

## Out of the Shadows:

# The Political Writings of Eslanda Goode Robeson

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Generally overshadowed by the celebrity and controversy of her more famous husband, Eslanda Goode Robeson nevertheless made significant contributions of her own to the field of Americans' understanding of Africa and to race relations in general. A consideration of Eslanda's three books (one of which was co-authored with Pearl S. Buck, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist), and a look especially at the reception of these books by reviewers at the time, provides an opportunity to survey these contributions.

Eslanda's impact as an author, of course, was inseparable from her status as the wife of the well-known singer, actor, and political activist. Indeed, all of her books included discussion of her husband. But Eslanda—called Essie by her friends and often by the press as well—used these writings to go beyond simply providing readers a vicarious proximity to celebrity, as she probed the intersections between race, class, and gender in the United States, Europe, Africa, and elsewhere.

In the larger scheme of African-American history, looking at Eslanda Robeson's role gives greater depth to recent studies by such scholars as Brenda Gayle Plummer and Penny Von Eschen on the internationalist activities of African Americans. In particular, Eslanda's work illuminates what Von Eschen has called "the politics of the African diaspora," the mutual encouragement of freedom struggles in the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean generated by interconnections between Black activists from these varied societies.<sup>1</sup> On a more personal level, this attention to Eslanda's writings and activities corrects the tendency in Martin Duberman's enormously influential biography of Paul Robeson to be overly critical of Eslanda's writings and politics, especially in the period before 1950. Taking Eslanda's writings and activism seriously also emphasizes the collaboration more than the friction between Eslanda and Paul—although it must be noted that Eslanda herself did not ignore the friction even in her published writings.<sup>2</sup>

Eslanda was born in Washington, D.C. in 1896, her father a clerk in the War Department. Her mother was from the light-skinned Negro elite, whose own father, Francis Lewis Cardozo, had been a prominent South Carolina elected official during Reconstruction.<sup>3</sup> Eslanda attended the University of Illinois, but graduated from Columbia University in New York City with a degree in chemistry. She became the first African-American to work at New York City's Presbyterian Hospital. She married Paul in 1921.

Courtesy of Paul Robeson, Jr.



*Paul and Eslanda, 1931.*

Eslanda's first book was a biography of her husband, published in 1930 and written while the couple and their son "Pauli" lived in England.<sup>4</sup> Duberman emphasizes weaknesses in the book, highlighting a handful of negative reviews.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it received quite positive reviews overall, and was received as more than simply an adoring portrait by a wife. Beginning with the title of the book, *Paul Robeson, Negro*, Eslanda clearly intended it as an affirmation or pride for African Americans in the success of one of their number, and an

illustration for whites of the capabilities of the “Negro” people. Paul was only 32 at the time, and while several reviews noted the incongruity of a biography of such a young man, most agreed that he merited the attention, having already gained international acclaim as a singer and actor.

Indeed, reviewers picked up on Eslanda’s political goal of profiling this example of African-American success. The *Times Literary Supplement* of London, which said the book “leaves a very pleasant impression of both the subject and the writer of the book,” noted that Paul’s accomplishments demonstrated what many more Negroes could do were it not for the “restrictions and handicaps” they faced due to race.<sup>6</sup> Harry Hansen, the prominent New York book critic, called the book “inspiring,” and believed that Eslanda’s depiction not only of her husband but of “Negro family life, of Negro traditions and accomplishments,” all written with “rich understanding” and “deep pride,” was of great importance for white Americans to read.<sup>7</sup>

African-American reviewers as well made clear that profiling Paul’s success would, indeed, make Blacks proud, and that they would want to read about it as much as whites. Langston Hughes, whose review was featured on page one of the *New York Herald-Tribune* book section, said that ordinary workers and servants in the Black community considered Paul to be “their ambassador to the world,” and that with his success “his old friends who still walk humble and mighty glad.”<sup>8</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, writing in *The Crisis*, the NAACP magazine, placed the biography in the “must read” category, and commented, significantly:

The hero is made a little too perfect, but with all that, the evident triumph of a fine black man makes fascinating reading and something unusual in these days when everything black in literature has to come from the slums, wallow in Harlem, and go to Hell.<sup>9</sup>

Eslanda supplemented her account of her husband’s life with an almost sociological description of the importance of the church in African-American life, and a chapter on the development and significance of Harlem to African Americans. Eslanda considered Harlem a place Blacks “can call home; it is a place where they belong,” a place where, being in the majority, they no longer have to be on their guard as representing their race to others.<sup>10</sup> She discussed the long history of inter-racial sexual relations in the U.S. which resulted in distinctions based on color among “Negroes,” and the phenomenon of “passing.” “Passing” was very relevant to Eslanda’s own life with her mixed ancestry and her ability at times to “pass” for white.<sup>11</sup> Eslanda contrasted the racial discrimination even in Northern hotels, restaurants, and housing with the lack of such discrimination in England: “So here in England, where everyone was kind and cordial and reasonable, Paul was happy.”<sup>12</sup>

Several reviewers, including Langston Hughes, pointed to these sections on the Black community and on race relations as especially noteworthy. Rose Feld in the *New York Times* called the chapter on Harlem “penetrating and thought-provoking,” and said Eslanda presented “frankly and interestingly the psychology of the Negro in his relationship to white people and the expressions of escape which his race consciousness gives him.” Feld and Harry Hansen both viewed with alarm the Black preference for life in Europe over life in America. Hansen observed with great prescience that “Expatriation is merely an evasion,” and that all the Robesons—Paul, Pauli, and Eslanda—“will be in a position to help tremendously the cause of their people in the United States.”<sup>13</sup>

