

## CONTENTS

- The Play
- Meet The Playwright
- Characters at a glance
- Moisés Kaufman & the Tectonic Theatre Project
- A Renaissance Man
- Historical Context: McCarthyism
- Paul Robeson Timeline
- Three Big Questions
- Additional Resources

## THE PLAY

Discover **Paul Robeson** as award winning playwright and performer **Daniel Beaty** share the true story of an athlete, singer, actor, scholar, lawyer, and author who once was held as 'the best-known black man in the world'. With his booming baritone voice, Robeson would ride to wealth and fame before changing times and his controversial political views would ultimately have him and his legacy erased from the pages of history books.

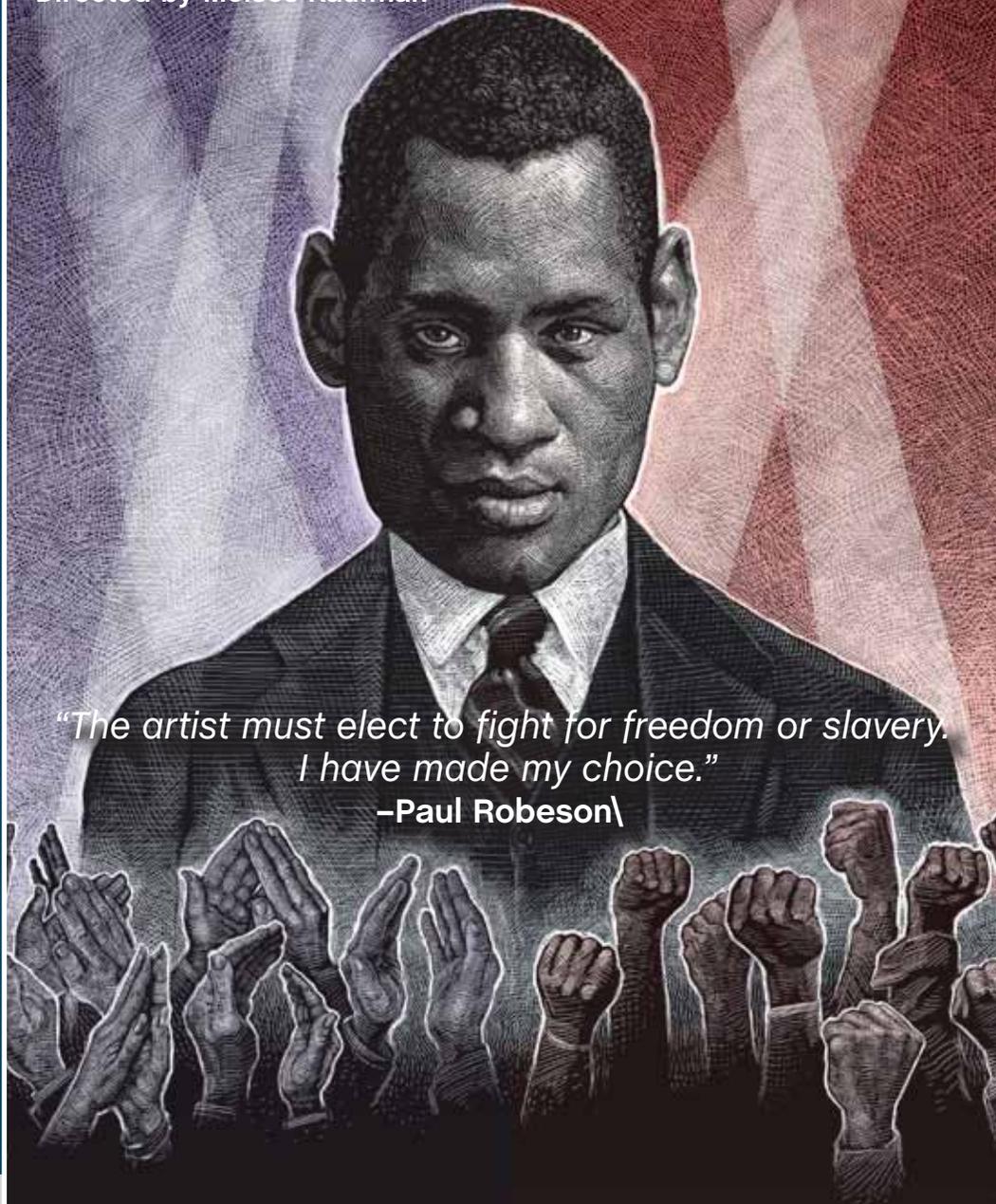
*The Tallest Tree in the Forest* is a soulful and poetic one man play that features excerpts from some of Robeson's signature songs like 'Ol' Man River'. Daniel Beaty combines talents with acclaimed Broadway director **Moise Kaufman** in bringing Robeson's story to life on the stage.

