

October 2019

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## Recommended Citation

Potter, Sonia (2019) "On the Reactionary Treatment of American Radicals By J. Edgar Hoover's FBI," *Student Projects from the Archives*: Vol. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/spa/vol2/iss1/7>

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# On the Reactionary Treatment of American Radicals

## By J. Edgar Hoover's FBI

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**D**uring the middle of the twentieth century, the political climate of the United States—both in a global context and within the borders of the nation—was going through a period of tumult. With the advent of the Red Scare, which intensified during the 1940s and 1950s, when tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were particularly high, there was a prevailing fear throughout the country of anything that may have been related to communism. On top of this fear, though, was another: African Americans, who had been systematically oppressed from the very beginning of their time in the United States, were calling more and more loudly for freedom and equality. This—the Civil Rights Movement—contributed another dimension to the tumultuous political climate of the U.S. during the mid-twentieth century. Compounded with the fear and hatred of communism was also a fear of black Americans ascending to the same societal plane as white Americans, especially among individuals and groups of people who held racist views and had reservations about equality between blacks and whites.

One of the groups of people who seemed to have reservations about such a concept was the United States' own Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), particularly under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, during the Cold War. These reservations are evident in many of the surveillance files compiled for African Americans by the Bureau during the middle of the century. At the time, The FBI was an inherently racist and reactionary organization that targeted African American activists and artists from the very beginnings of movements for freedom and equality, treating them unjustly in an effort to maintain a status quo that thrived on racially based power dynamics. However, despite its reactionary behavior towards certain African Americans, such as Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and Paul Robeson—all deemed “radical”—the Bureau effectively gave them no choice but to empower themselves. Although it is no excuse for racism and oppression, the FBI's unfair treatment, while utterly despicable, ultimately gave the artists a platform on which to overcome hardship, bolstering their publicity and legacies, which has made their work even more poignant than it may have otherwise been.

The Cold War, which began after the end of World War II, resulted in a period of history known as the Red Scare. During this time, there was an intense fear of communism that had the United States in its grips. An article entitled “Cold War Media Mythologies: Conspiracy Myth, ‘Red Scare’ and Blacklisting in *The Front*” offers a brief background surrounding discussions of political sentiment during the Red Scare. The author, Andrada Fatu-Tutoveanu, writes, about the scare, that “the legitimizing discourse focused on patriotism and Americanism versus treason and ‘un-American activities’” (232). He goes on to say that anything but staunch patriotism was often seen as “implied anti-Americanism, as the Cold War was, after all, about taking sides.” The U.S. government propagated this fear of communism throughout the nation, appearing, at times, to be on a sort of witch hunt. Often, when a public figure seemed uncooperative with Americanistic ideals, she was subject to skepticism, scrutiny, and even, potentially, investigation. As Fatu-Tutoveanu emphasizes in his article, being neutral or apolitical in the Cold War climate was simply not an option (232).

It was during this period in the history of the United States that the Bureau exemplified itself to be a rather reactive organization. In the case of the Red Scare, the FBI began to spy on citizens that were believed to be involved in communistic activities. The power dynamics involved in this spying may have made this a problematic activity. According to an article entitled “The FBI, MOWM, and CORE, 1941-1946” by Merl E. Reed, the spying on individuals and groups associated with communism intensified as American participation in World War II began to loom nearer. Reed writes:

In 1924, J. Edgar Hoover stated that ‘theoretically’ the bureau could not get involved in noncriminal activities, but as American participation in World War II neared, Hoover, using recently issued presidential directives as authority, began claiming a much wider scope for the bureau’s activities. By 1940, he believed that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had jurisdiction over subversive activities and other movements detrimental to the national security. (465)

Ironically, despite Hoover’s haste in expanding the scope of federal investigation, he may have been overstepping a boundary, encouraging his Bureau to act in a reactive manner when it, perhaps, was unnecessary. Interestingly, although Hoover felt as though the FBI had the right to monitor the great majority of

subversive activities, Reed points out that “the presidential directives, issued in 1936 and 1939, authorized investigative work only involving communism and fascism, not ‘subversive activities and related matters,’ as Hoover and the bureau later claimed” (465). One may wonder, then, how the director of the FBI was able to come into such a substantial degree of power in surveilling subversive individuals. The power certainly seemed to intoxicate him as it grew, as he began to plan “an elaborate program of surveillance that would focus on domestic political or trade union activities deemed subversive by FBI personnel” (465), using wiretaps—which were illegal—to monitor a variety of individuals and organizations.