There were some negative reviews, mostly charging, with much justice, that Eslanda portrayed Paul as a paragon of “Sunday-school piety.” William Soskin in the *New York Evening Post* rightly criticized the book for downplaying any sense of Paul’s bitterness at personal encounters with racism. But his review, anti-racist in intent, had more than a trace of the desire for the exotic, and even the voyeuristic, as Soskin wanted to know how Paul felt being surrounded by admiring white women after a successful concert.<sup>14</sup> Most critical was Stark Young, in *The New Republic*, who called the book the “worst type of biographical rubbish,” and who objected that the book was framed around Paul as a “Negro” rather than simply as a “remarkable man.” One may simply note without comment that Young, in establishing his “credentials” for criticizing Eslanda’s portrayal of the Black church and life, mentioned that his father owned 350 slaves.<sup>15</sup> Among the few criticisms of Paul that Eslanda raised in the book, which several reviews noted, was what she called his “Laziness, with a capital L.” But none of the commentators took Eslanda to task for referring to this laziness as one of Paul’s “typically Negro qualities,” a stereotype which would unleash a firestorm of criticism today.<sup>16</sup>

Eslanda’s next book would not appear for another fifteen years, in 1945, but it would be very influential.<sup>17</sup> Based on her diary of her 1936 trip through southern, central, and eastern Africa with eight-year-old Pauli, the book reflected both the training towards a Ph.D. in anthropology that Eslanda had begun in London and completed at the Hartford Seminary, and her growing concern with the political aspects of colonialism. Describing her encounters with everyone from Black South African miners to sympathetic and unsympathetic white colonial officials, and from herdswomen in Uganda and pygmies in the Congo to Edinburgh-trained African doctors, Eslanda focused on the varied people of Africa, and the experience of traveling through Africa. She took particular care to detail women’s roles and gender relations in the various African cultures she described, according respect for women’s labor and knowledge but noting as well the exclusion of women from certain activities.<sup>18</sup> Her strong and convincing critique of colonialism and racism emerged from her vignettes rather than overpowering them.

Part of the book's appeal, too, consisted of young Paul's "mature observations and reactions," as the *Literary Guild Review* put it, to immersion in very different cultures and to issues of racial discrimination. (For example, about South Africa's Orange Free State, Pauli asked, "What's free about it?")<sup>19</sup> Although "Big Paul" did not accompany Eslanda on the trip, he, too, was a constant presence in the book. After all, the white press in South Africa and colonial officials in East Africa regarded her nervously because she was "Mrs. Paul Robeson." Meanwhile, African—and some European—fans from the Cape Colony to Egypt gave her special treatment for precisely the same reason.<sup>20</sup> And with Paul at "the apex of fame" in 1945, to use Duberman's phrase,<sup>21</sup> a book in which he was just off-stage, as it were, but nonetheless central to the plot, would certainly be noticed by the American press and the reading public.

Duberman rightly but briefly notes the favorable reviews that *African Journey* received upon publication, and the personal lift that it gave Eslanda during another strained period in her relationship with Paul.<sup>22</sup> But the book's political significance, too, was enormous, as one of the first published portraits of Africa for an American audience by an African-American who had traveled in Africa, combining a first-hand critique of European colonialism and racism with a human portrait of the African people and an appreciation of the cultural achievements of African peoples. To appreciate the importance of such a work, one might note that the fairly thorough *Book Review Digest* listed only five books on Africa published in the U.S. in 1945, and only 30 in the period from 1942-1946, with most of those being geared mainly to scholars or foreign policy experts, and several sponsored by European colonial powers. By contrast, there were well over 100 books on China, and over 75 on India, published in this five-year period in the U.S.<sup>23</sup>

*African Journey* was published by the John Day Company, headed by Richard Walsh but with great input by his wife, Pearl Buck. Buck was among the most prominent Americans who believed that World War II needed to be transformed into an anti-racist and anti-imperialist war—W.E.B. DuBois wrote that among whites Buck represented "the strongest and clearest elucidation of this point of view."<sup>24</sup> She began corresponding with Paul Robeson after they shared the platform at an April 1942 rally on behalf of allowing Black Americans and Black Africans to participate in the war without racist restrictions in the army or any other area.<sup>25</sup> This association undoubtedly led to Buck's association with Eslanda as well, and in the fall of 1943 Buck provided a detailed but favorable critique of Eslanda's manuscript which led to its acceptance at the John Day Company.<sup>26</sup> A lengthy revision process ensued, which nevertheless had the salutary effect of allowing Richard Walsh to publish, in the highly-regarded magazine that he also edited, *Asia and the Americas*, two articles by Eslanda, one which he adapted from a speech she had given, and one excerpted almost directly from the book. Both of these articles, in turn, were reprinted

in at least one Black periodical, and one of them appeared as well in expanded form as a pamphlet published by the Council on African Affairs.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Eslanda spoke about African views of the new United Nations at the plenary session of a conference sponsored by Buck's East and West Association, which over 600 librarians attended.<sup>28</sup>

In "A Negro Looks at Africa," one of the articles published in *Asia and the Americas*, Eslanda previewed some of the main themes of her book, especially the pride that Black Americans could and should take in the achievements of Africans—just as other Americans took pride in the culture and accomplishments of their respective "old countries." Drawing on the work of anti-racist anthropologists such as Franz Boas, she described early African smelting of iron, the long-established systems of law among the Ashanti and the Hausa, and the domestication of cattle. She noted the inspiration of African art for modern art, and she suggested that the traditional communal ownership of land in Africa could likewise be an inspiration for contemporary society. Indeed, her essay prefigured in some ways the current multicultural education movement.<sup>29</sup>

