

Guide to  
the Microfilm Edition  
of the  
**FBI File on  
Paul Robeson**

A Microfilm Publication by

**SR** *Scholarly Resources Inc.*  
Wilmington, Delaware

## **Description of the Microfilm Edition of the FBI File on Paul Robeson**

The investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of possible Communist party membership of Paul Robeson, one of the most famous black actors and singers of the 1930s–1950s, gave J. Edgar Hoover the opportunity to pursue two of his favorite targets, subversive activities and the black civil rights movement, of which Robeson was an outspoken advocate.

Robeson, who graduated from Rutgers in 1919 and from Columbia Law School in 1923, came to the attention of the FBI on the eve of World War II because of his membership in organizations that were considered to be dominated by the Communist party and that were opposing Franklin D. Roosevelt's programs of rearmament and aid to the Allies (which did not include the Soviet Union at the time). Although concern for civil liberties had never been central to Hoover, he and the FBI had been restrained in their activities for most of the 1920s and 1930s because of presidential pressure; the outbreak of World War II, however, led Roosevelt to "unleash" the FBI to combat subversive activities. Robeson's opposition to U.S. foreign policy and his stand on rights for blacks made him a natural target of investigation.

Robeson continued to draw the attention of the Bureau after Germany's attack on the Soviet Union led various organizations to which he belonged to support the administration's anti-Axis policies and after U.S. entry into the war. The FBI appeared sometimes to be more interested in Robeson's wife, who also was active in left-wing movements, than in Robeson himself. Concern with Robeson's vehement criticism of U.S. foreign and domestic policies while on trips overseas led to seizure of his passport; it was only in 1958, after repeated litigation and a Supreme Court decision in a comparable case, that the State Department again issued the world-famous entertainer a passport, and he and his wife moved to London. During much of the previous two decades, Robeson and, to a lesser degree, his wife had been listed as "key figures" by the New York office of the FBI. This designation

meant that they were to be apprehended in the event of a national emergency, although neither Robeson ever admitted, or was convicted of, membership in the Communist party.

The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the Freedom of Information Act; certain documents or portions of documents have been deleted by the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released, although every effort has been made to publish the most legible copies available.

The files are in approximate chronological order, and the FBI did not index documents. The Roll Notes is not a complete inventory of the files; it is, however, an indication of the types of material or specific documents that may be particularly worthwhile for research.

## ROLL NOTES

### Section 1:

*February 1941 - November 1945* Roll 1, 0001-0162

Accusations of membership in Communist-front organizations

*Wo-Chi-Can Comics*, 4/42

FBI field reports including undeveloped leads

List of organizations or movements

Preparation for custodial detention

Investigation of Mrs. Robeson

Preparation of security index card on Mrs. Robeson

Biographical sketch of Robeson from *New York Worker*, 1/45

Activities with International Workers Order and Council of African Affairs

### Section 2:

*November 1945 - March 1948* Roll 1, 0164-0346

Technical surveillance logs

FBI field reports including undeveloped leads

Newspaper material

Report on Mrs. Robeson

Prohibition of Robeson performance in Peoria

Summary of newspaper stories

Cancellation of security index card on Mrs. Robeson

Trip to Panama

Trip to Canada

### Section 3:

*March 1948 - July 1949* Roll 1, 0348-0484

Trip to Hawaii

Prohibition of speech at Michigan State

"Statement by Negro Americans to the President and Attorney General of the United States"

West Indian trip

Trip to England

FBI field reports including undeveloped leads

Trip to Soviet Union

Request for Passport Division and Selective Service files  
Reports of confidential informants  
Questionable evidence gathered for extrajudicial proceeding or for  
cross-examination in judicial proceeding

Section 4:

*July 1949 - June 1950* Roll 1, 0486-0686

Request for check of driver's license and voter's registration  
Letters to FBI regarding Robeson  
Transcript material from *U.S. v. Foster, et al.*  
Robeson concert in Peekskill, N.Y.  
Translation of *Pravda* clipping, "The Communists Fight for  
Freedom of All Mankind"  
Translation from Czech clipping, "The Man Whose Weapon is  
a Song"  
Robeson rally, 10/13/49  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
"Inquiry on Racial Incitations Practiced by Communists," report  
on Peekskill riot of 9/4/49 prepared by National Americanism  
Commission of the American Legion  
Passport application

Section 5:

*June 1950 - April 1951* Roll 1, 0688-0791

FBI field reports  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
State Dept. passport information  
Robeson denied passport  
Translation of Brazilian newspaper article  
Robeson prevented from traveling to Canada  
Newspaper material  
Photographic surveillance of Robeson functions

Section 6:

*March 1951 - June 1952* Roll 1, 0793-0899

FBI field reports  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
Boston concert  
Denial of passport application  
Brazilian newspaper material

Proposed trip to British Columbia  
Newspaper material  
Pittsburgh concert

Section 7:

*June 1952 - December 1952* Roll 1, 0901-0983

FBI field reports  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
Newspaper report on Pittsburgh concert  
Survey of Robeson investigation to date  
Newspaper reports of Hartford concert

Addition to Section 7:

*December 1952* Roll 1, 0985-0988

Formation of Othello Recording Corp.

Section 8:

*January 1953 - September 1953* Roll 1, 0990-1049

FBI field reports  
Statements on Rosenberg case  
Award of Stalin Prize

Section 9:

*September 1953 - December 1953* Roll 1, 1051-1106

FBI field reports  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson

Section 10:

*December 1953 - January 1955* Roll 1, 1108-1249

FBI field reports  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
Translation of Hungarian newspaper article

Section 11:

*January 1955 - April 1956* Roll 1, 1251-1413

Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
Accused of sympathy for Communist China  
Translation of Hungarian newspaper article  
Passport information  
*Paul Robeson v. John Foster Dulles*

Referrals Returned to FBI for Release:

*April 1956 - February 1967* Roll 1, 1415-1471

Material originating from other governmental agencies, including  
State Dept., ONI, and Army Intelligence

Section 12:

*April 1956* Roll 2, 0001-0097

FBI field report: Biography of Robeson

Section 13:

*April 1956 - April 1957* Roll 2, 0101-0237

Memo on filing amici briefs in *Robeson v. Dulles* from Warren  
Burger to Hoover

Investigations ordered of those filing amici briefs

Denial of passport affirmed by court of appeals

HUAC investigation of Robeson

FBI field reports

Reports on Mrs. Robeson

Section 14:

*April 1957 - February 1958* Roll 2, 0239-0385

Allegations of affair between Robeson and Lady Edwina  
Mountbatten

State Dept. administrative hearing on passport case

English newspaper material

FBI field reports

Review of passport case

Reports on Mrs. Robeson

Section 15:

*January 1958 - April 1958* Roll 2, 0387-0526

Report on Robeson's *Here I Stand*

FBI field reports

Reports on Mrs. Robeson

Section 16:

*May 1958 - July 1958* Roll 2, 0528-0658

Report on Mrs. Robeson

Sponsorship of Carnegie Hall concert, 5/9/58

FBI field reports

Report on Othello Associates, Inc.

Robeson issued passport  
Summary of *Robeson v. Dulles*  
Newspaper material on Robeson passport case

Section 17:

*July 1958 - January 1959* Roll 2, 0660-0794  
FBI field reports  
European trip  
Summary of BBC interview with Robesons  
Announcement of intention to live in London  
Continued as "key figure" of the New York office  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
Report on 11/58 meeting of Women's Division of NCASF  
Summary of interview on Radio Moscow

Section 18:

*February 1959 - October 1960* Roll 2, 0796-1041  
FBI field reports  
Reports from legal attachés  
Article from *L'Humanité*  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
Translation of French interview of 9/60  
Receives honorary degree from Humboldt University in  
East Berlin

Section 19:

*October 1960 - January 1963* Roll 2, 1043-1238  
Concert tour in Australia  
FBI field reports  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson  
Trip to New Zealand  
Article, with translation, from East German newspaper  
Passport renewed  
Itinerary since 7/58  
Closure of New York file and removal from "key figure" status

Section 20:

*March 1963 - January 1966* Roll 2, 1240-1475  
Mrs. Robeson awarded German Peace Medal by GDR  
Robeson trip to East Germany  
Return of Robesons to United States  
Reports on Mrs. Robeson



Translation of East German newspaper article  
Security index card deleted  
Reports on American Institute for Marxist Studies  
Mrs. Robeson's trip to England  
Report on Robeson as potentially dangerous submitted to Secret  
Service  
Reports on various organizations  
Report on Mrs. Robeson as potentially dangerous submitted to  
Secret Service

Section 21:

*January 1966 - May 1978* Roll 2, 1477-1543

Reports to Secret Service  
Robeson admitted to hospital  
Request for file under FOIA  
Paul Robeson Commemorative Committee  
*Daily World* article, 7/21/76