Hoover’s Bureau avidly watched organizations that held values that may have been associated with communistic ideals, such as the trade unions mentioned previously. However, during this time, the FBI also expended a great deal of time and energy surveilling activist civil rights organizations and their leaders. According to Reed, this surveillance was “going on before the United States entered World War II, and it continued, at least, for some time after that conflict ended” (466). Among the organizations that were monitored were the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) and the Committee of Racial Equality (CORE). Both of these groups, ironically, were known for their advocacy of “peaceful direct-action tactics” to achieve milestones in the movement for racial equality, unlike some of their more conservative counterparts that may have been less inclined to act peacefully (466). It seems that the Bureau was not particularly concerned with ensuring peace reigned, then, but that, rather, the Civil Rights Movement not be able to gain significant ground.

This assertion, of course, is rooted in the actions of Hoover’s FBI during the middle of the twentieth century—actions that reflected an unwillingness to welcome racial equality into the United States, which was a prejudicial ideal that was only very thinly masked by a proclaimed fear of communism. For example, a march on Washington was proposed to occur in 1941 by the MOWM. It was around this time that the FBI began to monitor the organization, after the president “met with several Black leaders in a vain attempt to persuade them to call off the threatened march on the nation’s capital” (Reed 466). One of these leaders was a man by the name of A. Philip Randolph, who was the “former head of the National Negro Congress ... an alleged Communist-front organization” (466). Hoover, at the time, was afraid that some of the African American leaders, such as Randolph, would be able to “convert the march into a Communist demonstration, because MOWM’s goals on the issues of discrimination, lynchings, and Jim-Crowism

were the same as those of the party” (467). In this fear, it seems to become immediately obvious that the FBI under Hoover suffered from deeply rooted racist ideological views. In the context of a group of civil rights organizations planning to meet and peacefully demonstrate in the nation’s capital—advocating for equality and the end of lynching, discrimination, and Jim-Crowism—the Bureau’s concern was not for the people of the nation. If that were the case, it would not, perhaps, have used threats of a march to bolster its anti-communistic mission. The Communist Party collectively disliked discrimination, lynching, and Jim-Crowism as much as the MOWM did, and for that very reason, the Bureau took a stand against it, beginning its intrusive, uninhibited surveillance. This is racism, thinly veiled as a fear of communism.

Not only did the FBI take care to monitor major civil rights organizations, though. It also spent a great deal of time and energy surveilling African American literary figures. In his book, *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover’s Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature*, William Maxwell delves into this subject. In conjunction with the assertions Reed makes in his article, Maxwell also iterates that “the Hoover Bureau targeted practically the whole of the African American freedom movement starting with the first signs of the Harlem Renaissance” (3). Many prominent Black artists have roots in the Harlem Renaissance, which creates an interesting link between the Bureau and African American art. According to Maxwell, “FBI harassment of black political leadership was habitually tied to an excited fear of black writing” (5). Whatever the reason may have been, Hoover’s Bureau was intensely preoccupied with art that was produced by African Americans—particularly literary art. Hoover goes on to explain the ways in which the FBI monitored African American writing between the years of 1919 and 1972:

Poring over novels, stories, essays, poems, and plays as well as political commentary and intercepted correspondence, the FBI acted as a kind of half-buried readers’ bureau with aboveground effects on the making of black art ... Unlike nearly every other institution of U.S. literary study, prone to showing interest only during well-promoted black renaissances, America’s ghostreading national constabulary rarely took its eyes off the latest African American writing ... and during this more-than-fifty-year period, the whole of its Hoover era, the Bureau never dismissed this writing as an impractical vogue relevant only to blacks. (5)

Here, it becomes evident how expansive was the scope of the FBI's attention to African American literature. It took great care in making an effort to peruse a wide range of genres—including those that may not traditionally be thought of as "literature" (in the case of intercepted correspondence or political commentary). One of the most interesting and telling of Maxwell's observations certainly must be in the FBI's failure to dismiss the writing as insignificant. It suggests that there was a very real concern about how movements for freedom and equality—again, written off as communistic in nature—might affect the country moving forward.