In "Proud To Be A Negro," Eslanda recounted a conversation on the plane leaving Africa with an arrogant European colonialist who pitied her son Pauli for being Black. Eslanda declared firmly that "[Pauli's] color, his background, his rich history are part of his wealth. We consider it an asset, not a handicap." In addition to this assertion of Black pride, she argued that racist attitudes had isolated European colonialists, and like-minded Americans, from the world of tomorrow, and that such attitudes would make their lives difficult. Africans and African-Americans, meanwhile, in their long experience of fighting oppression, "have survived and grown strong." This strength was only increased in the ideological and strategic conflicts of World War II, Eslanda added, as Africans felt that the "Four Freedoms" and the promises for self-government of the Atlantic Charter should apply to them, and where an African governor of a French colony, Felix Eboué, took his stand with the Free French. One might note, however, that Eslanda, like the Council on African Affairs as a whole, expressed an unfounded optimism about French promises to restructure their empire in Africa to include more self-government.<sup>30</sup>

While Eslanda was buoyed by letters she received in response to her articles in *Asia*,<sup>31</sup> the response to the publication of *African Journey* itself was overwhelming: the first printing was sold out on the day of publication, and it resulted in much greater demand for her services as a lecturer.<sup>32</sup> The African-American press was most enthusiastic. Ben Burns in the *Chicago Defender* called *African Journey* "perhaps the first really popular book ever written on the African Negro. It will make [American] Negroes hold their heads and shoulders high, proud to be Negro and African."<sup>33</sup> Prince A. A. Nwafor Orizu, a Nigerian living in the U.S., and a regular columnist on Africa for the *Pittsburgh*

*Courier*, agreed that “the Negro in America must take pride in his African origin as a beginning of self-confidence which is the starting point of outward freedom.” He wrote, with the kind of hyperbole that one would think only book publishers and ad-writers could make up, that Eslanda’s book “opens a new page in the history of the black man in America,” potentially as important as Marcus Garvey’s movement for pan-African pride after World War I. Another columnist in the *Courier* also wholeheartedly endorsed the book, and described Eslanda’s role on behalf of the Council on African Affairs and the decolonization movement at the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in April 1945.<sup>34</sup> Constance Curtis in the *Amsterdam News* detailed Eslanda’s dismaying descriptions of conditions of Blacks in South Africa, but noted as well that the book brings the important “discovery” that Africans were “deeply interested in the colored peoples outside of their land,” a point that Eslanda had discussed at length. Curtis added that Eslanda’s view of Africa as an African-American would be particularly interesting for her Black readers: “It is good to see Africa through such eyes because it ceases to be the land of the big game hunter and the Pukka Sahib and becomes a land in which people live who are like many all of us know.”<sup>35</sup>

White reviewers gave *African Journey* coverage that was just as prominent and just as favorable; both the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald-Tribune* reviewed it in their weekday and Sunday book columns. Ernestine Evans called *African Journey* “an excellent tourist book as well as a treatise on the color line,” and a “starting point of real study” on Africa. She duly noted the political significance of Eslanda’s discussion of the difficulty she encountered in obtaining visas, as “people who are counting grievances are not allowed to go where they please.” Eslanda, like the other thirteen million African-Americans, was beginning to count herself as one with the “ten million West Indians of color, the one hundred and fifty million blacks of Africa, and tentatively all the peoples of Asia,” in the realignment of the world’s peoples that would take shape in the post-war world.<sup>36</sup> While noting the poverty and discrimination Eslanda described, Evans, too, understood the importance of her descriptions of African achievements. She cited a few, such as temperature control mechanisms in traditional African housing, that the U.S. might learn from—“Federal Housing, please note,” Evans wrote. Evans, writing in the *Herald-Tribune*, provided perhaps the most detailed and incisive review, but it was representative of the response. Helen Cain highlighted Eslanda’s warning that “those who make the peace must not overlook a seething, brooding Africa.” Francis Hackett noted with respect, albeit with regret, Eslanda’s turn to the Soviet Union as a model for development of non-industrialized societies and for the creation of a non-racist modern society. Stuart Cloete, a liberal white South African—who said that to him “a zebra is a white beast with a black stripe; to Eslanda Robeson it is a black beast with a white stripe”—welcomed

Eslanda's frankly "biased" approach in favor of Black Africans, which might "make the white South African wonder," as no other book has done, "what those whom he calls his servants think of him."<sup>37</sup>

Several reviewers contrasted *African Journey* favorably with John LaTouche's *Congo*, which appeared at the same time. LaTouche's book was based on a trip paid for by the Belgian government, and gave a favorable view of Belgian colonialism. Ironically, LaTouche was the author of the song, "Ballad for Americans," which Paul had helped make famous, and LaTouche himself reviewed Eslanda's book favorably.<sup>38</sup>

Eslanda went on staff with the Council on African Affairs in September 1945, a month after *African Journey* came out, and she participated in its work at the U.N. on behalf of decolonization over the next few years.<sup>39</sup> She was also active, along with Paul, in Henry Wallace's Presidential campaign in 1948. She became a leader of the Progressive Party in Connecticut and a candidate for Connecticut Secretary of State in 1948 and for Congress in 1952.<sup>40</sup>

But she also kept up her association with Pearl Buck, and the two women met regularly to prepare *American Argument*, which appeared in January 1949. This so-called "talk book," presented as an edited conversation with Buck's commentary, was part of a series that Buck published in which she presented critical views that she thought Americans needed to hear—Buck had earlier published her interviews with a Chinese agrarian reformer, a Russian woman who had grown up on a collective farm, and a German socialist and anti-Nazi refugee.<sup>41</sup>