Playing roles of more than 20 characters, Daniel Beaty ask the question; "how does a man remain an artist when his soul cries out to be an **activist**?"

*An activist – someone who takes part in activities that are intended to achieve political or social change.*

# THE TALLEST TREE IN THE FOREST

Now Playing in the Kreeger Theater  
January 10 - February 16, 2014  
By Daniel Beaty  
Directed by Moisés Kaufman



*"The artist must elect to fight for freedom or slavery.  
I have made my choice."*

**–Paul Robeson\**

# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



Daniel Beaty

*“As an artist, my purpose is to inspire people to transform their pain into power.”*

—Daniel Beaty

Award-winning actor, singer, writer, scholar, and motivational speaker Daniel Beaty is an artist who has performed throughout the U.S., Europe, and Africa performing on television, acting in theatrical productions, singing leading roles in operas, and giving solo concerts of his own work.

Born December 28, 1975, Beaty grew up in Dayton, Ohio, in a home that was rife with addiction and incarceration. *“I thought chaos was the norm...My concept of who I could be in the world was greatly influenced by the men in my home.”* Beaty recalls when reflecting on his childhood.

Inspired in third grade by King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, Beaty would begin writing and giving inspirational speeches at a young age all over the U.S. at various civic organizations. After receiving a scholarship to a private school, Beaty went on to college at Yale and then graduate school at the American Conservatory Theatre.

In 2010 Beaty starred in *Emergence-See!* (now re-titled *Emergency*) at Arena Stage. His play *Resurrection* was performed as part of Arena’s 2008/09 season. In 2013 Beaty released a children’s book titled *Knock, Knock* and an empowerment book titled *Transforming Pain to Power*. ●

# CHARACTERS AT A GLANCE

In many plays, the playwright is not the performer. In *The Tallest Tree in the Forest*, Daniel Beaty has written and conceived the script, and performs over twenty characters in the play. This is called a one-person show. It takes a great skill both as an actor and as a playwright to achieve success in this form. Beaty will become each of these characters and more in the play:

**PAUL** An African American, Athlete, scholar, singer, who rose to fame through stage and film

**POP** Paul Robeson’s father, the Rev. William Drew Robeson was an escaped slave turn

**REVEREND** who encouraged his son to succeed academically.

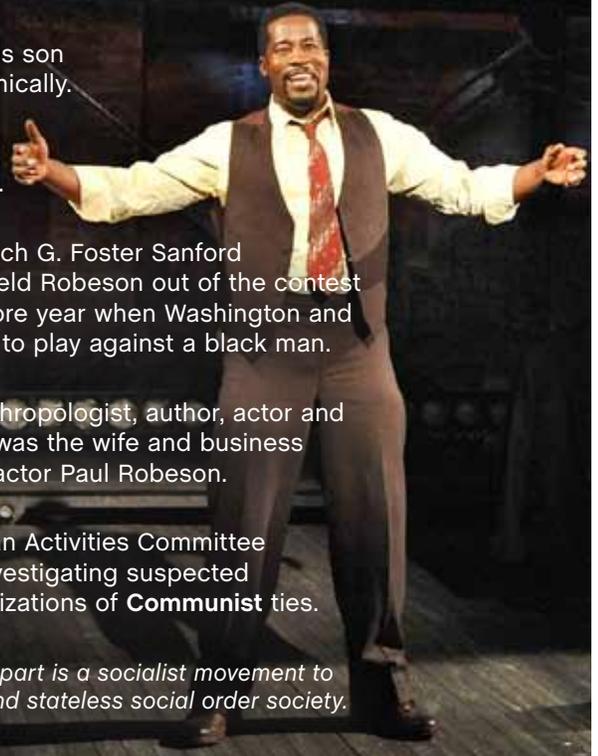
**REEVE** Paul Robeson’s rebellious older brother.

**COACH SANFORD** Rutgers Coach G. Foster Sanford regretfully held Robeson out of the contest his sophomore year when Washington and Lee refused to play against a black man.

**ESSIE** An African American anthropologist, author, actor and civil rights activist. She was the wife and business manager of singer and actor Paul Robeson.

**CHAIRMAN** House Un-American Activities Committee created in 1938 investigating suspected citizens and organizations of **Communist** ties.

**Communist** someone who takes part in a socialist movement to create a classless, moneyless, and stateless social order society.



# MOISÉS KAUFMAN & THE TECTONIC THEATRE PROJECT



Moisés Kaufman is a playwright, director, and founder of Tectonic Theater Project. The Tectonic Theatre Project uses unique playwriting techniques to devise new plays through the use of in-depth research, interviews, and collaboration to create work.

