Dear Jim, 1/18/85

As you will have seen before this reaches you, I saw and tried to use an opportunity and as my enclosed letter to Rick Smith indicates, it left me more tired. The accident of the snow storm which closed the loca schools and courts, where I was to have been tied up yesterday as a State witness, enabled me to get it copied yesterday and mailed today. Copies to the same people, including Bazelon and the bar association.

Duberman may be interested in knowing that I have an original pen-and-ink of Robeson as Othello, if he wants to use it. And before knocking off for the day a few suggestions for his counsel, you and Greer. Not including all the places the FBI can have records hidden, which I'll address later if you, either, desire it. But don't forget and please tell Greer about the 66s and 94s. He should also duplicate his request with DJ and the appropriate presidential libraries, I believe. And not have overlooked the NYC and Phila field offices, which he may have.

Some time ago I saw some records disclosed to someone else in one of the FBI's phony spy cases, I think "Gregory." A guy I used to know a little and wasn't very fond of, Harold November, was in it. It disclosed that there was FBI coverage at a peace meeting in Washington to which I drove Robeson and from which I also drove him. In fact, I also met him at the airport, and that was when National Airport was a small building where the Pentagon now is. I think that meeting was sponsored by The American Peace Mobilization. The disclosed records revealed car checks, license numbers, so mine ought be included, and thus Robeson. (His was a great concert, in an amazing number of languages of the folk songs he sang.)

Another small suggestion for Duberman: magnificent as was Robeson's singing voice, his conversational voice was in some ways even more beautiful. I've never heard as beautiful, as melodious a voice in normal conversational tones.

He had friends on the Howard facylty, because that is where I drove him from the airport and where I picked him up and returned him, a row house on an east-west street as I now recall on the hill behind old Griffith Stadium, which was east of Georgia Avenue and just at the bottom of that hill. His friends were on the north side of that street, and my mind gives me a picture of stairs leading up to it. Red brick if that is a clue and he is looking for Robeson friends of that period. I imagine faculty members might be among the better sources.

I'm sure he'll have heard about the Willkie GOP convention and Ballad for Americans that Robeson was to sing and then wasn't permitted it. (It was sung.) But I don't believe in forgetting the obvious and a biographer can use such things to advantage and they are meaningful. I have a first pressing of his recording of it.

The only thing he carried to the concert was a small wooden box of things he used for his voice, perhaps 5-6" square, an attractive, well-finished box perhaps made to order. Simple but well made and thus attractive. No decoration, only a handle of some kind.

By coincidence I had a visit the other day from the (black) news director of one of the local radio stations. He's from Philadelphia and when he saw the sketch he was reminded that when he was a very little boy in North Philadelphia and about the central part of it he went along once with someone making am meat delivery to Robeson and when as a kid he learned who that man was he never forgot it for he is still this young man's personal hero. But it suggests that when Robeson was ill there were those who wanted to see to it that he got the best food, not just chain-store meat.

I can see some judge with much in camera reading!

P.S. I've still not heard from Mark. Is he that mad about you? Or is there something else?

Best,

Harold

Robeson's Biographer Sues F.B.I.

By EDWIN McDOWELL

Martin Duberman, a biographer and playwright, has filed a lawsuit against the Federal Bureau of Investigation seeking to force the agency to release files about the family of Paul Robeson, the singer, actor and left-leaning black activist who died in 1976.

The suit, filed Dec. 27 in the United States District Court in New York, contends that the agency has wrongfully denied the author access to the files "in direct violation of the Freedom of Information Act."

Mr. Duberman, the Distinguished Service Professor at Lehman College of the City University of New York, has been granted exclusive access to the Robeson family archives for a biography he is writing for Alfred A. Knopf. Paul Robeson Jr., the late singer's surviving next of kin, waived all privacy rights to permit the Government files to be opened to Mr. Duberman.

Much Was 'Censored'

"I'm suing first to get the F.B.I. to release the vast amounts of material they have refused to release to me, and I'm suing because much of what they have sent has been almost totally censored," said Mr. Duberman, whose biography "Charles Francis Adams" won the 1962 Bancroft Prize. "Whole pages are inked out from top to bottom and are absolutely useless. On some pages they left only a couple of tantalizing file numbers, on other pages they left only two or three words."

Edward Greer, Mr. Duberman's attorney, said of the bureau, "We're contending they misued their right to withhold certain classified material. In my opinion, they obviously don't want to admit to their shenanigans." Mr. Greer, a professor at Northeastern University Law School in Boston, added that the bureau "destroyed" many of the Robeson files.

Marvin H. Lewis, a spokesman in Washington for the F.B.I., said that he was unaware of the lawsuit. "But I am aware of Mr. Duberman's request and can acknowledge that we have been releasing material to him as we have been able to process it."

1945

Paul Robeson as Othello

I'm local counsel for Greer on a FOIA case here.