

PAUL ROBESON (THE EXHIBITION)

A U L O B E S O I

PAUL ROBESON

Paul Who?

At the Factory in West London, there is a collected painting of Black heroes. There is a good balance of male and female figures, Africa, the West Indies and America, is well represented. This work of art has the ability of creating a sense of pride in black cultural heritage. Day by day these individuals long dead but not forgotten, are being rediscovered.

One face that is not on the wall is that of Paul Robeson. It is one of life's ironies that the face of the man, that should definately be there is missing. Let us not forget that in Russia there is a mountain named after him, in Berlin a museum, in Pennsylvania a film festival and in Poland, a street also bears the name Paul Robeson. The conspiracy to make Robeson an "un-person" has had a certain amount of success! There is a poem on Robeson that goes

My Hero
was a leader
I was never told of him in school

His feats
Accomplishments
Sufferings
And punishments
Were never seen in books

His name
His face
A distant haze
Shrouded
Clouded
In a secret conspiracy
That I should not know

For to know
I have
Tells me more than they feel
I ought to know
And shows the tainted white of
Their eyes

To know he was a lawyer
Scholar
Singer
Stage Actor
Film Star

Activist
And spoke twenty five languages
Defeats their lies

My hero will live
Not die
Survive their contradictory lies

+ Paul Robeson was born in Princeton, New Jersey in 1898.
He died in Philadelphia on the 23rd January 1976.
The Paul Robeson Exhibition is a documentation
of his life though hundreds of news paper
articles, photographs, books and memorials.
It is only through an exhibition like this
can the injustice be rectified. First, to
th^e memory of Paul Robeson and secondly to
the general public at large who ought to
know that there was a man called Paul Robeson.

This is a feasibility study of the exhibition. It is
written in attempt to paint a picture of Robeson and
his life. It is hoped that the research that went
into this paper will provide information that will give
an indication of what the exhibition consist of and an
insight into Mr. Paul Robeson.

BEGINNING

In trying to understand Paul Leroy Robeson, what he did, why he took certain actions in his life, we have to look at his background. At the very start of the exhibition under banner of Beginning, we see what Robeson's early life was like.

William Drew Robeson, Paul Robeson's father was born into slavery on July 27th 1945, on a plantation near North Carolina. In 1860, at the age of 15, William Robeson executed his God-given right of self determination and "freed" himself from slavery three years before Abraham Lincoln was coerced into producing the Emancipation Proclamation. By 1876 William Drew Robeson had managed to work his way through University. Two years later he married Maria Louisa Bustill. A tall, slender woman pale brown eyes, whose olive skin and raven hair suggested the mixture of African, Cherokee Indian and white Quaker blood that flowed in her viens. Paul Leroy Robeson, their fourth child, came into the world on April 4th 1898.

THE EXHIBITION

This section is one of the most compelling parts of this exhibition. It contains rare photographs of Robeson's father and mother. Some of these magnificent photographs goes back as far as 1845. There is also Robeson's college Thesis which he wrote in 1917. The Thesis has recently

been sent from America to Martha Edwards. The Thesis runs for 23 pages and is on the 14th Amendment (The Sleeping Giant of the American Constitution).

In all there are 35 pieces of articles/pictorial documentation in this part of the exhibition. All the items here are of a presentable standard. The standard measurement of all the boards in the exhibition will be 28" x 34". Seven boards are required.

See Budget for details.

SPORTS

Before he showed any ability as a singer or actor, Robeson had proved himself as one of American's best ever football players. He first showed his athletic prowess at Somerville High School. For the most part things were peaceful save for the racism of the school's principal, Dr. Acherman, who was tortured by Paul's successes and did all he could to make Paul feel inferior.

It was the second decade of the twentieth century, some fifty years after slavery had officially ended, yet blacks were still struggling for parity and recognition in a country whose warped vision would never allow them to accept anything other than a "separate and unequal" society.

In 1918 he was named as one of the players on the All-American Team. Years later when he became a thorn in America's way of thinking. His name would be removed amassed fifteen letters in four different sports. Excellence at athletics and in his studies did not go unnoticed. His peers at Rutgers announced that Robeson had proved to be a larger figure than even Booker T. Washington, who had died four years earlier.

The path of football glory was painful and tough. Robeson actually suffered physical damage that would last him for the rest of his life. As Robeson said years later

"I was seventeen years old when...I was trying to make the football team. Rutgers had a great team that year, but the boys - well - they didn't want a Negro on their team, they just didn't want me on it. Later they became my friends... On the first day of scrimmage they set about making sure that I wouldn't get on their team. One boy slugged me in the face and smashed my nose, just smased it. and then when I was down, flat on my back another boy got me with his knee, just came over and fell on me. He he managed to dislocate my right shoulder.

Well, that night I was a very, very sorry boy. Broken nose, shoulder thrown out, and plenty of other cuts and bruises. I didn't know whether I could take any more. Seventeen-years-old, it was tough going for that age. But my father...had impressed upon me that when I was out on a football field or a classroom or anywhere else I wasn't there just on my own. I was the representative of a lot of Negro boys who wanted to play football and wanted to go to

college, and as their representative, I had to show that I could take whatever was handed out.

...I stayed. I had ten days in bed, a few days at the training table, and then out for another scrimmage. I made a tackle and was on the ground. A boy came over and stepped, hard, on my hand. He meant to break the bones. The bones held, but his cleats took every single one of the fingernails off my right hand! That's when I knew rage!

The next play came around my end, and the whole first string backfield came at me. I swept out my arms...and the three men running interference went down. The ball carrier was a first-class back named Kelly. I wanted to kill him, and I meant to kill him. It wasn't a thought, it was just a feeling, to kill. I got him up over my head. I was going to smash him so hard to the ground that I'd break him right in two, and I could have done it. But just then the coach yelled; 'Robey, you're on the varsity' That brought me around."

