

Connections:

Paul Robeson

Communist

Othello – first African American

James Earl Jones

Paul Robeson is an African American singer and actor who gained a prominent voice in the Civil Rights movement. His purported allegiance to socialistic views have long painted him as someone famous yet somehow un-patriotic. However many do not realize that he was focused mostly on the racial equality he felt while in the USSR. The Soviet Union had a clause in it's constitution barring racial discrimination. This really stood out to Robeson, who went to the Soviet Union several times and met with many artists and playwrights. His belief that the barriers of racial discrimination be brought down led him to express his passion through theater, where he was the first African American actor to play Othello (a role traditionally played by white actors wearing blackface). The legacy that he left through his civil rights-inspired acting impacted other Black actors to follow his path and increase the presence of African Americans in theater.