*American Argument* was a wide-ranging dialogue, covering Eslanda's background, and the views of the two women on American society, Russia, race relations, gender relations and women's role, education and child-rearing, and many other issues. As Eslanda had done for the African people in *African Journey*, Buck kept the focus on Eslanda as a total person rather than just her "political" ideas as such. Indeed, some of the more interesting sections included Eslanda's discussion of her personal encounters with color prejudice by the light-skinned elite in the African-American community, and her observations on the different attitude toward the "finality" of marriage of Paul and herself, which only partly veiled their marital tensions.<sup>42</sup>

As many reviewers noted, the two women, Eslanda and Buck, agreed more than they disagreed, both excoriating American Cold War policies toward the Soviet Union, attacking U.S. militarism, denouncing the failure of the U.S. to work for decolonization, and bemoaning American women's preoccupation with families and housework rather than public affairs. Where the two disagreed was on tactics for change, with Eslanda defending Soviet policies, and even proposing that "liquidation"—yes, she used that term associated with the Stalinist regime—of the enemies of civil rights in the U.S. would be appropriate.<sup>43</sup> Buck, who portrayed herself as an "individualist," demurred

from such measures, but nevertheless defended Eslanda from accusations of disloyalty, and agreed that the American ideology of individual rights had facilitated the denial of the collective rights of large numbers of Americans. While Buck made clear her own opposition to Communism, and tried to forestall criticism by declaring that she knew that Eslanda was no Communist,<sup>44</sup> the very fact that she brought out this book with Eslanda, just when attacks on Eslanda's and Paul's "loyalty" were about to reach their height, demonstrated her own rejection of Cold War ideology, and provided an important platform for Eslanda's ideas. Indeed, Buck structured the book to present a critique of American society from the perspective of an educated, professional, activist African-American woman, in order to puncture the complacency of white Americans who considered their society to be a democracy of all of its citizens.

Considering the political climate—U.S.-Soviet tensions were very high as the Berlin blockade and airlift were underway; the NAACP had recently fired DuBois; Max Yergan, the former director of the Council on African Affairs accused Paul of leading a "Communist faction" of the group; and the heavily red-baited Wallace campaign had received very few votes—the critics' reaction to *American Argument* was quite positive.<sup>45</sup> There were, to be sure, a few wild denunciations. The ultra-reactionary *Plain Talk* called it an "anti-American interview," and accused both Buck and Eslanda of disloyalty to American principles, while the *Washington Star* implied that Buck had fallen for Eslanda's Soviet propaganda.<sup>46</sup>

But favorable reviews far outweighed such criticisms. The *Boston Herald* told readers that Eslanda's critique of the U.S. was worth considering, especially regarding the treatment of Blacks, while the *San Francisco Chronicle* emphasized Eslanda's view that with more democracy at home the U.S. could become a force for progress in the world. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* pointed to the importance of both women's critique of the growing cult of domesticity in the U.S.<sup>47</sup> Mary Ross in the *New York Herald-Tribune* described the book as "serious but never pompous or preachy, that cannot help but be stimulating to others who love America but are also troubled by certain qualities of our national life." Ross, like some other reviewers, made it clear that both authors loved this country, and that they had unusual vantage points on this country, as both insiders and outsiders, Buck having grown up in China, and Eslanda having lived abroad for twelve years and looking at the U.S. as both an anthropologist and as one with dark skin. The *New York Times* challenged Eslanda's views on the Soviet Union but declared the need to hear her viewpoint, while the *Saturday Review of Literature* urgently recommended the book to "the isn't-it-grand-to-be-an-American school."<sup>48</sup> Mary Margaret McBride, host of a popular radio show on which Buck often appeared as a guest, balked at inviting Buck and Eslanda to appear together because of the "Communist angle," but eventually relented.<sup>49</sup>

The African-American press also recommended the book to readers. The *Pittsburgh Courier* called it “must” reading, “a provocative but friendly argument, and one worthy of the serious reflections of all Americans—especially American women.” The *Amsterdam News* said that both the political discussion and the human portraits of the authors revealed in the book were noteworthy. The *Chicago Defender* was less enthusiastic, but still respectful, calling Eslanda “a vigorous and interesting conversationalist.”<sup>50</sup>

Despite the publicity and the reviews, however, the book did not sell well, as Buck later apologized to Eslanda.<sup>51</sup> But its publication and reviews demonstrate the dialogue that Eslanda had with the mainstream of the literary community as late as 1949, as well as Buck’s continuing dialogue with the left. That this association with Buck was helpful to Eslanda is made clear by the fact that Eslanda’s lecture agency, in soliciting bookings in the 1950’s, quoted extensively from Buck’s effusive description of Eslanda in *American Argument*, as follows:

[Eslanda] sees in herself every Negro in the United States, every poor white in a poll-tax Southern state, every black man, woman, and child in Africa, every untouchable in India, every colonial in Indonesia and Indochina, every woman anywhere who longs for equality.<sup>52</sup>

The two women continued to exchange friendly letters about politics and family for several more years. Buck congratulated Eslanda when she lashed out at the hate-mongers who tried to interfere with Pauli’s marriage to a white woman, and commiserated with her when Eslanda was called before Joe McCarthy’s Senate committee. In one particularly ironic twist, one of the times that McCarthyism hit Buck personally was when an invitation was rescinded under pressure from the House Un-American Activities Committee to speak at an all-Black Washington, D.C. high school. The school was none other than Francis Cardozo High School, named after Eslanda’s illustrious grandfather.<sup>53</sup>

Eslanda’s experience at the United Nations in the 1940’s led to a long stint during the 1950’s as the UN correspondent for *New World Review*, a pro-Soviet magazine linked with the National Council for American-Soviet Friendship, an organization with which Eslanda, and Paul, were also associated.<sup>54</sup> On the whole, Eslanda did not defend Stalinism in these articles, although she certainly did not criticize it. Eslanda’s writings plugged decolonization, opposition to the Cold War, the admission of the People’s Republic of China to the UN, and the rise of the neutralist bloc as symbolized by the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955, all of which coincided with Soviet policy but which a wider range of progressives could also support.<sup>55</sup> After a brief period in 1950 when she attacked the Nehru

Courtesy of Paul Robeson, Jr.