One of Robeson's greatest achievements in the field of sports took place not on the field but off it. The date was December the 3rd 1943. Before 1943 Negroes were not allowed to play baseball for any of the major league clubs. At a meeting in New York with the High Commissioner of Baseball, the major league owners and a delegation of Negro publishers. Robeson appealed to the gathering in the following words.

"This is an excellent time to bring about an entry of Negro players into organised baseball. The time has come that you must change your attitude towards Negroes and keep it consistent with the attitude of the entire country. To me the most indicative thing that has happened in the fight against racial discrimination is the reception that I've been given in Othello. I was told before the play was produced that America was not ready to accept me or such a delicate theme, but I've never appeared before friendlier audiences. When I played football at Rutgers, we met Southern teams that threatened to cancell games if I was in the line up. The games were played and nothing happened. Baseball is a national game, it is up to baseball to see that discrimination does not become the American pattern. I come here as an American and former athlete. I urge you to decide favourably on this request and that action be taken this very season."

After the meeting the baseball magnates agreed that there should be no barrier to participation of Negroes in organised baseball.

THE EXHIBITION

4 This part of the exhibition deals with Robeson the sport-
man mainly from a pictorial point of view. There are
team photographs of Robeson when he made both the
basketball and baseball teams at Rutgers University
in 1917. There are also photographs of Robeson as a
boy in the line up of his school team. There are
twelve pieces in this section. About 8 pieces have
to be worked on. The work will cover two boards.

See Budget for cost.

STAGE ACTOR

It was via the stage as a straight actor that Robeson became known as a world renowned singer. In 1920, Robeson's wife Essie, coaxed him into the Harlem YMCA production of SIMON THE CYRENIAN.

While Robeson was a law student at Columbia University he had little or no interest in acting at all. Times were hard in Harlem and the promise of a weekly salary lured him to the production of TABOO by Mary Hoyt Wilborg. The play was a success and the production came to England under its new title VOODOO. The year was 1922.

In 1924 Robeson got the major break that sent him into his artistic career with a new commitment. The playwright Eugene O'Neill wanted him for the part of Jim Harris in his new play ALL GODS CHILLUN GOT WINGS. The fact that Robeson was being cast opposite to a white woman who would kneel at his feet and kiss his hand had brought a considerable amount of preproduction publicity. The same thing would happen six years later when he would play Othello for the first time with Dame Peggy Ashcroft.

After the production of ALL GOD'S CHILLUN, he appeared in another O'Neill play, EMPEROR JONES. He played the role of Brutus, an ex-pullman porter who builds a corrupt empire in Africa and is later deposed. A simple enough plot that was to later cause much controversy. In 1926 he played a prize-fighter in BIG BOY. Robeson went from strength as a stage actor.

In May of 1930, Robeson became the second blackman to perform the role of Othello on the English stage. Ira Alderidge was the first almost 100 years before. In 1939 Robeson turned his back on the West End and joined the left wing Unity Theatre near Mornington Crescent. His first play for the Company was PLANT IN THE SUN. The play made a strong dramatic appeal for trade unionism. Its moral is simple. Stick together or the man at the top will beat you in the economic bargain. The five main characters are workers in a packing shop of a big factory. They decided to stage a sit-down strike because one of their numbers has been victimized for talking unionism.

THE EXHIBITION

Photographs of Robeson in Eugene O'Neill's plays (All God's Chillun Got Wings and Emperor Jones) are to be found in this part of the exhibition. Recent material that has yet to be displayed include photographs from the plays he performed with the unity theatre.

C.L.R. James has supplied newspaper reviews of his play TOUSSAINT in which Robeson appeared in March of 1936. The reviews are in an advance state of decay and will have to be photocopied from the original. These include the GLASGOW HERALD, 18th March 1936, The DAILY MAIL of 17th March 1936 and the April issue of DRAMA LONDON 1936. A certain amount of work has to be done on this section of the exhibition, recopying and obtaining more material. Two boards will be needed to accommodate 14 pieces.

OTHELLO

Recently we saw the Young Vic's production of Othello with the black actor Rudolph Walker. The forthcoming Lyric Hammersmith production of Othello will also star a black actor, Joe Marcell. It is worth bearing in mind that less than three years ago, the director of the National Theatre, Sir Peter Hall, said in a television documentary that he didn't feel there was a black actor in Britain who was capable of playing the Moor. The actors that Sir Peter Hall felt weren't capable of doing justice to Shakespeare's work were around when he made his bold, now unjust statement. Robeson was the second Black Actor to play Othello. The first was Ira Aldridge, who played the role against the Iago of the brilliant Edmund Keen in the 1860's. However, because Robeson was the first Black Actor this century to play the role, not once, but in three different productions over twenty years. It is fair to say that he opened the door for the Walkers and Marcells.

Robeson observed in 1930:

"Othello in the Venice of that time was in practically the same position as a coloured man in America today. He was a general, and while he could be valuable as a fighter, he was tolerated, just as a negro who could save New York from a disaster, would become a great man overnight. However as Othello wanted a white woman, Desdemona, everything was changed."

It is felt in certain quarters that had Robeson not played the role, the role would have been lost to Negro actors forever. There were heated discussion on what manner of man Shakespeare intended - an Arab or Negro. Robeson saved the day by saying:

"In Shakespeare's time, I feel, there was no great distinction between the Moor and the brown or black...In Shakespeare's own time and throughout the restoration, notably by Garrick, the part was played as a blackman. This was not changed until the time of Edmund Keen, about the middle of the nineteenth century, when he (Othello) became brown. I feel that had to do with the fact that at that time Africa was the slave centre of the world and people wanted to forget the ancient glory of the Ethiopians.

When Robeson first played the role of Othello in 1930, at the Savoy Theatre. He did receive poisoned letters and threats if he deared to kiss a white woman on stage.

