

arts & entertainment

Common Sense

with

RASMI

GAMBLE

Rasmi Gamble
Reviewer

"Through my singing and acting and speaking, I want to make freedom ring. Maybe I can touch people's hearts better than I can their minds, with the common struggle of the common man."

- Paul Robeson

This week I'm doing the unthinkable. I'm talking about Black History and it's not the month of February (Wow!)

Paul Robeson's name probably won't be found in many school textbooks.

His face isn't been plastered on any celebrity's t-shirts to become the latest fashion trend, nor has their been any big-shot director whose made an attempt to capture this man's life on-screen.

Paul Robeson was born in Princeton, New Jersey on April 9, 1898. His father, William Robeson, was a former slave and pastor of St. Thomas A.M.E. Zion Church in Somerville, New Jersey.

During high school Robeson found a love for singing and acting. One of his first performances in high school was Othello.

When Robeson wasn't dazzling audiences on the stage, he did it on the gridiron. Robeson was an exceptional athlete who excelled in many sports.

After graduating from Somerville High School in 1915, Robeson attended Rutgers University on a four-year academic scholarship. He was also the third black student admitted in the school's history.

Like many other African Americans during that time, he faced racism and adversity, but still managed to become a twelve letter athlete. Robeson was named to several All-

American football teams as a half-back. In addition to being an accomplished athlete, Robeson also made his mark in academics.

He graduated as valedictorian of his class in 1919 and belonged to the Cap & Skull Honor Society. He was also named a Phi Beta Kappa scholar.

Robeson's next endeavor was New York's Columbia Law School, where he graduated in 1923. He tried to pursue a career in law, but was discriminated against within his profession.

In 1924 he returned to the stage, starring in All God's Chillun Got Wings. He also starred in Emperor Jones, the musical Showboat and 11 other films.

Robeson often changed the lyrics to popular songs during his stage performances to reflect the experiences African American were going through at the time. For example, "Old Man River," in the musical Showboat.

Robeson traveled around the world to places like Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Germany, Paris, Holland, London and Moscow. It was during those travels that Robeson realized he was treated with more dignity and respect abroad. He could do things in a foreign land that he could not have imagined doing in his own homeland.

During the 1940s he began to protest the evolving hostilities between the USSR and U.S. He also formed the American Crusade Against Lynching.

From 1941-1974, Robeson was under surveillance by J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI.

He was named by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947, he was also denied a passport by the State Department for several years.

Robeson's outspokenness might be viewed by some as a gift and a curse, but allowed the opportunity for other later actors such as Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte and Eartha Kitt to express their



Photo courtesy of <http://www.achievement.org>.

opinions on U.S. social and political issues.

Paul Robeson died on January 23, 1976 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at the age of 77. He lived in seclusion during his later years and battled with a variety health issues.

He was Denzel Washington before

there was a Denzel Washington, the Jackie Robinson of Broadway.

A true renaissance man.
R.I.P Coach Ann Lashley.
I'm Out, Peace.

Contact Rasmi Gamble at pendulum@elon.edu or 278-7247.