*Paul and Essie, Marseilles, France, 1936.*

government in India for its persecution of the left, she soon became a particular booster of Nehru's independent foreign policy and of his UN representative, Krishna Menon, who she had known in London.<sup>56</sup> Among Eslanda's most noteworthy articles were those in which she highlighted particular women leaders abroad and at the UN, carrying on the work of the small but energetic progressive women's networks in the years that some historians have called the "doldrums" of the women's movement.<sup>57</sup>

Even during the most difficult times in the U.S., with the weakness of the progressive movements in general in the 1950's and the attacks on the Robesons personally, Eslanda maintained a sense of optimism from her UN post, as she saw, slowly but perceptibly, the increased influence of Asians and Africans in world politics.<sup>58</sup> While these articles contained important analyses of this changing world scene as crystallized at the UN, they were not widely circulated, and did not reach as many people as any of her three books had done.

But Eslanda Goode Robeson did make her mark as a political writer and speaker, with a reputation tied to her husband's but developing her own voice. She made this mark in her analysis of Harlem and the black community in *Paul Robeson, Negro*, of African culture, European colonialism, and nationalist resistance in *African Journey*, and of the American and world scenes in *American Argument*, as well as in her active work for decolonization in the Council for African Affairs and in her journalistic endeavors towards the same end in *New World Review* and other publications.

The historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his polemic against multiculturalism, has claimed that current efforts to establish an identification of African Americans with Africa are artificial, that they do not flow from the logic of African-American history.<sup>59</sup> Eslanda Goode Robeson—light-skinned, middle-class, cosmopolitan—might be among the African Americans most likely to corroborate Schlesinger's thesis. But Eslanda in fact developed a strong cultural and political identification with Africa and Africans even as she asserted her rights as an African American, and this identification made sense to important sectors of the Black community at the time. This identification developed in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement that gained momentum from the mid-1930s on, but was disrupted in the Black community by the Cold War and McCarthyism.<sup>60</sup> The experience of Eslanda Goode Robeson, thus, shows both the shallowness of Schlesinger's critique, and the importance of focusing renewed attention on the ways that African Americans in the mid-twentieth century interpreted their domestic experiences in a global, and especially an African and anti-colonial, context.

## Notes

Note: For the sake of brevity, Eslanda Goode Robeson will be referred to in these notes as "EGR," while Paul Robeson will be referred to as "PR."

"Robeson Papers-Howard" refers to the Robeson Family Papers at the Moorland-Spingarn Archives, Howard University.

"Robeson Papers-Schomburg" refers to the Paul Robeson Papers in the Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library.

"EGR Vertical File" refers to the Vertical File on EGR, microfiche 004,342 in the Schomburg Collection.

"Brown Papers" refers to the Lawrence Brown Papers in the Schomburg Collection.

"John Day Papers" refers to the John Day Co. Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

1. Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4 and passim.

2. Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson: A Biography* (N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989). For a hagiographic portrait of EGR which ignores the marital conflict altogether, see Barbara Ransby, "Eslanda Goode Robeson, Pan-Africanist," *Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* 3 (Fall 1986), 22-26.

3. For discussion of Cardozo's role in South Carolina politics, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1988), 27, 102, 327 and passim; Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 356-91 passim; and W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (N.Y.: Atheneum, 1972 [1935]), 392, 395, 397-98, and passim.

4. EGR, *Paul Robeson, Negro* (N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1930).

5. Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 139-40, 613.

6. "A Negro Artist," *Times Literary Supplement* (22 May 1930), 432.

7. Harry Hansen, "The First Reader," *N.Y. World* (25 June 1930), 11.

8. Langston Hughes, "Ambassador to the World," *N.Y. Herald-Tribune Books* (29 June 1930), 1-2.

9. W.E.B. DuBois, "The Browsing Reader," *The Crisis* 37 (Sept. 1930), 313.

10. EGR, *Paul Robeson, Negro*, chapters 1 and 4, quotations here at 44, 46-47.

11. On EGR's mixed background, and the minor scandal which her light-skinned mother caused by marrying "a dark man," see Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 35-36. For an example of EGR "passing" for white, see EGR, *Paul Robeson, Negro*, 110-11.

12. EGR, *Paul Robeson, Negro*, 110-11.

13. Rose Feld, "Paul Robeson Viewed By His Wife," *N.Y. Times Book Review* (13 July 1930), 5; Hansen, "The First Reader." My evaluation of the reviews by Feld and Langston Hughes differs from Duberman's: cf. Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 613.

14. William Soskin, "Books on our Table," *N.Y. Evening Post* (25 June 1930), 9.

15. Stark Young, "Paul Robeson, Negro," *New Republic* 63 (6 Aug. 1930), 345-46.

16. EGR, *Paul Robeson, Negro*, 154-55, 170-71. That EGR in these years was not free from elitist attitudes toward other Blacks may be seen in correspondence with Paul's pianist, Lawrence Brown, in which she referred casually to the "niggers" in the telegraph office who might be reading her messages; see EGR to Lawrence Brown, 7 Mar. [1932?], Brown Papers, microfilm reel 1.

