

Paul Robeson at the East Berlin Academy of Arts (October 6, 1960)

Abstract

On October 6, 1960, the African-American singer, actor, and civil rights activist Paul Robeson (1898-1976) was inducted into the East German Academy of Arts as an affiliate member. Robeson, who was internationally known, was an eloquent critic of racial discrimination in the U.S. and a member of the Communist Party, both of which made him into a poster-child for East German solidarity with the U.S. civil rights movement. He participated in the Socialist debate about jazz by publishing an article in 1949 in a Soviet music magazine, in which he criticized jazz as commercial and called it a falsification of African-American music. Only spirituals and the blues, in his estimation, were true expressions of African-American culture. In 1950, Robeson fell victim to McCarthyism; the U.S. revoked his passport and only reinstated it eight years later. The official caption by the GDR news agency ADN reads: "At an event held at the Academy of Arts in Berlin, the famous American Negro-singer Paul Robeson was inducted as an affiliate member. The certificate of appointment was conferred by the President of the Academy, Professor Nagel. [. . .]"

Source



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