Playing the role of Desdemona was the young Peggy Ashcroft. The Morning Post reviewer said:

"There has been no Othello on our stage certainly for forty years, to compare with his dignity, simplicity and true passion...In general from an elocutionary point of view, one only wishes that some of our actors could take example from his rolling and natural response to the rhythm and beauty of Shakespeare's verse."

It took another twelve years before Robeson could play the role in his native America. The play opened at the Brattle Hall, Cambridge Massachusetts, and in the following year 1943, it opened on Broadway. By so doing he had restored dignity and power to the shabby commercial stage.

The New York Journal-American Critic wrote:

"I'd be surprised if thanks to the farsightedness of the Theatre Guild and the magnificent performance of Paul Robeson in the title role, we fortunate New Yorkers playgoers were not seeing the real 'Othello', the Moor of Venice William Shakespeare actually had in mind."

1959 was the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre 100th season. In the repertoire for the season was Othello. This would be the final time that Robeson would play Othello. Never before had such an illustrious cast been assembled for a production. Peter Woodthorpe played Roderigo, Sam Wanamaker played Iago, Albert Finney played Cassio, Ian Holm played the Duke of Venice, the late Angela Baddeley of "Upstairs Downstairs" played Emilia, Julian Glover played Montano, Vanessa Redgrave and Diana Rigg could only make the crowd scenes.

THE EXHIBITION

It was a sad fact that Robeson's performance of Othello was never captured on film. What we do have are a number of photographs of the 1930, 1943 and 1959 productions of Othello. The contents of this section runs to 40 pieces of the exhibition. This section has to be supplemented with photographs from the 1959 performance of Othello from the Shakespeare Memorial Trust. There are also 10 pieces that have to be enlarged. About 7 Boards will be needed.

See Budget for details.

ROBESON AND WALES

The title of Honary Welshman is apt for the man who was born the son of a former slave, and felt at home with the Welsh people. Robeson's association with Welsh people began back in 1928 when he was appearing in the stage musical Showboat.

After the general strike, the Welsh miners felt that their grievance has not been adequately dealt with. So they left their villages and towns and journeyed to London to protest about their conditions. Robeson from his dressing room at Drury Lane, heard the singing miners and went downstairs to see what all the singing was about. He met the Welsh miners and they told him of conditions in their mining valleys. He then promised to visit them and see for himself what the conditions were like. Thus began a life long association with the Welsh people.

Robeson arrived in the Rhondda valley between the Great Wars when rising prices, runaway inflation and the disclosure of unshared war profits brought on more than the usual labour unrest. Fortunately for the miners, the period produced its own daring union leadership in such men as William Paynter, D.D. Evans and Dia Francis.

Robeson's close relationship with the Welsh miners was reflected in the film "PROUD VALLEY". The film was shot in the Rhonda Valley in 1938-39. During the shooting, Robeson lived with the miners, many of whom appeared in the film. Scenes in the movie showed miners in their homes, stores and the mines.

"PROUD VALLEY" was completed in mid-September and Robeson sailed for America in May of 1939, ending a 12 years exile in London. It is felt that Robeson's close relation with the miners influenced his decision to return home in 1939. The poor working conditions in the mines reminded him of the intolerable conditions of his relations on the tobacco plantation in North Carolina and the mine fields in West Virginia. He saw here again the ruthless exploitation of the working class that make the problems of the poor all over the world different, if not insoluble. Robeson cast his lot with the miners, campaigning their cause whenever the opportunity arose. Such behavior alienated the mine owners but ensured a life-long friendship between Robeson and the people of the valleys.

In the years that Robeson was denied a passport, the Welsh were certainly the most vocal and active group, who tried to get the State Department to change their minds. As early as 1953, the Miners' Union of South Wales joined with many other groups to register their outrage at the way Robeson was "persecuted" by the United States Government. They claimed in effect, that Robeson was a citizen of the world, therefore, what happened to him was the concern of everyone.

Robeson's first invitation to attend the Welsh Miners' Eisteddfod, arrived in 1953, just before his second Peace Arch Park concert. The Welsh invited him to be their honored guest at their 1957 Eisteddfod. Again the State Department refused him a passport, but Robeson and his friends had an alternative plan. They arranged a trans-

Atlantic telephone hook-up between New York and Porthcawl and Robeson sang on schedule. The American press, by and large, ignored this event. Just the opposite was true in England and Europe. Thousands listened to the programme in Wales. Millions in England and on the continent read about the concert in their newspapers and the miners recorded the concert for posterity.

THE EXHIBITION

This section of the exhibition has documentation of most of the things mentioned above. There are photographs of Robeson in Wales and pictorial documentation of his famous broadcast from his home in America to the Welsh people. There is the prize photograph of Mr. and Mrs Robeson with Nye Bevan and Jenny Lee. There are 32 pieces in this section and apart from enlarging the written documentary material and laminating the exhibition on 4 boards there isn't very much else to do.

FREEDOM

From 1950 to 1958, the American State Department refused to grant a passport to Paul Robeson. For a man who was known as a citizen of the world the implications were obvious. Robeson was not even allowed to travel to Canada a country to which American citizens can travel without a passport. As stated in the section of "Robeson and Wales", the Welsh miners were very prominent in helping

to get Paul Robeson a passport. Other groups tried different methods to liberate Robeson from "house arrest" in the United States. Several Universities, including St. Andrews and Edinburgh, offered him the position of Principal. The Royal Shakespeare Company invited him to Stratford for a production of Othello, A "Let Paul Robeson Committee" was formed. In the House of Commons over fifty Labour MPs organised a committed to put pressure on the American Government.

THE EXHIBITION

Pride of place in this section is a photograph showing Robeson holding his passport (which had been returned to him after 8 years). There are various bits and pieces that show the work that went into securing Robeson his passport. There are 15 pieces and the amount of boards required is 2.

