped his comedy, including the racism he faced throughout his life. The book also examines Fetchit's legacy and his impact on American culture.

### Early Life

Lincoln Perry was born in Key West, Florida, on May 30, 1892. His parents were both former slaves, and he grew up in poverty. As a child, Perry was nicknamed "Step 'n Fetchit" because he was always running errands for his neighbors.

In 1914, Perry moved to New York City to pursue a career in show business. He found work as a dancer and comedian in vaudeville, and in 1925 he made his film debut in the short film *The Mysterious Stranger*.

### The Stepin Fetchit Character

In 1928, Perry created the Stepin Fetchit character for the film *In Old Kentucky*. The character was a lazy, shiftless, and dim-witted black man who was always getting into trouble. Fetchit's routines were often criticized for perpetuating negative stereotypes about African Americans, but they also made him one of the most popular comedians of his time.

Fetchit's character was based on the "coon" stereotype that was common in American popular culture at the time. Coons were often depicted as lazy, superstitious, and childlike. They were also often portrayed as being sexually aggressive towards white women.

Fetchit's routines often played on these stereotypes, but he also used them to subvert them. For example, in one routine, Fetchit is asked to take a bath. He agrees, but then he proceeds to take a bath in a bucket of chicken.

Fetchit's humor was often self-deprecating, and he was able to find humor in even the most difficult situations. He once said, "I'm the laziest man in the world. I'd rather sit on a fence and watch the grass grow than work."

## **Hollywood Stardom**

In the 1930s, Fetchit became one of the most popular comedians in Hollywood. He starred in a number of films, including *The Emperor Jones* (1933), *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935), and *Judge Priest* (1934).

Fetchit's films were often controversial, but they were also very popular. He was one of the few African American actors who was able to achieve mainstream success in Hollywood during the Jim Crow era.

Fetchit's success was due in part to his ability to appeal to both black and white audiences. Black audiences appreciated his humor and his willingness to challenge stereotypes. White audiences enjoyed his slapstick routines and his self-deprecating wit.

## Later Career

Fetchit's career declined in the late 1930s and 1940s. He continued to make films, but they were less successful than his earlier work. In 1950, he was blacklisted by the Hollywood blacklist for his alleged communist sympathies.

Fetchit spent the rest of his life in obscurity. He died in Los Angeles on November 19, 1985.

## Legacy

Stepin Fetchit was a complex and controversial figure. His comedy was often criticized for perpetuating negative stereotypes about African Americans, but he also used his humor to challenge those stereotypes.

Fetchit's legacy is still debated today. Some critics argue that his work was harmful to African Americans, while others argue that he was a pioneer who paved the way for other black comedians.

Ultimately, Fetchit's legacy is a reminder of the complex and often contradictory history of race in America.

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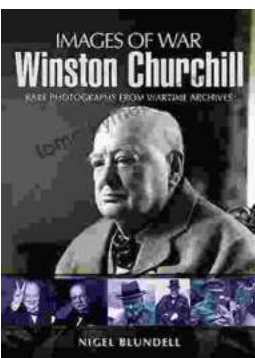


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