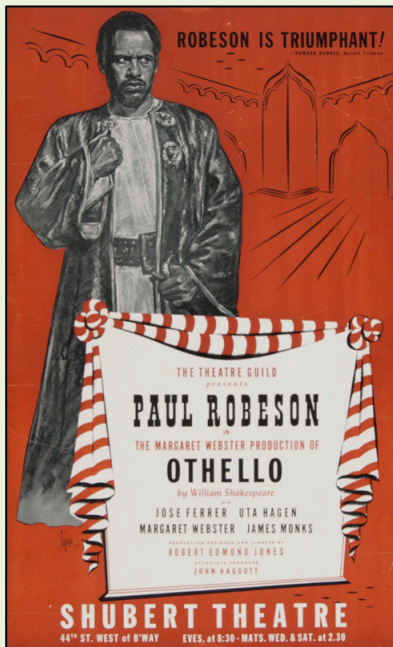


FOCUS

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*The Paul Robeson Collection
The Charles L. Blockson
Afro-American Collection
of Temple University Libraries
(Philadelphia, PA)*

Right: Poster for Paul Robeson's "Othello" performance at the Shubert Theatre in New York City / Far right: Conservation Technician Amber Hares surface cleaning a pamphlet cover with grated eraser >



PAUL ROBESON VISITS EUROPE
IN USO TOUR TO THREE COUNTRIES



When Paul Robeson (1898-1976) began acting in the mid-1920s, he was one of the first black men to play roles in an overwhelmingly white theater industry. Faced with this obstacle, he nonetheless quickly established himself as an acclaimed performer (his "Othello" ran on Broadway for almost 300 performances), as well as a film actor and singer. Robeson felt that celebrities should use their status to promote human rights causes, and in keeping with this belief, he performed benefit concerts all over the world and spoke out against racism in America, even before the civil rights movement had begun.

While Robeson's talent and activism earned him many admirers, it also made him enemies who worked to negate his accomplishments. During the 1940s, Senator Joseph McCarthy decided that Robeson's activist efforts (along with his support of socialism and the Soviet Union) were a threat to American democracy and began a long campaign to silence and discredit him. In 1950, Robeson's passport was revoked for eight years, preventing him from traveling abroad to perform. This interruption to Robeson's career, combined with the damage to his reputation, proved detrimental. Realizing his career could not recover, Robeson spent the end of his life in seclusion in Philadelphia.

The negative propaganda that led to the end of Robeson's career also resulted in his relative obscurity today. But Robeson should be remembered as a pioneering political activist and world-renowned actor, singer, and author, and many historians and scholars hope to restore his place in history, especially because of his role in the beginnings of the civil rights movement. Thanks in part to a grant from the Barra Foundation, 62 items from the Robeson Collection of Temple University Libraries' Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection are currently receiving conservation treatment at the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts. The collection includes posters and playbills for Robeson's "Othello" performances, programs from his concerts and plays, magazine articles about his work, and his own books and writings. Conservator Samantha Sheesley, Conservation Technician Amber Hares, and N.E.A. Fellow Marion Verborg will surface-clean the materials, wash them, mend any tears or weaknesses, and reduce adhesive residue. Finally, the collection will be returned to Temple University Libraries in archival folders.



< Top: Robeson materials soaking in a bath of calcium-enriched, deionized water that will reduce discoloration and acidity / Middle: Poster from Robeson's USO tour to entertain American troops in Europe / Bottom: Hares mending a program book from one of Robeson's concerts