See Budget appendix for details

10

ROBESON AT HOME

THE EXHIBITION

Here we see the private side of the man. Robeson is captured at home with his family. He is seen playing chess with his son Paul Jr. Those who were part of his circle are also featured here. It is a mark contrast to other parts of the exhibition. There are 10 pieces. Boards required 2.

SINGER

Most people don't know that Paul Robeson was the leading concert singer in the world for most of the 1930's and 1940's and that his singing career spanned thirty-five years from 1925 through 1960, winning him unprecedented world wide popularity. His concert career began in 1925 in New York, it was the first ever concert programme which consisted solely of Negro music. The "New York World" music critic wrote:

"All those who listened last night to the first concert in this country made up entirely of Negro music... may have been present at a turning point, one of those points in time in which a star is born and yet not visible - the first appearance of this folk wealth to be made without deference or apology. Paul Robeson's voice is difficult to describe. It is a voice in which deep bells ring."

There is no doubt that if anyone had to list the ten greatest concert singers of the twentieth century, Paul Robeson would be in the top three.

Most books on concert singers published after 1949, give Robeson a one line mention, in passing, or he is referred to in the footnote. For instance the book FAMOUS NEGRO MUSIC MAKERS by Langston Hughes does not even mention Paul Robeson. A man of whom Benjy Green wrote:

"...Running like a fine thread through the texture of the times is Paul Robeson's incomparable voice ...I accept all over again the immutability of Robeson as a great artist, and I am reminded that the late Alexander Woolcott's comparison of Robeson with the redwood trees of California was particularly appropriate ...It is apparent to us all...that Robeson is one of the archetype artists of the 20th Century. He is one of those all too rare people who can, through some miraculous alchemy of the spirit, reach out, and within the scope of a single gesture or phase, touch the hearts of both the galleryites looking for a good time and the intellectuals probing for the message. When he sings I hear the unsullied expression of the human spirit."

THE EXHIBITION

The prize item in this part of the collection is a photograph of Paul Robeson singing to a crowd of 5,000 inside St. Paul's Cathedral, while another 5,000 listened outside. The famous Peekskill concert when hundreds of people took it in turn to form a human chain around Robeson to prevent him from being shot at, is recorded here.

There are 30 pieces, five boards are needed.

See Budget appendix

CIVIL RIGHTS

In 1938 Paul Robeson was asked by a Daily Mirror reporter what he would give up for an ideal. His answer was "my career". At the time when Robeson made that statement he was at the peak of his career. He had already made several films, he was in demand as a concert singer, he was feted every where he went and the world was at his feet. Twelve years after making such a bold statement Robeson found himself in that exact position. Robeson could have taken the money and buried his head in the sand. Instead he decided to speak out against the injustices that he saw in America. He understood the dynamics and mechanics of racism in America. He knew that the torch in Lady Liberty's hand could easily apply the flame to black people and make them victims. He also knew full well what the consequences of his aggression would be.

In defining Robeson's political activities and his role as an activist there is only one true source that can be relied upon and that is Robeson himself. First his reason for turning his back on Hollywood. This is a quote from his autobiography,

"In the early days of my career as an actor, I shared what was then the prevailing attitude of Negro performers - that the content or film scenario was of little or no importance to us. What mattered was the

opportunity, which came so seldom to our folks, of having a part - any part - to play on stage or in the movies. Later I could to understand that the Negro artist could not view the matter simply in terms of his individual interests, and that he had a responsibility to his people who rightfully resented the traditional stereotyped portrayals of Negroes on stage and screen. So I made a decision; if Hollywood and Broadway producers did not choose to offer me worthy roles to play, then I would choose not to accept any kind of offer."

Robeson made it his duty to speak out against America's involvement in other countries internal affairs. In the sixties and seventies a large section of America voiced its indignation at their country's involvement in the Vietnam War. Years before the first GI had set foot in Vietnam, when the war was still brewing, Robeson spoke out. This is what he had to say in the March 1954 issue of "Freedom"

"As I write these lines, the eyes of the world are on a country inhabited by 23 million brown-skinned people - a population one and a half times the number of Negroes in the U.S.... It's

a fertile land, rich in minerals;
but all the wealth is taken away
by the foreign rulers, and the
people are poor.

I'm talking about Vietnam, and
it seems to me that we Negroes
have a special reason for under-
standing what's going on over
there....

Now, when France wants to call it
quits, Eisenhower, Nixon and Dulles
are insisting that Vietnam must be
re-conquered and held in colonial
chains. "The Vietnamese lack the
ability to govern themselves," says
Vice-President Nixon.

Robeson's words were prophetic. America not only
entered into a so-called war against the people of
Vietnam but saw that black youngsters from across
America, who could not use the same restrooms and sit
with whites at the front of buses, killed and were
killed by brown-skinned peasants who were equally as
despised.

Robeson was the first black performer to take a stand
on not playing to segregated audiences. Years later
Nat King Cole would follow his example.

Robeson loved the U.S.S.R., some critics have labeled
his love for communism a quirk in his personality.
Even after his death there are Americans today, black
and white, who while admiring most of what Robeson

stood for cannot forgive him for having so warmly embraced the Soviet people and their Government. Iron because this is both a logical and essential feature of Robeson's creed. There are two explanations for Paul Robeson's attachment to the Soviet Union. He had read about the Yakuts who lived in the eastern part of U.S.S.R. They were classed as a backward race. To Robeson and many other people they resembled the people of East Africa. Robeson had wondered whether socialism could eradicate the racism of the Russian people. "What would happen to people like the Yakuts now that they had gained freedom from colonial oppression?" Paul Robeson and his family visited many times and within 25 years he saw how the Yakuts had been totally integrated into Russian society. Their art and culture played an important part in Russia's everyday life and they were not treated as secondclass citizens.

