



TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

WEDNESDAY

FEBRUARY 14, 2018

7:00PM • WHITNEY

HUMANITIES CENTER



PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



Paul Robeson, born in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1898, graduated from Rutgers University in 1919. While attending Columbia Law School in 1921, he began acting, and by 1924, he had established himself as an important leading man in part through his collaboration with Eugene O'Neill in his plays *All God's Chillun Got Wings* and *The Emperor Jones*. Robeson took over from the original star of *The Emperor Jones*, Charles Gilpin, in the spring of 1924, after O'Neill became dissatisfied with Gilpin's performance. Upon discovering Robeson, O'Neill described him as "a young fellow with considerable experience, wonderful presence and voice, full of ambition." "Emperor" Brutus Jones became the role with which Robeson was most closely associated for the rest of his life.

In 1932, director Dudley Murphy, who had produced Fernand Léger's avant garde classic *BALLET MECANIQUE* (1924), joined forces with two young American entrepreneurs, John Krimsky and Gifford Cochran, who were eager to tap into the market for "artistic" films outside the Hollywood mainstream. A year earlier, Krimsky and Cochran had acquired the American release rights for the groundbreaking German drama *MÄDCHEN IN UNIFORM* (Dir. Leontine Sagan, 1931) for \$8,000. When the film's overt depiction of a homosexual relationship provoked a ban from American censors, the battle went to court, and when the ban was overturned, the controversy helped the film run for 22 weeks and made the young distributors more than \$400,000. Looking for another artistically challenging project, they offered to purchase the film rights for *The Emperor Jones* from O'Neill for \$30,000. O'Neill agreed, with one stipulation: that the lead role go to Robeson. Robeson, who by now was living (and enjoying great success as a stage actor) in London, agreed, with one stipulation of his own: he would work on the film in the U.S., "excepting only such portions...as may be south of a line along the Mason-Dixon Line from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts."

Though the film was shot and released before the 1934 establishment of the Production Code Administration, it was still subject to cuts and changes as it was being made, demanded by the censor Will Hays, and was altered in numerous ways by local censorship boards after it was completed, each with its own agenda and objections. Some of the censor cuts involved a scene in which Jones murders a white chain gang guard, and another where Jones describes the brutality of the guard with another convict. The biggest loss incurred at the hands of the censors came in the form of two hallucination sequences that were cut before the film was released. In one, Jones finds himself a slave being sold at auction, and kills the auctioneer and plantation owner. In the other, Jones is in the belly of a slave ship, surrounded by the ghosts of enslaved Africans coming to the U.S.

After a brief commercial run, the film eventually fell into the public domain in 1959. *THE EMPEROR JONES* was the subject of no fewer than four restorations and attempted restorations between 1970 and 2000 as preservationists, collectors, distributors, and archives in the United States, Canada, and the UK attempted to return the film closer to its original form. Each of these attempts had serious flaws, and by the late 1990s, the Library of Congress began in earnest a project to bring *THE EMPEROR JONES* back to its original form. The original nitrate film negative survived, but had censor cuts as well as material lost due to nitrate decomposition. The hallucination scenes were never located, but by bringing together 35mm, 16mm, safety, and nitrate sources from archives and distributors around the world, the Library of Congress was able to combine the best remaining picture and sound elements into a unified whole. Preservationists Ken Weissman, now the supervisor of the Library of Congress Film Preservation Lab, and the late James Cozart worked with colleagues at the National Archives of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art, and Janus Films to piece together six different picture sources and four separate sound elements into a final product that is a representation of the work that comes closer to the way it was originally seen than audiences have experienced in more than 60 years. Censored dialogue and butchered shots had been restored to their original content and length, and the film, though still flawed, could now be judged on its own merits.

DIRECTED BY **DUDLEY MURPHY**
WRITTEN BY **EUGENE O'NEILL** AND
DUBOSE HEYWARD
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **ERNEST HALLER**
PRODUCED BY **JOHN KRIMSKY & GIFFORD COCHRAN, INC.**
(1933) 72 MINS.
STARRING **PAUL ROBESON, DUDLEY DIGGES, FRANK H. WILSON, FREDI WASHINGTON, MOMS MABLEY, AND HAROLD NICHOLAS**

DID YOU KNOW: EUGENE O'NEILL, DISTRUSTFUL OF HOLLYWOOD AFTER THE DEBACLE OF *STRANGE INTERLUDE* THE YEAR BEFORE, COMPLAINED THAT THE SCRIPT FOR *THE EMPEROR JONES* SUFFERED WHEN OTHER WRITERS BESIDES DUBOSE HEYWARD, WHO PERFORMED THE BULK OF THE ADAPTATION, PUT THEIR MARKS ON IT. HE DESCRIBED THEIR INFLUENCE AS MAKING THE FILM "FLASHIER, MORE EXCITING, A COMPROMISE NEITHER ARTISTIC NOR COMMERCIAL." HE WAS RESIGNED TO IT, THOUGH: "I WAIL NOT," HE CONCLUDED. "I GOT MY MONEY!"

NEXT UP: CELEBRATE THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARRIVAL AT YALE OF A GROUP OF MORE THAN 200 16MM PRINTS THAT FORMED THE SEED OF THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE. **THE YALE COLLECTION OF CLASSIC FILMS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION** WILL SHOWCASE VINTAGE 16MM PRINTS FROM THE ORIGINAL COLLECTION, WITH LIVE ACCOMPANIMENT BY DONALD SOSIN, **FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23 AT 7:00 PM.**