Tectonic Theater Project was founded in 1991 by Moisés Kaufman and Jeffrey LaHoste. Tectonic refers to the art and science of structure and was chosen to emphasize the company’s interest in construction—how things are made, and how they might be made differently.



# A RENAISSANCE MAN

“Robeson was more than just an artist... he was a master of many different forms.”

—Daniel Beaty



**SCHOLAR:** Rutgers University Valedictorian.

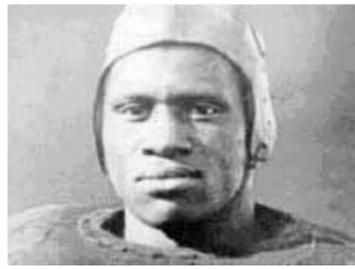


**ACTOR:** London debut as Joe in the American musical *Show Boat*/ First African American to play the role of Othello.



Photo of Paul Robeson by Edward Gooch.

**LAWYER:** 1923 graduate of Columbia University Law School.



**ATHLETE:** All American Rutgers University Athlete/ NFL Football player.



**SINGER:** “O’l Man River” – *Show Boat* (1927).



**AUTHOR:** Wrote *Here I Stand* in 1958.



**ACTIVIST:** 1946 meet with President Truman to discuss lynchings of African Americans.

# PAUL ROBESON A TIMELINE

- ▼ **1989** Paul Leroy Robeson is born on April 9 in Princeton NJ
- ▼ **1919** Graduates from Rutgers as Valedictorian, All-American, Phi Beta Kappa & Cap & Skull member
- ▼ **1921** Marries Eslanda Cardozo Goode
- ▼ **1922** Ends his NFL career after 2 seasons with the Akron Pros & Milwaukee Badgers
- ▼ **1923** Graduates from Columbia Law School
- ▼ **1928** Stars as Joe in the London revival of *Show Boat*
- ▼ **1933** Becomes first African American to star in a major motion picture: *Emperor Jones*
- ▼ **1934** Travels to Europe “Here I am not a Negro but a human being...”
- ▼ **1943** Becomes first African American to perform the role of Othello on Broadway
- ▼ **1947** Retires from acting to focus on activism
- ▼ **1950** Robeson is blacklisted and denied passport travel.
- ▼ **1958** Autobiography published. “Here I Stand.”
- ▼ **1976** Robeson passes away on January 23



**ACTIVITY** Research the life of a historic figure who inspires you. Create a monologue from their perspective describing an important part of their life



# HISTORICAL CONTEXT: MCCARTHYISM

*"Whether I am or not a Communist is irrelevant. The question is whether American citizens, regardless of their political beliefs or sympathies, may enjoy their constitutional rights."* – Paul Robeson

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s America was overwhelmed with concerns about the threat of communism growing in Eastern Europe and China. Capitalizing on those concerns, Senator Joseph McCarthy from the state of Wisconsin made a public accusation that more than two hundred "card-carrying" communists had infiltrated the United States government. These accusations would be known as

**McCarthyism**; the practice of making unfair allegations or using unfair investigative techniques.

During the McCarthy era, thousands of Americans were accused of being communists or communist sympathizers and became the subject of aggressive investigations and questioning before government agencies. Paul Robeson and many other Hollywood entertainers would become blacklisted.



Protesting the Hollywood Blacklist



## ACTIVITY

What issues would you like to see celebrities take a stand on? Write a letter asking a celebrity to support social change in your community.

## THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1. What is a celebrity's responsibility to confront social change?
2. Paul Robeson retired from his career of theater in order to become an advocate for civil rights. What issues do you find important? How far would you go to support them?
3. Why do you think not too many people know about Paul Robeson today? Do you think he should be better known? Why or why not?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### FILM

- Show Boat: University Studios, 1936
- The Emperor Jones: United Artists, 1933
- The Tallest Tree in The Forest: Phoenix Learning Group, Inc., 1977

### ON THE WEB

- PBS American Masters: Paul Robeson:  
[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/robeson\\_p.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/robeson_p.html)
- Show Boat: Paul Robeson singing O'! Man River on YouTube:  
<http://youtu.be/eh9WayN7R-s>
- The Paul Robeson House  
<http://paulrobesonhouse.org>
- American Theater Magazine: Daniel Beaty:  
<http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/issue/featuredstory.cfm?story=1&indexID=37>

## Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
- Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
- Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
- Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
- Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
- Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

**Enjoy the show!**



the mead center  
for american theater

1101 Sixth Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
Phone: (202) 554-9066  
Fax: (202) 488-4056

Written by Sean-Maurice Lynch  
Edited by Rebecca Campana

Visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org)  
for more information on  
Arena Stage productions  
and educational opportunities.