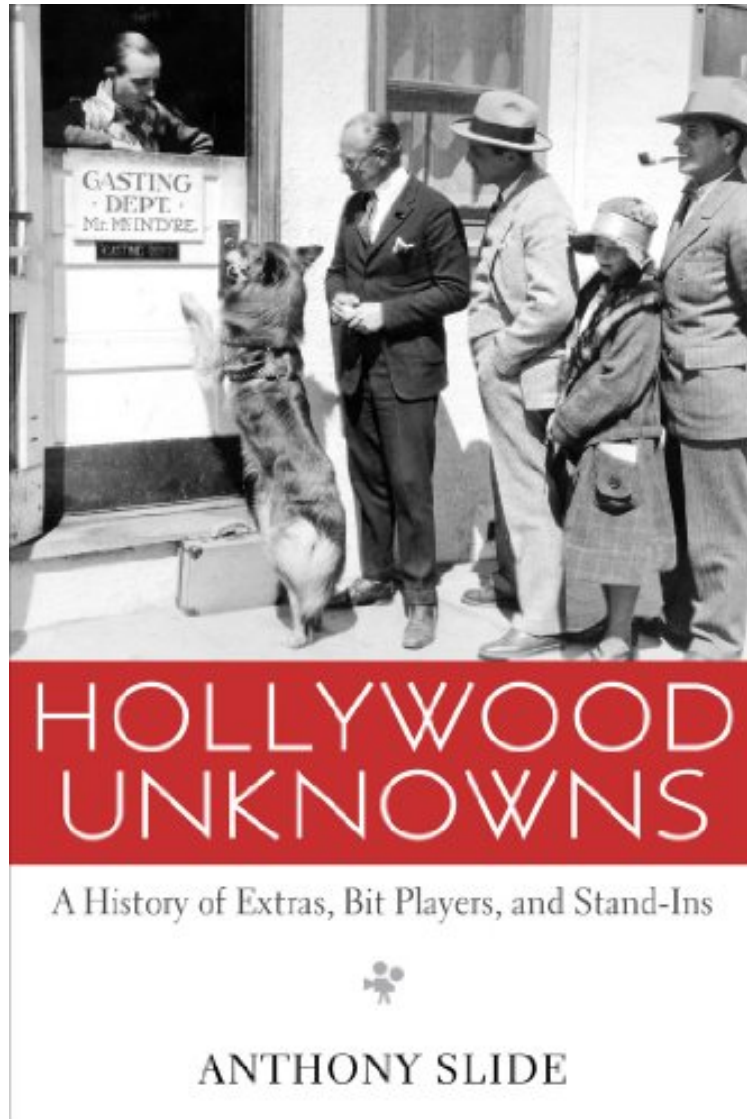


## Hollywood Unknowns

*Anthony Slide*

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**Anthony Slide : Hollywood Unknowns** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hollywood Unknowns:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I was unexpectedly delighted by the long overdue background given and light shed ...By CustomerI bought this book because it mentions my father, Henry Kraft, who was Ray Milland's stand-in, which helps connect some dots in our family history. In addition, I was unexpectedly delighted by the long overdue background given and light shed on so many who have provided so much in film. They have been necessary for realism and plot, yet rarely credited. Thank you, Mr. Slide!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Eye Opening View of a Little Known Group of PeopleBy catherine mcneilYou will never look at movies the same way