17. EGR, *African Journey* (N.Y.: John Day Co., 1945).

18. For discussions of gender relations and women's roles, see, e.g., EGR, *African Journey*, 41-42 (on a Black South African nurse), 45-46 (on an African wedding), 91-93 (on the separation of men and women socially in Uganda), 104 (on women's role in traditional medicine), 108-09 (on the Ugandan herdswomen).

19. *Literacy Guild Review—Wings* (Aug. 1945), as quoted in EGR to Lawrence Brown, 15 July 1945, Brown Papers, microfilm reel 3. See also Richard J. Walsh (the book's publisher) to EGR, 28 April 1944, EGR correspondence,

Robeson Papers-Howard. For the quoted passage of Pauli's, see EGR, *African Journey*, 51.

20. See EGR, *African Journey*, 32-33, 34, 82, 128, 149.

21. Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, ch. 14.

22. *Ibid.*, 292.

23. *Book Review Digest, 1946 (with cumulative index 1942-46)* (N.Y.: H. W. Wilson Co., 1947), 927 (for entries on Africa), 1269 (South Africa), 999-1000 (China), 1134-35 (India). I include books on South Africa with the Africa total, but have excluded those focused solely on North Africa.

24. W.E.B. DuBois, "The War for Race Equality," *Phylon* 3 (3d quarter, 1942), 321. See also Pearl S. Buck, *American Unity and Asia* (N.Y.: John Day Co., 1942), and Buck, *What America Means to Me* (N.Y.: John Day Co., 1943), and Peter Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 7.

25. For brief reports on this rally of 8 April 1942, sponsored by the Council on African Affairs (which Eslanda and Paul had helped form), see "Pearl Buck Urges Mobilization of Negro and Colonial Peoples," *Opportunity* (April 1942), 119, and *In Fact* (20 April 1942), 3.

For efforts by Paul to get Buck involved in the support movement for the imprisoned Puerto Rican nationalist leader, Pedro Albizu Campos, see Buck to PR, 3 Aug. 1942, and PR to Buck, 28 Aug. 1942, in PR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard.

26. Buck to EGR, 12 Oct. 1943, and Walsh to EGR, 19 Nov. 1943 and 28 Apr. 1944, and EGR to Walsh, 7 May 1944, all in EGR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard. For discussion of a campaign EGR wanted to initiate outlawing segregation, see Buck to EGR, 10 June 1944, EGR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard, and see also Mary Braggiotti, "Tourist in Africa" (a profile of EGR), *Negro Digest* 3 (Oct. 1945), 43-44. That EGR had originally intended to complete this book much sooner, and that she expected that her first publisher would print it, is clear from an article about the trip based on a letter from EGR to Harper & Brothers: Carolyn Marx, "Book Marks: Essie Robeson Writes From Africa," *N.Y. World-Telegram* (11 Sept. 1936),

31.

27. EGR, "A Negro Look at Africa," *Asia and the Americas* 44 (Nov. 1944), 501-03; EGR, "Proud To Be A Negro," *Asia and the Americas* 45 (Feb. 1945), 108. On Walsh editing the first article based on EGR speeches, see Walsh to EGR, 12 June 1944 and 17 July 1944, EGR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard. "Proud To Be A Negro," though not identified as such, was an advance publication of pages 150-52 of *African Journey*. For re-publication, see *Negro Digest* 3 (Jan. 1945), 3-6 and *Negro Digest* 3 (April 1945), 43-44 (under the heading "Is Black a Handicap?"), and see EGR, *What Do the People of Africa Want?* (N.Y.: Council on African Affairs/African Pamphlet Series, May 1945). Much of this material was reprinted later as "Is African Civilization Backward?" *Freedom* 3 (June 1953), 2.

It is possible that part of the delay in publication of *African Journey* was due to wartime paper restrictions that publishers faced; see Walsh to EGR, 28 Apr. 1944, EGR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard.

28. *People Through Books* 1 (May 1945), 15, and 1 (June 1945), 6.

29. EGR, "A Negro Looks at Africa," and EGR, "Proud To Be A Negro." For other examples of the popularization of and controversy around Boas's anti-racist work and for this early development of multicultural education during World War II, see Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish, *Races of Mankind* (N.Y.: Public Affairs Committee, 1943, 1946), and Robert Shaffer, "Multicultural Education in New York City During World War II," *New York History* 77 (July 1996), 301-32.

30. For another contemporary treatment of the significance of Eboué's role, see Walter White, *A Rising Wind* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1945). On the overly generous evaluation of the Free French program for Africa, see EGR, *What Do The People of Africa Want?*, 21-22, and cf., in the magazine of the Council on African Affairs, "French Plan New Role for Africa in Tomorrow's World," *New Africa* 3 (Feb. 1944), 1-2, and "Editorial," *New Africa* 3 (Mar. 1944), 3.

31. See Walsh to EGR, 2 April 1945, responding to a letter from EGR not in the

files, EGR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard.

32. EGR to Brown, 15 Aug. 1945, Lawrence Brown papers. For one lecture series announced at this time, see "Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt and Mrs. Paul Robeson To Serve As Lecturers for New Community School," *N.Y. Age* (11 Aug. 1945), 5. For a brief reference to EGR's speech about Africa to her sorority's national convention in Dec. 1945, see EGR to "Sorors in Delta Sigma Theta," 4 Aug. 1949, Robeson Papers-Schomburg (microfilm reel 1, frames 469-75).

