

ARTS

TELEVISION EUNY HONG-KORAL

The worst of both worlds

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The film refers to the fact that Robinson was among the first to rebel against a vaudeville convention called "The Two Negro Rule", which one of the characters explains as follows: "No one coloured man is talented enough to entertain white folks on his own, so there have to be two on stage." Why is this subject handled so flippantly?

Robinson felt justifiably humiliated by the "happy darkie roles", as this film refers to them. But it is strange that *Bojangles* devotes so much discussion to the work of which Robinson was most ashamed.

This film makes the slipshod error of underplaying the social significance of the 1943 film *Stormy Weather* – a dignified love story in which Robinson starred opposite Lena Horne. The classic film is mentioned, but largely for the purpose of

gossiping about Robinson's second wife, a chorus girl who had danced with him in the film.

The creators of *Bojangles* missed this obvious chance to exult in Robinson's moment of glory, just for the cheap convenience of making a hackneyed point about evil

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Hollywood.

All we learn from this film, as the epilogue text tells us, is: "At the time of his death, *Bojangles* was the highest-paid black entertainer." I'm pretty sure the subject of this drama was not selected on the basis of income, so why highlight such a

ridiculous piece of trivia?

I cannot recall the last time I saw such a poorly researched biographical film. I am reminded of the trick we naively used in school when we couldn't meet the length requirement for class papers: using a large typeface and wide margins. We ceased this practice when one instructor scrawled at the bottom of one of our papers: "Do you think I'm an idiot?" I'd like to ask the same of this programme's creators.

□ *Jackie under my Skin* (Farrar Straus & Giroux, \$21), published shortly after the death of Jackie O, contains 40 essays whose titles read like a list of Barbie doll varieties: "Dream Jackie", "Astonished Jackie", "Jackie's Sunglasses and Scarf".

In this book, the respected but eccentric cultural critic Wayne Koestenbaum writes: "I admire [Jackie's hair-dos]; they blur the distinction between real hair and wig, an ambiguity that

advertises her superior sense of irony."

Now, could any Jackie fetishist raise his head after that? Apparently so, though the more recent culprits have felt obligated to obscure their Jackie fetishes by burying them in other stories.

The mini-series *Jackie Ethel Joan*, for example, pretends to take an interest in the wives of Robert and Ted Kennedy (Ethel and Joan, respectively) as well. (NBC. Airdate to be announced.)

But the drama portrays the two latter wives as star-struck by Jackie from the start, as if they were presciently aware of her iconic significance to come. Upon first meeting Jackie, Ethel (played by Lauren Holly) whispers to Joan (played by Leslie Stefanson): "I realised – she keeps asking questions so she doesn't have to talk about herself. She's deep, that one."

No one expects a biographical Kennedys epic to release new information. The entire mini-series, in fact, delivers what is expected of it, and no more. In several scenes, the characters deliberately position themselves to duplicate some of the famous Kennedy family home photographs: the ones in which the family plays touch football, or Caroline is holding a



Gregory Hines as legendary tap dancer Bill Robinson

particular spotted dog. How appropriate for a film

the Ken