Everything Man
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Published by Duke University Press

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Everything Man: The Form and Function of Paul Robeson.

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Notes

A Preface: Element

8 Freedomways, *Paul Robeson*, 244, 246, 247.


16 My effort to announce Robeson’s almost unbelievable presence and ability is not the only one of recent. In 2019 his granddaughter Susan Robeson published a children's book, which begins, “Daddy always said it takes a man of peace to stop a war. And that’s just what my Grandpa Paul did. He stopped a war.” Susan Robeson, Grandpa Stops a War: A Paul Robeson Story (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 5. Her statement sounds fantastic, and may be interpreted as hyperbolic, but her claim is not untrue; the hostilities of which she writes—the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)—paused at the moment of his singing in 1938 as soldiers laid down arms to listen.

An Introduction: Vibration

1 This request is theorized by Avery Gordon as part of the work of haunting. Avery Gordon, Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

2 Peter Dreier, “We Are Long Overdue for a Paul Robeson Revival,” Los An-
3 J. P. Den Hartog, Mechanical Vibrations (1934; reprint, New York: Dover, 2013), 1, emphasis added.
7 Eidsheim, Sensing Sound, 3.
12 Quoted in Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys, and John Docker, eds., Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2010), 171.
13 The song “Joe Hill,” from which these lyrics derive, was a standard within Robeson's repertoire. Earl Robinson and Alfred Hayes, “Joe Hill” (1936).
16 Eidsheim, Sensing Sound, 2.
18 For example, radical Trinidadian intellectual and author C. L. R. James described Robeson in 1970 as “an unusual man.” He said, “I’ve met a lot of people you know, a lot of people in many parts of the world and he remains, in my life, the most distinguished and remarkable of them all.” C. L. R. James, interview with Sterling Stuckey, summer 1970, quoted in Sterling Stuckey, Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America (1987; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 465n119.
19 Walter White, “Paul Robeson: Right or Wrong,” Negro Digest (March 1950):
In his 1967 volume *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Cruse argued that Robeson “turned out to be neither very independent nor much of a leader, in terms of political astuteness and imagination. This may sound paradoxical to many in view of Robeson’s great personal magnetism. But a close examination of his views shows that he was not at all an original thinker.” Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: From Its Origins to the Present* (New York: William Morrow, 1967), 227. (The views of the U.S. State Department are detailed throughout this project.)


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**One. Hologram**

1 Don Roy King, dir., *Saturday Night Live*, “Dead Bopz,” aired May 7, 2016, on NBC.

2 Critics and listeners alike often make note of the generational gap/difference between Black musics/musicans and those of another era by arguing that prior forms and performers were better—more political, creative, or even talented—than those of the present, making for a continued and irresolvable cleavage within Black music’s long genealogy. I offer no solution to this time-worn debate but suggest it here as a contributing factor in the ridiculous ventriloquism of the *Saturday Night Live* “Dead Bopz” sketch. This issue was raised thanks to and in conversation with Anthony Jerry.

3 King, *Saturday Night Live*, “Dead Bopz,” emphasis added.


15 Lubasch, Robeson, 34, emphasis added.
18 Eidsheim, The Race of Sound, 9, 24.
19 Koestenbaum, The Queen’s Throat, 43.
25 Weheliye, Phonographies, 7, 13.
28 Leppert, The Sight of Sound, xxvi.
31 Koestenbaum, The Queen’s Throat, 177.
32 Perucci, Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex, 55.
33 It is worth noting that the type of objecthood brilliantly argued for by perfor-
merce scholar Uri McMillan is, again, a different enterprise than that pursued by Robeson, who did not adopt a persona and was vigilant in detailing the consistent character of his ideas and beliefs. See Uri McMillan, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

34 In his canonical text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Martinican intellectual Fanon discusses his objectification as a Black colonial body, saying, “The Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation with a dye. I lose my temper. . . . Nothing doing. I explode. Here are the fragments put together by another me.” Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (1952; reprint, New York: Grove, 2008), 89.


44 There is a common story in Britain about Robeson’s encounter with Welsh miners on the streets of London in 1928. After being locked out of their mine, the workers walked in protest to the metropole to air their grievances and cause. There they found Paul outside of the Drury Lane Theatre, where he was staging *Show Boat*. As the story goes, he was so moved by their stories that he staged an impromptu concert for them, right then and there, and sent them back to Wales via train at his expense. Upon their arrival, they received clothing and food donated by Paul and the other artists and intellectuals that he had rallied on their behalf. While it is told by Paul Robeson Jr. and other historians of the *num*, Mark Exton notes in his thesis that there is no document to support this event, as fantastic (and possible) a story as it is. Mark A. Exton, “Paul Robeson and South Wales: A Partial Guide to a Man’s Beliefs” (*ma* thesis, University of Exeter, 1984), South Wales Miners’ Library, Swansea University.
Due to the decline and swift end of the Welsh mining industry in the late 1980s, the miners' eisteddfod no longer takes place.


Quoted in Robeson, Here I Stand, 56.