33. Ben Burns, "Off the Book Shelf," *Chicago Defender* (25 Aug. 1945), 13.

34. Prince A. A. Nwafor Orizu, "Africa Speaks: Mrs. Robeson's Book Is a Challenge to the Negro in America," *Pittsburgh Courier* (25 Aug. 1945), 6; P. L. Prattis, "The Horizon: Mrs. Robeson Finds Herself Very Much At Home When She Visits 'Her People'," *Pittsburgh Courier* (15 Sept. 1945), 7.

35. Constance Curtis, "About Books," *N.Y. Amsterdam News* (25 Aug. 1945), 13-A. See also the earlier review of Eslanda's CAA pamphlet, in Curtis, "About Books," *N.Y. Amsterdam News* (14 July 1945), 13-A. Excerpts from the book were also featured under the heading "An American Negro Views Her 'Old Country,'" in the *Negro Digest* 3 (Oct. 1945), 85-93, along with the reprint, on pages 43-44, of a feature article from the *N.Y. Post* about Eslanda's success with the book.

36. The phrasing of this review provides a striking confirmation of the thesis developed by Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*.

37. Ernestine Evans, "An American Negro in Africa," *N.Y. Herald-Tribune Weekly Book Review* (12 Aug. 1945), 2; Lewis Gannett, "Books and Things," *N.Y. Herald-Tribune* (13 Aug. 1945); Francis Hackett, "Books of the Times," *N.Y. Times* (9 Aug. 1945), 19; Stuart Cloete, "Contrasting Appraisals of a Still-Dark Continent," *N.Y. Times Book Review* (12 Aug. 1945), 5; Helen Cain, "A Close-up of Africa's People By an American Negro Woman," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* [Oct. 10, 1945?], clipping, EGR Vertical File; Margaret Williamson, "Africans Are People," *Christian Science Monitor* (22 Aug. 1945), 14; George Streator,

"Books of the Week," *Commonweal* 42 (21 Sept. 1945), 555-56; John LaTouche, "In Africa Before the War," *Saturday Review of Literature* 28 (25 Aug. 1945), 11-12.

For brief but positive references to race relations and social development of "so-called 'backward people'" in the Soviet Union, see EGR, *African Journey*, 47, 106-07, 153.

38. See the reviews cited in the previous note by Cloete, Gannett, and LaTouche.

39. See "Mrs. Robeson Joins Staff; Reception Honors New Book," *New Africa* 4 (Aug.-Sept. 1945), 4, and Ruth Gage-Colby's tribute to EGR after her death on their work together before the Trusteeship Council of the UN, in *Freedomways* 6 (Fall 1966), 340-42. EGR traveled briefly in Africa again in 1946; a brochure announcing an 11 Nov. 1946 lecture in N.Y.C. based on this trip may be found in EGR Vertical File.

On the CAA's campaign at the UN in the postwar years, see Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 83-96, and on African-American appeals at the UN more generally see Carol Anderson, "From Hope to Disillusion: African Americans, the United Nations, and the Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1947," *Diplomatic History* 20 (Fall 1996), 531-63.

40. See, e.g., EGR publicity material, and EGR to "Sorors in Delta Sigma Theta," 4 Aug. 1949, Robeson Papers-Schomburg (microfilm reel 1, frame 74 and reel 1, frames 469-75, respectively).

41. Buck, *American Argument, with Eslanda Goode Robeson* (N.Y.: John Day Co., 1949); Buck, *Tell The People: Mass Education in China* (N.Y.: John Day Co., 1945); Buck, *Talk About Russia, with Masha Scott* (N.Y.: John Day Co., 1945); Buck, *How It Happens: Talk About the German People, 1914-1933, with Erna von Pustau* (N.Y.: John Day Co., 1947).

42. Buck, *American Argument*, 19, 22-23.

43. See esp. Buck, *American Argument*, 125-27.

44. For a revealing exchange on the issue, in which Eslanda charged in effect that Buck's "defense" of her as a non-Communist was a capitulation to Cold War thinking, see *American Argument*, 122-23.

45. Buck excised references to Eslanda's participation in the Progressive Party from the

book, explaining to Eslanda that with publication in January 1949, such discussion would be dated; see Buck to EGR, 27 Sept. 1948, EGR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard. Buck probably felt as well that eliminating partisan references would help the book's reception.

46. Suzanne LaFollette, "Anti-American Interview," *Plain Talk* (Feb. 1949), 45-49, clipping, EGR Vertical File; Fletcher Isbell, "A New Dictatorship 'By the People' Is Given Hearing," [*Washington Star* (30 Jan. 1949)], clipping, Robeson Papers-Howard.

47. Helen Beals, "Pearl Buck Race 'Argument' Produces Varying Emotions," [*Boston Herald* (26? Jan. 1949)], and Jay Smith, "A Talk Book On Questions Facing World," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* [6 Feb. 1949?], clippings, EGR Vertical File; P. M. Mezey, "Our Country," *S. F. Chronicle* (20 Feb. 1949), 19.

48. Mary Ross, "Native Grounds," *N.Y. Herald-Tribune Weekly Book Review* (6 Feb. 1949), 17; R. L. Duffus, "On the Defects of Society Today," *N.Y. Times Book Review* (23 Jan. 1949), 21; Mrs. Worth Tuttle Hedden, "Four Critical Eyes on U.S.A.," *Saturday Review of Literature* (5 Feb. 1949), 13. See also for similarly positive reviews, Olive Deane Hormel, "Challenge to Americans," *Christian Science Monitor* (17 Mar. 1949), 22, and M.P., "Strong Views, Aptly Put," *Worcester Sunday Telegram* (23 Jan. 1949), clipping, Robeson Papers-Howard.