Robeson felt that his colour was a secondary factor. In America there were places that he could not go because of the colour of his skin. In England in 1929, he was barred from entering a hotel. The irony is he was about to attend a party in his honour. Robeson could always point out that the Soviet Constitution and the provisions of Article 123 of Chapter X as important to blacks.

"The equality of the right of citizens of the U.S.S.R., irrespective of their nationality or race, in all fields of economic, state, cultural, social and

political life, is an irrevocable law. Any direct or indirect restriction of these rights, or conversely the establishment of direct or indirect privileges for citizens on account of the race or nationality to which they belong, as well as the propagation of racial or national exceptionalism, or hatred contempt, is punishable by law.

It was a document that struck right to the heart of the problem that faced 14 million blacks in America. At least on the surface of things. But the Soviet Union could afford to make the pronouncement. The 14 million were not confined within Russia's borders and weren't likely to be transported there, though the majority of Americans probably would not have minded. Russia was not faced with confronting racism within its territorial confines, so the article was in many ways hollow. Yet Robeson still saw the viability of a Soviet connection, stating, "I...feel that the rapidly growing power of the Soviet Union in world affairs would become an important factor in aiding the colonial liberation movement which he did not separate from the plight of his own people in America."

There are 40 pieces in this section, 25 pieces have got to be worked on, 8 boards will be required.

ROBESON & INDIA

Today it has become the accepted thing for those who feel disadvantaged against, to refer to themselves as black. What these individuals/groups have failed to do so far is to support each other. Until the Afro Caribbeans and the Asians and the Orientals and all other disadvantaged groups start making overtures towards each other, the word Black will be meaningless.

Paul Robeson the great forerunner and scholar believed in the "coming together" of those who bore the brunt of imperialism and racism. It is not commonly known but Robeson had tangible connections with India and the sub-continent. Let us look at the facts. Both Jawaharal Nehru and Paul Robeson had travelled (individually) to Spain to see for themselves the upheaval and destruction of Fascism in the 1930's. When a welcome meeting was organised for Nehru at the Indian League in June of 1938, Paul Robeson was among the speakers. This was probably Robeson's first meeting with Nehru. This historic meeting would eventually lead to the South African Committee of the Indian League, the League of Coloured People, the West African Student's Union and the East African Student's Union, forming a huge protest march in 1949 against the racist policies of South Africa, in London.

The State Department's decision to continuously refuse Robeson a passport became an international issue. Nehru wrote an open letter to Robeson in 1958, on his sixtieth birthday, part of which said:

"...This day should be celebrated not only because Mr. Robeson is one of the greatest artists of our generation, but, also, because he fights and suffers for a cause which should be dear to all of us; for human dignity. To celebrate his birthday means to honour both a great man and at the sametime the cause for which he stands and which he suffers..."

Nehru's letter angered the Americans. The American Ambassador went to India's Ministry of External Affairs to register his protest in person. The Indian Ambassador in Washington was summoned to the State Department and was told in no uncertain terms of the American Government fury. Less than three months later the State Department announced that it was bowing to the Supreme Court and Robeson's passport was returned to him. It must be said that there were others who helped in the effort to put pressure on the American Government to give Robeson back his passport. I am refering here the Welsh miners and the "Let Paul Robeson Sing Committee".

Robeson's connection did not start and end with Nehru. His daughter Indira Ghandi organised in 1958 a National Committee to sponsor a "Paul Robeson day". On his birthday, 4th April, there were celebrations in Delhi. The State Department (U.S.) had once again failed in its efforts to prevent the celebration of the Paul Robeson Day.

Robeson was also close to Krishna Menor. The two men met in London in 1935. They also had a lot in common, both were qualified lawyers. Both had strong socialist principles that originated from Harold Laski. Their separate arrival in Britian in 1927 turned into a much longer stay than they had anticipated, (Robeson 12 years and Menor 28 years)., They were born within a year of each other. They were both accused of being communist and suffered from the hostility of the American press. The simularities are endless.

It is interesting to note that Robeson became a supporter of the Indian League, financially and otherwise. Krishna Menor reciprocated by supporting West Indian and African groups in London. Later he would give even more support to the Council of African Affairs, (the organisation that Robeson founded).

THE EXHIBITON

This is a proposed new section.

The third new section will be entitled THE EXHIBITION.
This section will highlight the response to the
exhibition and will carry an explanation on the
background of the exhibition itself.

The amount of boards needed for the three new sections
are 7.

See budget for details.

ROBESON (LOVER OF CHILDREN)

This is a selection of photographs showing Robeson's
love for small children. The section is a small one
requiring only 1 board.

TRIBUTES

The Exhibition

It is inevitable that after his death tributes would
pour in to honour one of the twentieth century's most
remarkable men. In this section an indication is given
of the mass appeal of the man.

See Appendix

COST

In deciding how the work/exhibition should be mounted and preserved in the most cost effective way, it was decided to use the lamination process. The Marley system ^{would} mean that the work_A have to be mounted on hardboard size 100, heat sealed and then wrap mount one panel with 10 pieces of articles. Cost, about £65.00. The Plastic Art Company will mount the exhibition. The firm are leaders in the process of polyester encapsulation. They are equipped with the best machines available (all their machines are automatic) and their standards are very high. The firm has encapsulated a single board to show how the finish product will look, the work was satisfactory.

Each finished board will measure 34" x 28"

The cost of encapsulating 1 board with 2 pieces of articles is £8.33. For every extra piece of material mounted on the board a charge of 50p is made.