Robeson, Paul Robeson Sings 20 of His Favourite Songs, track 31.

Johnson and Johnson, The Second Book of Negro Spirituals, 18.

Robeson, untitled speech to Bandung Conference, 3.


Clarke, Dimensions of the Struggle against Apartheid, vii.

See, for example, Redmond, Anthem, chapter 6.

Clarke, Dimensions of the Struggle against Apartheid, x, 1, 3.

Clarke, Dimensions of the Struggle against Apartheid, 33.


Clarke, Dimensions of the Struggle against Apartheid, 4.

Foner, Paul Robeson Speaks, 438, 439.

Clarke, Dimensions of the Struggle against Apartheid, 48, 51.


Two. Play


2 Jeffrey Stewart, “Paul Robeson’s Homecoming: An Historical Perspective,”


7 Sutton-Smith, The Ambiguity of Play, 4, emphasis added.

8 Ellis, Why People Play, 1.

9 Sutton-Smith, The Ambiguity of Play, 10, 90.

10 Ben Carrington, Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora (London: Sage, 2010), 65, 2, 3.


14 Robeson, Here I Stand, 20.

15 Goode Robeson, Paul Robeson, Negro, 177, 176; quoted in Edwards, “Paul Robeson,” 19.

16 Ellis, Why People Play, 2.

17 Robeson, Here I Stand, 22.


20 Robinson, I Never Had It Made, 33.

21 Robinson, I Never Had It Made, 34.

22 Quoted in Ed Schmidt, Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting (New York: Samuel French, 1994), v.

23 Schmidt, Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting, 5.

24 Sutton-Smith, The Ambiguity of Play, 89.


26 Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting, by Ed Schmidt, dir. Sheldon Epps, New Brunswick, NJ: George Street Playhouse, 1994, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Theatre on Film and Tape archive, New York Public Library.

27 Schmidt, Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting, 14.

28 Robinson, I Never Had It Made, 33.
29 Schmidt, *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*, 14.
30 *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*, dir. Epps.
32 Schmidt, *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*, 27.
33 Schmidt, *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*, 27.
34 Schmidt, *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*, 39.
42 Quoted in Goode Robeson, *Paul Robeson, Negro*, 83.
43 Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex*, 11.
45 Sheet music, Lawrence Brown Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.
47 American Social History Project, “You Are the Un-Americans.”
49 Quoted in Goode Robeson, *Paul Robeson, Negro*, 85.
50 It is worth noting that his career did not end with a lesser version of himself behind the microphone. He retired before his aging and ill body betrayed his voice, making for a lasting public memory of him as always healthy and robustly defiant.
51 For more on the song and its history, see Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social


54 Tayo Aluko, Call Mr. Robeson: A Life, with Songs (Portsmouth, UK: Playdead Press, 2013), 50.

55 Aluko, Call Mr. Robeson, 62.

56 The world premiere of the play was staged at Macauley Theatre in Louisville, Kentucky, in September 1977 and continued to tour in the Midwest and northeastern U.S. until February 1978.


59 Patricia Caple, “Dean’s Play Paul Robeson Betrays a Man: Review,” Encore: The Magazine of the Theatre, April 1978, 18, Robeson-HU.

60 Dean, Paul Robeson, 4. Further citations are given by page number in the text.

61 Goode Robeson, Paul Robeson, Negro, 123, 129.

62 This mention of Desdemona may serve as a synecdoche for white women. Robeson was known to have extramarital affairs, sometimes with white women, including his Othello costars Peggy Ashcroft and Uta Hagen, both of whom played Desdemona. If true, this would also be a tie to other famous Black (ex)athletes, such as Jack Johnson, who were often vilified (even criminally convicted) for their intimate relationships with white women. The representational collapse of the U.S. (through the Statue of Liberty) into white women, however, would have been entirely objectionable to Robeson, and this is part of the confusion and trouble of this passage in the play.


66 Quoted in Horne, Paul Robeson, 183.


72 National Ad Hoc Committee to End the Crimes against Paul Robeson, “Some Facts about Paul Robeson, the Man, Vis-à-Vis the Stage Play,” pamphlet, n.d., 6, Robeson-HU.

73 Goode Robeson, Paul Robeson, Negro, 42.


75 It is worth noting that my request for a staged Robeson who sings is a bit of a trap; his Voice is impossible to duplicate and would open the performer up to different, but equally stringent, standards. Having said that, the investment in the form—regardless of proximity to his style, tone, timbre—is the primary concern. The musical elision in these plays reveals a devastating indolence that forecloses the possibility of accuracy or invention.

76 Caple, “Dean’s Play,” 19.

77 Perucci, Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex, 7.

78 Goode Robeson, Paul Robeson, Negro, 33.

Three. Installation


4 Stephens, Skin Acts, 74.


6 Gesture and affect are often referenced in the productions by and for Robeson, detailing how his reception generated intensive study by other artists who were captivated not simply by what he said but by how he said it.

