

Abstract Writing Workshop

In my research presentation regarding the significance of the famous early 20th-century tap dancer, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, I am exploring why Robinson was a notable figure in the early stages of tap dance and entertainment on both stage and film. Through my historical exploration, I focus on how his career and work in the field have inspired the contemporary field of dance in various aspects. My motivation behind this research stems from my deep interest in the practice, performance, choreography, and history of tap dance. I have been inspired by some of the most influential works in tap, such as . Through this project, I focus on examining how Robinson’s career has shifted performative dynamics of the Vaudeville circuit of entertainment and dance in film. What are the components and reasons behind why Bill “Bojangles” Robinson is considered an early legend in the field of tap dance on both stage and film? How did the racial dynamic during the height of his career shape how we view his legacy today? How did he impact the dance industry? Dance scholars, namely, Hanah Durkin and Miriam Petty discuss his successful career in both film and stage and the racial boundaries of this time and how he was represented as a black entertainer. Through choreographic analysis of my visual sources, I explore his methodology in his iconic works. I place my findings in conversation with other theorists in the field of tap dance with regard to gauging Robinson’s significance. I analyze his works done on both stage and film. In my presentation, I show how these canonical works by Robinson becomes significant to his career during the 20th-century as a black entertainer in a racialized field. I also argue that Bojangles’s work has impacted dance history overall and not just the history of tap. In conclusion, the career of Bill “Bojangles” Robinson is significant because as a black entertainer, he successfully navigated segregation and racial dynamics of his time, developed new forms of tap, and guided future black entertainers in the field like The Nicolas Brothers.