This is a breakdown of the cost of encapsulating the exhibition

<u>Number of Boards</u>	<u>Pieces</u>	<u>Title</u>
7	35	BEGINNING
2	10	SPORTS
2	14	STAGE ACTOR
7	40	OTHELLO
5	30	SINGER
7	35	FILMS
2	10	RUSSIA
4	12	PROUD VALLEY
8	40	CIVIL RIGHTS
5	32	WALES
2	10	FREEDOM
1	8	INDIA
1	8	CHILDREN
2	15	75TH BIRTHDAY
5	30	TRIBUTES
1	10	THE EXHIBITION
61	339	

61 x £8.33 = £508.13

117 x 50 = £ 58.50

566.63

PLUS 15% VAT 84.99

£651.62

Cost Enlarging of 130 articles at 52p	=	£67.60
Cost of buying 30 films stills at £1.70	=	£51.00
Cost of photographing	=	£80.00
Cost of buying photographs from the R.S.C	=	<u>£25.00</u>
		£213.60

TOTAL COST OF EXHIBITION

ESCAPSULATING	£651.62
SUPPLEMENTING	<u>£213.60</u>
	<u>£865.22</u>

NEW SECTION

The exhibition that will be seen at the Festival Hall will not only be better presented but will be much bigger. For a start there will be three new sections. Researchers working on this report have uncovered material on Robeson that has never been on display before.

The first new section will be on Robeson's 75th birthday celebration. A concert was staged at Carnegie Hall and on display will be the concert programme and the numerous messages of congratulations from heads of States all over the world.

The second new section will be entitled ROBESON AND RUSSIA. This section is important because of Robeson's feeling towards the Soviet Union. Recounting his first visit there he said:

"I for the first time walked
this earth in complete human
dignity, a dignity denied me
at Columbia University or
Medina, denied me everywhere
in my native land, despite
all the protestations about
freedom, equality, consti-
tutional rights and the sanctity
of the individual."

Russia, as far as Robeson was concerned was fulfilling America's charge: "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

BOOKS

Through the years an important channel of discovering, not to mention rediscovering Paul Robeson has been books written about him. Martin Luther King is the only other Black individual about whom more works have been written. It is an important part of the exhibition seeing that so many people always make notes on what books are available in an attempt to read about Robeson.

As expected the standard and variety of the books differ enormously. There is the homely and private side of the man, by his wife in the book PAUL ROBESON NEGRO. There is the appraisal of his artistic work by Marie Seton. In the book LABOUR'S FORGOTTEN HERO, Dr. Wright deals solely with his work as a union activist. Both the Welsh and the Scottish Miners features in the book. There is also his own autobiography, HERE I STAND. The following comments on the books about Robeson is meant to act as a guide and to give the reader of this report an indication of the varied sides of Robeson and how he was perceived by so many different individuals. The books mentioned are just some of the many books in the exhibition. Unfortunately only one book BIG BEN by Joseph Nazel is obtainable in selected book shops. In 1980 a book by Susan Robeson (his grand-daughter) A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF PAUL ROBESON was published. The book is the only one of its kind and sadly to say this book is not only out of print, but the British publishers have gone into liquidation.

HERE I STAND BY PAUL ROBESON

The book can best be described as a moving document on Robeson's life. "I am a Negro," the book begins. He is a part of the Harlem community, of the "church where on Sunday mornings I am united with the fellowship of thousands of my people...." Winning a scholarship to Rutgers was "the decisive point of my life" because "I knew I was not inferior." He traces the expansion of his horizons. "This belief in the oneness of human kind... has existed within me side by side with my deep attachment to the cause of my own race." His "stand" has two elements; for the world, the principles of Bandung; for the Negro in the United States. "Freedom can be ours, here and now," and "Negro action can be decisive." He proposes an all-inclusive "National conference of Negro leadership," to lead Negro action for Freedom. This book, first published in 1958, is Robeson's account of the beliefs he held; how he came to hold them; his controversial associations and activities; and the restrictions imposed against him by the U.S. Government, which virtually wrecked his career. He believed and states that racial prejudices were at a minimum in the communist nations as distinguished from the white supremacy complex of his own country. It was his opinion that scientific socialism could project a programme which would be more effective in improving the quality of life for all people than an imperialistic capitalism. Such "heresy" was anathema

to the U.S. Government, and the State Department denied him a passport, thus grounding him from 1950 to 1958. He states that he was not even allowed to go to countries such as Canada, for which an American passport was not required, "Many things in this book are interesting, not the least the Appendix section.

PAUL ROBESON: THE AMERICAN OTHELLO BY
EDWIN P. HOYT

The writer sets the rise and fall of Paul Robeson in clinical detail. He lets the facts speak for themselves. With his striking personal endowments, his triumphs on the concert and musical stages, Robeson established himself as one of the finest singers of his time. After his tour-de-force interpretation of Othello midway in World War II, he might also have become one of the finest actors. Instead, there followed his quest for racial equality, his long exile in the Soviet Union, the sad return to his homeland and the oblivion of his old age. This thoughtful book, demonstrates that it is too simple to call Robeson his own worst enemy. He concludes: "He was not the first artist whose career was destroyed by his convictions in our present climate, he will not, unfortunately, be the last."

It is a tragedy of a great artist deprived of the freedom to travel and the opportunity to perform because he advocated unpopular views in an intolerant era. It is also the tragedy of a Negro fighter for civil rights so far ahead of his time that his influence was dissipated in controversy before civil rights became fashionable. "Hoyt has written a well intentioned introduction to a most remarkable human being. The writing is simple and clear, but the results seem second hand and oversimplified.