49. Richard Walsh, Jr. to Richard J. Walsh, 23 Dec. 1948, and AJS to Buck, memo, 11 Jan. 1949, both in Box 261, John Day Papers.

50. Thelma Thurston Gorham, "'American Argument' Features Women's Opposing Viewpoints," *Pittsburgh Courier* (26 March 1949); "News of Books & Authors," *N.Y. Amsterdam News* (29 Jan. 1949); Gertrude Martin, "'American Argument' is General Accord," *Chicago Defender* (29 Jan. 1949), all clippings in Robeson Papers-Howard.

In addition, chapter one of the book was reprinted in *Negro Digest* 7 (May 1949), 81-94. The *Baltimore Afro-American* reprinted sections as well; see Carl Murphy to John Day Co., 13 July 1949, Box 261, John Day Papers. The newly-organized Negro Reading Club also recommended the book to its members; see

Leslie Jones to Buck, 28 May 1949, Box 267, John Day Papers.

51. Buck to EGR, 18 July 1951, EGR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard.

52. Press release [1954], Robeson Papers-Schomburg, microfilm reel 1, frame 71. The quoted passage may be found in Buck, *American Argument*, 196.

53. See various letters between Buck and Eslanda, 1950-53, in EGR correspondence, Robeson Papers-Howard.

54. For EGR's first article in the magazine see "World Woman Number One," *New World Review* [hereafter *NWR*] 19 (July 1951), 20-25; for her appointment to the staff as "editorial consultant on Negro and Colonial Questions," see editor's note, *NWR* 20 (Aug. 1952), 3; for her own involvement with the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, on which she served as co-chair of its Committee on Women, see "Why I Am A Friend of the USSR," *NWR* 21 (Aug. 1953), 27-28.

55. For a representative sampling of articles, see: "The Cry For Freedom Rings Through Africa," *NWR* 20 (Sept. 1952), 14-17; "Which Way for Africa?" *NWR* 20 (Dec. 1952), 24-29; "Trust in Trusteeship," *NWR* 23 (May 1955), 28-30; "UN + Bandung = Peace," *NWR* 23 (July 1955), 26-29; "The Changing Face of the United Nations," *NWR* 25 (May 1957), 9-12; "China and the U.N.," *NWR* 25 (June 1957), 15-19; "The Accra Conference," *NWR* 27 (Feb. 1959), 13-14.

56. For EGR's attack on Nehru after her return from a trip to the Soviet Union and China in 1949, see "USSR Visit Opened Eyes: Mrs. Robeson Regrets Having Defended Nehru," *Baltimore Afro-American* [28 Jan. 1950], clipping, Robeson Papers-Schomburg, microfilm reel 2, frame 962. For PR's opposition to Nehru at this time, see Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 378-79, 698-99; apparently EGR's Jan. 1950 statement represented a change from her position of a few months earlier. For EGR's later appreciation of Nehru's foreign policies, see her articles, "Before and After Bandung," *NWR* 23 (July 1955), 26-29; "Krishna Menon: A New Type of Diplomat," *NWR* 24 (June 1956), 10-14.

57. See EGR's articles: "World Woman Number One" (on Soong Ching-ling [Mme. Sun Yet-sen]) *NWR* 19 (July 1951), 20-25; "140,000,000 Women Can't Be Wrong" (on the exclusion of the Women's International Democratic Federation from consultative status at the UN), *NWR* 22 (June 1954), 18-23; "Women in the United Nations" (on women delegates) *NWR* 22 (July 1954), 7-10; "If the UN Seated China" (on women in the PRC), *NWR* 22 (Aug. 1954), 21-23; "Women in the UN," *NWR* 26 (Mar. 1958), 33-35.

On the difficulties of the U.S. affiliate of the Women's International Democratic Federation, see Amy Swerdlow, "The Congress of American Women: Left-Feminist Peace Politics in the Cold War," in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, edited by Linda Kerber et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 296-312. On U.S. feminism in this period in general, see Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (N.Y.: Oxford

University Press, 1987). On women's peace activists see also Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), chap. 6, and Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

58. See, e.g., EGR, "The Rising Tide," *NWR* 20 (Nov. 1952), 10; EGR, "Here's My Story" (guest column), *Freedom* (July 1953), quoted in *Paul Robeson Speaks*, edited by Philip S. Foner (N.Y.: Citadel Press, 1978), 569-70; EGR, "Peace, Friendship, and Progress," *NWR* 22 (Nov. 1954), 29-32 (a speech presented at a *NWR* dinner honoring the Robesons); EGR, "Some Thoughts on Negro History Week," *NWR* 23 (Mar. 1955), 20-21.

59. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1992), 82-83, 135.

60. I am following the framework here of Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*.



"My ancestors in Africa reckoned sound of major importance: they were all great talkers, great orators, and where writing was unknown, folk tales and an oral tradition kept the ears rather than the eyes sharpened. I am the same way. I always hear, I seldom see. I hear my way through the world."

West Africa Review,  
December, 1936.

**LABOR**  
meets...

**PAUL**

**ROBESON**

**ROBESON'S**  
Only Seattle  
**CONCERT**  
WILL BE AT THE  
SENATOR Auditorium  
**FRIDAY AUG 6<sup>th</sup>**  
8:30 P.M.

in the  
**SCALER'S**  
**UNION** hall  
2221 - 3<sup>rd</sup> ave.

**Saturday August 7<sup>th</sup>**  
at 2 P.M. and ALL  
AFTERNOON...

...that's the day after his  
concert... there will be  
Singing and REFRESHMENTS and  
NO ADMISSION CHARGE! and..  
We can all meet Brother Paul Robeson and  
talk things over and have a good time!...

Note: Gold Cup Races will be there!!  
Via TV