Before discussing specific cases of African American artists whose adult lives were ridden with indiscriminate surveillance by Hoover's Bureau, it is important to acknowledge the aspects of a person that may have designated him or her as "radical" according to the standards of the FBI. Essentially, political radicalism refers to a way of thinking that seeks to revolutionize fundamental aspects of society. During a time and place in which African Americans were so heavily oppressed by their white American counterparts, then, the Civil Rights Movement, itself, was easily deemed radical, as were civil rights activists who strove for freedom and equality. At the time, Hoover's Bureau situated itself in an interesting position, seeming to recognize threats of communism and civil rights activities beneath the same umbrella of radicalism. In his article, "Racializing Subversion: The FBI and the Depiction of Race in Early Cold War Movies," John A. Noakes discusses the ways in which Hoover equated the threat of communism with the perceived threat of the Civil Rights Movement. Essentially, during the mid-twentieth century, communism was seen as "a domestic issue," which consisted, Hoover believed, of

a well-organized movement coordinated by Moscow that sought to capture the hearts and minds of marginal and vulnerable Americans. While considered generally content, blacks, immigrants, the working class, and other 'unsophisticated' populations were understood as having only a fragile commitment to American values and traditions and therefore as vulnerable to the seductive, if false promises of radicals. (730)

In keeping with the ideal, then, of anything other than staunch patriotism being potentially perceived as communism, it vaguely makes sense that Hoover held these views about Americans who were not white, or who were marginalized in some other way and may not have been as committed to traditionally "American" ideals. Nonetheless, this perspective, while explicable, also reflects deeply

ingrained racist views—and a fear of any idea that might challenge the white American status quo.

This was prevalent not only during the mid-twentieth century, but also earlier. In the summer of 1919, for instance, Noakes writes that “Hoover blamed racial unrest on foreign subversion” and that he “continued to associate racial progress with subversiveness...attributing racial unrest to Communist Party agitation and labeling civil rights advocates...as Stalinists” throughout his time with the Bureau (731). With this arguably harsh sentiment, it becomes evident that civil rights and communism were inextricable to Hoover. This is an ideology that greatly impacted many writer-activists who lived during the civil rights era, as they often underwent a great deal of surveillance and oppression that attempted to squelch their efforts to promote peace and equality in the United States. Among the writers, activists, and artists the FBI monitored and strove to silence were Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and Paul Robeson.

Lorraine Hansberry was a famous playwright, known, especially, for writing *A Raisin in the Sun*. The Bureau was quite concerned about Hansberry’s life as an artist, and it was careful in documenting as much as it could about her. Agents conducted pretext calls and interviews, collected all kinds of newspaper clippings having to do with her, and even, at some point, made sure to visit productions of her plays and write reviews about them. It is interesting to note how concerned they were with her work—particularly *A Raisin in the Sun*—the Bureau’s paranoia permeating many of the documents in the file.

For instance, on the ninth page of the first of Hansberry’s official files, a sense of fear of Hansberry’s social power is clearly evident on the part of the FBI. In this document, which was produced while *A Raisin in the Sun* was in the process of being filmed in Hollywood, the authoring agent states:

[Hansberry] is employed as a Free Lance Writer, whose recent past success has given the subject great notoriety in the New York Press. In addition to this, subject’s play, “A Raisin in the Sun” is currently being filmed in Hollywood. An interview at this time is deemed inadvisable since it could be a source of embarrassment to the bureau.

In asserting that an interview with Lorraine Hansberry might cause the Bureau to become embarrassed, the agent clearly acknowledges that there are interesting—and, perhaps, unexpected—power dynamics at play in this relationship. One would think that the FBI would hold all the power in this situation, especially with

its panoptic surveillance techniques. However, in this document, there is a concession to Hansberry. Her “great notoriety” in the social and political climate of black America certainly could be a source of embarrassment to the Bureau, which may have been aware that it was, in some respects, reaching for that which simply was not there.

Nevertheless, the Bureau remained intent on surveilling Hansberry. The aforementioned document was produced during a time in which *A Raisin in the Sun* was being filmed in Hollywood. The FBI, however, was concerned with Hansberry’s play from much earlier in her career. A document on page thirty-two of Hansberry’s third file, written in August of 1958, reads, “Promptly conduct necessary investigation in an effort to establish whether the play...is in any way controlled or influenced by the Communist Party and whether it in any way follows the communist line.” With further references on this page to various communistic activities and groups associated with Hansberry, perhaps the Bureau *was* simply intent on making sure the play was not a product of communist ideals. It would be irresponsible to claim that every agent in the FBI was racist.