PAUL ROBESON, NEGRO

BY ESLANDA GOODE ROBESON 1930

This book is the story of the college hero who really amounted to something afterwards. According to the author Robeson was equally successful as an athlete, lawyer, actor and singer. She quotes with pride the critics verdict on his performance in the leading role of "The Emperor Jones," and in "All God's Chillun Got Wings." Extraordinarily versatile, he was able to earn a living later with his fine singing voice giving Negro spiritual concerts, when Negro acting parts proved scarce. Moving in a prescribed circle in "the Village," the friend of Eugene, Car Van Vechten, Glenway Westcott, the Cooks, and so on, many of the race barriers tumbled. Robeson, through his wife, pays tribute

where it is due. But Harlem was the only unreservedly friendly country. From her vantage point in a London suburb where she declares race prejudice to be comparatively negligible, Mrs Robeson scores here countrymen for their "Jim Crow" practices, bitter at the eternal banishment from hotels, and restaurants and sleeping cars. That Paul should act "Othello/ in Lond was her supreme ambition, and she set about cunningly to make it his. She states that Robeson said, "When I do Othello they'll all expect a crusted American accent. I'll fool 'em," boasted Paul. "I'll do the role in good honest English, as pure as I can make it, because pure English will bring out the music of the text. Why, I might as well sing the Negro dialect of the spirituals with a correct Boston accent, as do Othello an 'American.'" She concludes: "That Robeson accomplished this appears to be amply attested to be the critics' eulogistic accounts of his performance." Essie writes warm passion of Negro Harlem, not the night Clubs dressed up for white patronage, but the living, pulsing capital of the black American world. Even in New York, when Paul was stranded between Greenwich Village and Harlem, the color bar silently lifted itself -- "he could get a good meal in any good restaurant or hotel -- except the Pennsylvania - from Tenth Street to 130th Street: at non of the innumerable first-class eating places could he be served as a Negro guess." In traveling it was difficult to obtain

accommodation or hotel rooms. Mrs Robeson's book is chatty, naively intimate, sincere and affectionate. Such a book could not be bettered by the best press agent. It is a unique and very winning portrait of a great American.

PAUL ROBESON BY MARIE SETON

To many people this is one of the best biographies on Robeson. It came out the same year as Robeson's own account of his life and thoughts (1958). Put together over many years, Robeson was consulted and did make corrections to the final draft.

In the book Marie Seton adds much interesting material about Robeson's early life and development as an actor and singer. Because she was a personal friend, Miss Seton had the good fortune to be with Robeson at some of the most important situations in his life.

It must be mentioned that some parts of the book is written in the awed style of the lives of saints. Robeson does everything except float on a millstone. This probably explains why he has remained a political bourbon to some people. To the author's credit almost every book on Robeson has paid tribute to her book.

PAUL ROBESON: THE LIFE AND TIME OF A FREE BLACK
MAN BY VIRGINIA HAMILTON

The story is told in a rich historical context, Miss Hamilton's readable explanation of political ideologies prevalent during the Second World War and McCarthy era enables young readers to identify with Robeson's actions, as well as grasp the complexities of the times. Unlike most young-adult biographies, the text remains unfictionalized and acquires chilling authenticity as each incident is fully documented by Senate testimony, newspaper and magazine quotes, Robeson's autobiography or texts by his wife and close friends. Yet Virginia Hamilton's magical ability to conjure up vivid images is still present in parts of the book, especially in her portrayal of Robeson's near-lynching in Berlin. Virginia Hamilton's book is far more than a compelling story of banished blacks; it is a vivid chronicle of dignity and determination with which all young people can identify.

PAUL ROBESON: ALL AMERICAN BY
DOROTHY BUTLER

The writer asserts that Robeson was one of the 20th century's most important, but least understood black figures. As an athlete, actor, singer and political activist he influenced many thousands of lives, black and white, in the United States and abroad. His exorcism from the American body politic and American consciousness

by the governmental paranoia of the 1940's and 1950's is a crime for which America has yet to admit guilt. The consequence has been that the present generation of Americans has little sense of who or what this magnificent man was.

BIG BEN BY EARL SCHENCK MIERS

Big Ben is a novel, that traces his career from the beginning of his college days to his first triumph as a concert singer. Big Ben represents the avowed attempt of a white author to plead for a minority group that "dignity" of treatment is due to all human beings. The tribulations and triumphs of Big Ben have been woven into a fascinating story, which should commend to a more sympathetic understanding of the efforts of the Black man seeking a higher goal in a prejudiced white world. Nevertheless, like all white authors, Mr. Miers suffers from an inability to grasp the true psychology of the Black man. Big Ben innocuous reactions to the barriers of racial prejudice are, in reality, not those of the Black man but what the misunderstanding white man thinks they would be. Moreover, the book suffers from the repeated use of the epithet negro. While that in itself is inexcusable, it is impossible to forgive the author for committing the heinous crime of

depicting the educated Big Ben as thinking of himself as a negro. Mr. Miers is to be commended, however, for bringing before the reading public a Black person - intelligent and educated - which is so consistently ignored by novelists in portrayal of life of Black people.

PAUL ROBESON BIOGRAPHY OF A PROUD MAN
BY JOSEPH NAZEL

This is one of the latest books on Robeson. It differs from the other works on him because it attempts to put Robeson in his proper perspective. The book goes beyond stating facts and events. It asks questions of the system that allowed the state to crush a citizen, that the state ought to protect in the first place. The book also looks at the political implication of Robeson's actions. For instance the book shows that because he refused to play stereotypes of negro roles, he spurned fabulous riches available to very few Black people. By campaigning for the rights of Black people the world over and recognizing their roots in Africa years before it became fashionable, he created controversy that swirled around his head for decades. By defying the infamous House on Un-American Activities Committee, he proved the power of his principles while dooming himself to an ever-

diminishing income. The book also shows that even though his life long crusade to stamp out racism ultimately cost him his career and his health, his pride remained intact to the very end. This is also the only biography to carry word for word Robeson's appearance before the sub-committee of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

When the main channel of communications were shut to Robeson, he decided to publish his own magazine FREEDOM WAYS. The magazine was distributed mainly in America. Now for the first time, many of Paul Robeson's British admirers will be able to see for themselves what the magazine looked like. Mark Eaton a final year student at Exeter University has just completed his thesis on Paul Robeson. There will be a copy of the book in the exhibition.

