

Document Citation

Title	Emperor Jones
Author(s)	Roy Chartier
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1933 Sep 28
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	The Emperor Jones, Murphy, Dudley, 1933

9/28/33 VAN

EMPEROR JONES

John Krimsky-Gifford Cochran production and United Artists release. Stars Paul Robeson, with Dudley Digges, Frank Wilson, Fredi Washington and Ruby Elzy in support. Directed by Dudley Murphy. Based on play of same name by Eugene O'Neill, with adaptation by DuBose Heyward. Musical arrangement by Rosamond Johnson. Photography by Ernest Haller. Recording by J. Kane. At Rivoli, N. Y., Sept. 19. Running time, 80 mins.

Brutus Jones.....	Paul Robeson
Smithers.....	Dudley Digges
Jeff.....	Frank Wilson
Undine.....	Fredi Washington
Dolly.....	Ruby Elzy
Lem.....	George Haymid Stamper
Marcella.....	Jackie Mayble
Treasurer.....	Blueboy O'Connor
Carrington.....	Brandon Evans
Stick-Man.....	Taylor Gordon

Artistically 'Emperor Jones' ranks high in cinematic achievement and for Paul Robeson it marks a personal triumph, but as a commercial property it is doubtful. Picture's circulation will be greatly limited, not only in appeal but in exhibitor acceptance.

The south is entirely lost to it for consumption by whites, while in the colored theatres down in Dixie some question arises as to whether it will not meet opposition. It is understood already that colored operators below the Mason-Dixon

line are objecting to the use of the term 'nigger,' which may have to be cut where occurring if exhibition is wanted for the Ethiopian trade.

What 'Emperor Jones' loses in the south and elsewhere in America where it may be considered too highbrow and O'Neillish, it has chances of making up in the foreign markets. With Robeson popular in England and Europe, these markets will undoubtedly bring it a good return.

The O'Neill play always enjoyed a class rather than a mass appeal and thus its best grossing possibilities are limited to the larger urban centers of the U. S. In the medium-sized and smaller localities, it is not regulation screen fare. That probably explains why the O'Neill play, produced 10 years or more ago on the stage and highly successful in New York, was never purchased before for filming by any of the major producers.

A character study of a colored gentleman with a Napoleonic complex, it is more strictly the portrait of an individual, perhaps, than anything O'Neill has done, comparing closely to his 'Hairy Ape,' rather than a situation piece, with plot, as 'Anna Christie' and 'Strange Interlude,' both of which have been filmed.

The Krimsky-Cochran twain, who lined their already well-velveted pockets through 'Maedchen in Uniform,' have attempted to build acceptable film plot around the Brutus

Jones who becomes an island emperor. While achieving this in a degree greater than others might have, the picture is still a character study of a Negro whose audience acceptance will either be sympathetic or unsympathetic, according to viewpoint.

The forest settings eerily effective and the monotonous thumping of tom-toms adding to it, Robeson's performance of a madman, shooting at apparitions which appear in the darkness until crawling into the hands of his followers to receive the silver bullet, is one of the best things ever contributed to the screen.

Picture was produced at the Par Astoria studios, where the budget obviously was not encumbered to the detriment of production value. The settings themselves are imposing, notably of the emperor's island castle and the forest.

Robeson is the entire picture, but in Dudley Digges, as a white trash Cockney trader, he has chief of support that is excellent. Minor performances are contributed by colored artists, including Frank Wilson, Fredi Washington and Ruby Elzy.

In a couple sequences the recording is not as clear as desired, but not seriously a fault. *Char.*