again! Bar scenes, dance floors and shoppers are now part of my watching enjoyment0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Hollywood Unknowns: A brief historyBy Rama RaoPity the "extras, bit players and stand-ins." These are the mostly overlooked and forgotten men and women in early Hollywood, especially those in the major Hollywood films from 1910 right through the dream factory's golden era. There were struggles of extras to make a decent living in harsh work environment. Low pay, little or no work, rip-offs from private employment agencies, and sexual harassment of women. Young women were always under threat from men; from studio bosses to casting and marketing departments. There were just too few jobs for far too many extras, some of whom were lured to Hollywood by what seemed to be rags-to-riches tales of stardom. Hollywood extras came from all walks of life-and many had good careers. Among the extras appearing in George Cukor's 1933 production of *Sylvia Scarlet* are: former silent leading man Gaston Glass; the first wife of Rudolph Valentino, Jean Acker; an early flyer, Major John Farrell; and Beth Taylor, the sister of actress Laurette Taylor. One commentator wrote in the late 1920s, extras would encounter "poverty, pathos and perversity in this fabulous paradise of prosperity, plenty and prodigality. This book discusses several issues related to the plight and working conditions of the 'extras.' Specific examples from this book are as follows: One star of the silent era sympathetic to the plight of the extras was actor John Barrymore. It is reported that he walked off the set in the middle of the day, leaving a couple of hundred extras with nothing to do. He was not particularly tired, but he was aware that making a living was difficult for extras. By deserting the set, Barrymore guaranteed them another day's work. Director Michael Curtiz, who was as cavalier loved to work with mobs. But he was abusive, and his violent confrontation with extras took place during the filming of *Noah's Ark* (1929) at Warner Bros. Both Curtiz and director Cecil DeMille had executive power, and they were autocratic with a mass of anonymous extras. Two Cecil B. DeMille productions of the 1920s made extensive use of extras, including many of the Jewish faith. On location in the sand dunes of Santa Maria, California, where much of *The Ten Commandments* (1923) was shot, more than two hundred Orthodox Jews added verisimilitude to the portrayal of Israeli slaves. *King of Kings* (1927) employed a large undisclosed number of Jewish men, supporting a cast that included prominent Jewish actors, Rudolph Schildkraut as Caiaphas, and Joseph Schildkraut as Judas, who were father and son. Their presence was of no account when the film garnered a storm of controversy from the Jewish community over its presentation of events immediately preceding the Crucifixion, strongly implying that Jews murdered Jesus Christ. More than ten years earlier, D. W. Griffith had faced the same criticism with regard to his filming of the same sequences in *Intolerance* (1916). And like DeMille, Griffith had hired "all the orthodox Hebrews with long whiskers to appear as extras in the lead up to the Crucifixion. Later, Griffith supposedly burnt that portion of the negative showing Jews crucifying Christ and re-filmed the scenes with Roman soldiers nailing Christ to the cross. The Warner Bros. production of *Noah's Ark*, directed by Michael Curtiz, released in November 1928 also claimed that some five thousand extras were hired for the film, with the casting department interviewing at least six thousand. Wardrobe, dressing, and makeup tents were pitched on the studio lot, which contemporary reports compared to an army camp. Military service was probably far less unpleasant because the extras were light-skinned, they did not resemble the dark-skinned tribes of the Middle East. As a result, the extras were ordered to strip, marshaled into line, and marched to enclosures, where some eighty makeup men and women sprayed them with a quick-drying, liquid brown solution. Once suitably darkened, the extras were ordered to costume themselves in robes, wigs, and beards. In 1929, director Raoul Walsh shot the most ambitious sound film to date, a historical Western epic titled *The Big Trail*, starring John Wayne, in the desert near Yuma, Arizona. It included numerous extras and filming included dangerous scenes. One extra, Pete Morrison saved three women from death by stopping the six oxen pulling the wagon in which they were seated from going over into a canyon. About four hundred Native Americans were gathered from Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana. They were separately housed in a native village and represented tribes included members of the Arapaho, Crow, Bannock, and Northern Cheyenne nations. One of the worst reported cases of physical abuse of extras took place on the set of MGM's *Riffraff* in October 1935. Forty women were called to the MGM set at 5:30 P.M. In the rain scene, they were soaked and hurled down by the full force of water from three fire hoses, backed by wind machines. Driven water, cold and sharp as icicles, blinded them and flung them about. Many were skinned from ankles to thighs. One woman was knocked unconscious, and another was paralyzed for hours. No drying equipment was provided. Working from 5:30 P.M. to 5:30 A.M., each woman got \$11.25. One director who was much liked by extras was W. S. Van Dyke whose credits include, *The Thin Man* (1934) and *San Francisco* (1936). He was known as "one take Van Dyke" with time for niceties. Years later, Minta Durfee, a silent actress turned extra recalled, "He always showed great personal concern for the extras." Actress Mary Pickford was also concerned with the mistakes extras were doing by taking great risks in their lives. She cautioned them in 1923 that "Success cannot be governed by set rules or bound by conventions. While hard work will help immeasurably to achieve it, it is in no sense a guarantee." The book also tells the stories, briefly, of young women who were physically attacked, which include Ginger Wyatt at MGM Studios, Patricia Douglass at one of the Culver City Studios, and Virginia Rappe. I enjoyed reading this book and it is highly recommended to readers interested in the history of Hollywood, silent movie era, and the Golden age.

Extras, bit players, and stand-ins have been a part of the film industry almost from its conception. On a personal and a

professional level, their stories are told in *Hollywood Unknowns*, the first history devoted to extras from the silent era through the present. *Hollywood Unknowns* discusses the relationship of the extra to the star, the lowly position in which extras were held, the poor working conditions and wages, and the sexual exploitation of many of the hardworking women striving for a place in Hollywood society. Though mainly anonymous, many are identified by name and, for perhaps the first time, receive equal billing with the stars. And *Hollywood Unknowns* does not forget the bit players, stand-ins, and doubles, who work alongside the extras facing many of the same privations. Celebrity extras, silent stars who ended their days as extras, or members of various ethnic groups--all gain a deserved luster in acclaimed film writer Anthony Slide's prose. Chapters document the lives and work of extras from the 1890s to the present. Slide also treats such subjects as the Hollywood Studio Club, Central Casting, the extras in popular literature, and the efforts at unionization through the Screen Actors Guild from the 1930s onwards. Slide chronicles events such as John Barrymore's walking off set in the middle of the day so the extras could earn another day's wages, and Cecil B. DeMille's masterful organizing of casts of thousands in films such as *Cleopatra*. Through personal interviews, oral histories, and the use of newly available archival material, Slide reveals in *Hollywood Unknowns* the story of the men, women, and even animals that completed the scenes on the silver screen.

From the Inside Flap  
The untold tale of bit players, doubles, Central Casting, and extras in American film  
About the Author  
Anthony Slide is an independent scholar who has published seventy-five books on popular entertainment. He has been a specialist appraiser of entertainment memorabilia for more than thirty years, an associate archivist for the American Film Institute, and the resident film historian of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.