All the books will be displayed in glass cases for security purposes. The books however, will be displayed in such a way that the titles and authors of the books can be read.

INVITATION

Since the death of his father in 1976, Paul Robeson Jn has been keeping the memory of his father alive. It would be appropriate to invite him to open the exhibition.

The cost of air fare from his home in Brooklyn and cost of staying in a reasonable hotel for 7 days (1 week) will be:

HOTEL	£560
AIR FARE	<u>£400</u>
	£900

EXHIBITION PROGRAMME

The exhibition programme should be more than a brief guide to the items on display. It should contain enough background material and information so that recipients can take it home and re-read it. It should be well produced and the other related activities should be included. Also it is hoped that there will be a few paragraphs as an opening remark by Paul Robeson Junior, in the programme. The size of the programme will be A5, with twenty pages or more.

Cost of Typesetting and printing the
first 2,000 is: £700
every other 1000 will be £ 75
The cost for 4000 is £850

RECEPTION

Three hundred people will be catered for at the opening reception. Apart from GLC officers, Art personnel around London. It is important that leading members of the "Let Paul Robeson Sing" Committee and others who were associated with him, be invited. If we estimate the catering cost per person is £2.50

Total budget = 300 X £2.50 = £750.00

FILMS

Robeson films are rarely shown either on T.V. or at film festivals. PROUD VALLEY is the only film of his that has been recently screened on T.V. As is to be expected, there is a certain amount of difficulty involved in screening Paul Robeson's films. Some of his films are not available. Two approaches can be adopted. The first one is to show the films that are available from Commercial Houses, they are SONG OF FREEDOM - available on 16 or 35 mm. EMPEROR JONES - only one reel is available

The above can be hired from:

Blue Dolphin
15-17 Old Compton Street
London W1V 6JR
Tel: 437 1517/1435

Harris Films
Glenbuck House
Glenbuck Road
Surbition - PROUD VALLEY (16mm)
Surrey KT6 6BT
Tel: 399 0022

SANDERS OF THE RIVER (16 or 35mm)

Norman Potts

London Films

In 1970 Sidney Portier narrated a documentary film on Paul Robeson. The film can be obtained from:

Janus Film

Suite 400

119 West 57th Street

New York NY10019

U.S.A.

(The feasibility team have written to Janus Films and are awaiting their reply.)

A commercial package of the above films will come to £2,000.

The Second Option

The National Film Theatre have recently restored many of Robeson's films. An American called Ronaver owns the rights to the films in the N.F.T. collection. He will only let all his films to be shown as part of a film festival. *These films include SONG OF FREEDOM, JERICHO and BIG FELLA.

So far correspondence between the feasibility Team and Sheila Whitaker has drawn a blank. The GLC now has to approach the British Film Institute (at the highest possible level). The BFI should be asked as a special favour to allow the showing of the films at the Queen Elizabeth Hall

on 23rd April. If the NFT will not allow their copies of the films to be screened outside the NFT. Serious thought should be given about staging the film festival at the NFT.

CONCERT

The Paul Robeson Memorial Concert should be part tribute, part salute and entertaining. The artiste for the concert will be personal friends and fellow workmates. The singer/actress Elizabeth Welsh (who played the female lead in his films) and the actress Dame Peggy Ashcroft who appeared with him in Othello. Dame Peggy will read poems as part of the evening (agreements has already been reached on the poems she will be reading).

Because of Paul's love for the Welsh people, a Welsh group will sing some of his favourite songs. As a reminder of what Paul Robeson sounded like the Opera singer Willard White will sing three of Robeson's best known songs. OL MAN RIVER, JOE HILL and the third choice will be left to him. (He will be given songs and he will pick his third song from a pick of four).

In keeping with Robeson's belief in Africa and the liberation of its people, the group African Dawn will perform a selection of their work.

The actor Joe Marcell will narrate/compere and will work from a script behind a lectern.

The above is the core of the concert. It has not been arranged as yet but it is hoped that Paul Robeson Jn. will say a few words on the night.

There is every possibility that the Purcell Room might be too small for such a concert. Elizabeth Welsh's concert at the Riverside Studio was a total sell out, which means that Elizabeth on her own could sell out at the Purcell Room.

The cost in artiste fees etc. will be £4,000. This is very cheap for the calibre of artiste concerned. Elizabeth Welsh for instance will be appearing with her own backing musicians so will African Dawn.

OTHER COSTS

Martha Edwards will have to be paid £50.00 (fifty pounds) for travelling expenses when she comes to London from Ponty Clean to supervise the encapsulating of the exhibition.

Feasibility Study Cost

The cost of putting this report together by a team of three, plus a typist (which involved a detailed analysis and examination of some four hundred articles, obtaining the material for three new sections, visiting exhibition encapsulating firms, putting together and producing a mounted board, working out the cost of the exhibition programme [type-setting and printing] putting together the concert programme, contacting agents etc, locating the films etc. is £2,500 [two thousand five hundred pounds]).

Members of the team are:

MAXINE TAYLOR (main researcher and compiler of the report)

ROBERT HEARNE (Exhibition Expert)

STEVEN BOURNE (film and book work)

The team were guided and co-ordinated by J. Douglas

TOTAL COST	£
EXHIBITION	850.00
INVITATION (Paul Robeson Jn)	960.00
EXHIBITION PROGRAMME	850.00
FILM	865.22
RECEPTION	750.00
CONCERT	4000.00
TRAVELLING (Mrs Edwards)	50.00
(unforeseen cost)	<u>100.00</u>
	8425.22
+ 5% contingency	<u>421.26</u>
+ feasibility study cost	<u>2500.00</u>
TOTAL	£11,340.48

The above cost does not include the cost of publicising the event. This is something that the GLC will have to decide on in accordance with usual practices.