7 Mark A. Exton, “Paul Robeson and South Wales: A Partial Guide to a Man’s Beliefs” (MA thesis, University of Exeter, 1984), South Wales Miners’ Library,

8 Exton, “Paul Robeson and South Wales,” 83.
13 For more on the progressive World War II coalitions that formed the Popular Front and the role of “Ballad for Americans,” see Michael Denning, The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century (New York: Verso, 1997).
15 Cope, Breaking Chains, 6, 5.
19 Croeso Project promotional postcard, 2000, Swml.
20 Mark Alan Rhodes II, “‘They Feel Me a Part of That Land’: Welsh Memorial Landscapes of Paul Robeson” (MA thesis, Kent State University, 2015), 72.
21 Cope, Breaking Chains, 6.
22 Cope, Breaking Chains, 158, 11, 18.
25 Manic Street Preachers, “Let Robeson Sing,” Know Your Enemy, Virgin Records (2001), B00005AWNW.
26 Cope, Let Paul Robeson Sing!, 5, emphasis in original.
27 Many thanks to Beverley Humphreys—singer and trustee of the Paul Robeson Wales Trust—for sharing this history with me. Beverley Humphreys, conversation with author, August 30, 2017, Park Plaza Cardiff, Cardiff, Wales.


In addition to the song “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child” regularly dotting his concert programs, Robeson was, literally, a motherless child, having lost his mother to a tragic fire in their New Jersey home at the age of five.


Copeland, “Glenn Ligon and Other Runaway Subjects,” 82.


Copeland, “Glenn Ligon and Other Runaway Subjects,” 105.

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Directions, Glenn Ligon: To Disembark (exhibition), Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, November 11, 1993–February 20, 1994.

For more on Robeson’s long history of being under international surveillance, see Jordan Goodman, Paul Robeson: A Watched Man (London: Verso, 2013).


Sharpe, In the Wake, 106.

Copeland, “Glenn Ligon and Other Runaway Subjects,” 98.

Sharpe, In the Wake, 110–11; Copeland, “Glenn Ligon and Other Runaway Subjects,” 99.


Quoted in Almberg, “Paul Robeson Honored.”


Larkin, “Columbia Law School Alumnus.”


Phillip S. Foner, Introduction to *Paul Robeson Speaks*, 11.


### Four. Environment


5. The Hollywood Walk of Fame did not include the category of theater and live performance until the 1980s.


23 Frank Kelly, “Rutgers Students Again Reject Name of Robeson,” unknown publication, December 11, 1968, Robeson-Rutgers.
25 As of early 2018, African American Rutgers University alumni were fund-raising for a Paul Robeson Plaza to be located on the main Rutgers campus. “Rutgers University had kept the name of Paul Robeson, but not the campus.” AAAA Keepers of the Legacy: Paul Robeson Plaza,” Rutgers University Foundation, accessed January 13, 2018, https://one.rutgers.edu/project/5183. In March 2019, the dedication of the Paul Robeson Plaza was announced. “April 12, 2019 Paul Robeson Dedication Registration closes TODAY,” Rutgers University Foundation, accessed April 3, 2019, https://one.rutgers.edu/project/5183/updates/1.
26 For a social history of this movement, see Martha Biondi, The Black Revolution on Campus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
27 Harambe Chama, “Dedication of Paul Robeson Campus Center” program, 1972, box 7, folder 32, Robeson-Rutgers.
34 Robeson, Here I Stand, 10.
40 Haskell, The Songs of Trees, 141.
42 Haskell, The Songs of Trees, 5.
44 Haskell, The Songs of Trees, 149, 150.
45 Haskell, The Songs of Trees, 6, 6, 7.
46 Haskell, The Songs of Trees, 15.
47 Quoted in Yong, “Trees Have Their Own Songs.”
48 Haskell, The Songs of Trees, 149.
49 Tien Shan also appears in the literature with the alternative spelling of Tian Shan.
52 Robeson, Here I Stand, 30.
59 Antar Sudan Katara Mberi, letter to Paul Robeson Jr., May 19, 1976, Robeson-H.U.
63 Mberi, “Oh, They Fear You Paul,” Suite of the Singing Mountain, emphasis added.
64 Mberi, “Erect as the Sun at High Noon, You Rise Like a Mountain,” *Suite of the Singing Mountain*.


**A Continuation . . . : Frequency**


3 Glinsky, *Theremin*.


7 As a scientist employed by the Kremlin, Theremin would continue to produce devices for their purposes for much of the 1930s and ’40s.

8 There was also an interpersonal connection that drew Robeson to Clara Rockmore. Her husband was theater critic, producer, and lawyer Robert Rockmore, who worked for decades as Robeson’s legal and financial counsel. The observation of Robeson having “invented electronica” was offered by Greg Tate in conversation on this project at the Southern California Library for Social Science Research in Los Angeles on April 27, 2018.

9 Glinsky, *Theremin*, 120.


15 Beverley Humphreys, conversation with author, August 29, 2017, Park Plaza Cardiff, Cardiff, Wales.
17 Bil Brown-El, letter to Tony Gittens, June 12, 1977, Robeson-HU.
19 José Esteban Muño, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 74.