In an effort to determine the nature of *A Raisin in the Sun*, the Bureau worked diligently to collect newspaper clippings of reviews of the play, as well as playbills and other concrete artifacts produced by it. Aside from this, agents were sent to watch the play. The second page of Hansberry’s fourth file embodies what came of an agent viewing it. Written on February 2, 1959, an agent writes about *A Raisin in the Sun* in great detail. He actually writes relatively impressively about specific details of the play, appearing, sometimes, to be a well-spoken literary critic. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise, considering William Maxwell’s assertion that the Bureau was a devout consumer of African American art (5). In this particular document, though, the FBI agent tasked with writing the play mentions, rather blatantly, that “the play contains no comments of any nature about Communism as such but deals essentially with negro aspirations, the problems inherent in their efforts to advance themselves, and varied attempts at arriving at solutions” (2). At first glance, it might seem that the FBI would be glad that no issues of communism seem to be present in the play. However, in line with Maxwell’s thinking—and furthermore in line with the views of Hoover at the time—it may be equally concerning to have a play deal with “negro aspirations,” especially when the play was well-known and well-loved by white and black Americans alike. The agent, well aware of the propagandistic messages inherent in the play (if a desire for basic human rights for African Americans may be referred to as propagandistic, which it should not), seems to be at least somewhat

allayed by his realization that “relatively few [audience members] appeared to dwell on the propaganda messages” (5). This, of course, did not stop the Bureau from continuing to collect newspaper clippings, conduct pretext interviews, and surveil Hansberry as much as it could until her death in the mid-1960s. The FBI was significantly concerned with the implications of the existence of such a strong, young, black, female playwright producing work that was accessible to many Americans regardless of racial identity, especially, perhaps, because the Bureau was aware on some level, that she was far more powerful, in some ways, than it could ever be.

James Baldwin, who was also under heavy surveillance by Hoover’s Bureau, was a close friend of Lorraine Hansberry. This, perhaps, came as a result of their unity against a common enemy, which could have been anything from racial oppression to those critical of their art or the scrutiny they each faced on account of the FBI. The two artists were intimate friends. As quoted in Imani Perry’s book *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry*, Baldwin reflects upon his relationship with Hansberry in stating, “We had that respect for each other which is perhaps only felt by people on the same side of the barricades, listening to the accumulating hooves of horses and the heads of tanks.” They had a great deal in common with each other—one of the many things being the manners in which the FBI surveilled their lives and artistic creations.

Baldwin has an impressive FBI surveillance file, with 1,884 pages of documents. As Maxwell indicates in his book, which is dedicated to Baldwin, entitled *James Baldwin: The FBI File*, this is “the longest [file] yet extracted on an African American author active during Hoover’s five decades as a Bureau executive” (7). This could have been for a variety of reasons—among them the idea that Baldwin, a man who identified himself as bisexual, was known, at least by Hoover, as a “pervert” (7). This, of course, touches on an aspect of prejudice not entirely dissimilar to the racism clearly exemplified by Hoover during his reign as Director of the FBI. Essentially, it seems that the Director had a tendency to hold unfavorable opinions of others that were founded upon aspects of their being that were simply out of their control, such as race and sexuality. This is why it is important to mention Baldwin’s sexuality here, since the reaction it drew from Hoover was very similar to the reaction drawn by his blackness.

Of course, there was still the issue of Baldwin’s political feelings, which he conveyed thoroughly in many of his writings. These were greatly concerning to Hoover and were believed to be a threat to the nation, since the threat of

communism was a domestic issue and communistic ideology was directly responsible for racial unrest, to Hoover (Noakes 730). Noakes reminds readers of an important concept in FBI attitudes toward art during the period:

The FBI associated whiteness with Americanism and blackness with subversion. [Artistic works] that suggested that America had a racial problem...were smears of American values and institutions. The portrayal of blacks in too positive a light was considered glorification of values and institutions considered to be anti- American or pro-communist. (732)

If this was the case, then, it is no particular surprise that Baldwin faced such a great deal of scrutiny, or that the Bureau had such an easy time masking its racist attitudes as a fear of communism. To Hoover, they were one and the same.

There are a variety of documents in Baldwin's FBI file that capture the essence of the Bureau's concern for his artistic presence in the nation. For instance, on page 217 of Maxwell's book about Baldwin, there is a document pictured, which was written in June of 1964. It is simply a memorandum with the subject line, "James Arthur Baldwin Information Concerning." The document, which was written only shortly after Baldwin's book *The Fire Next Time* was published in print, seems to be ridden with a subtle fear of the artist's writing. It states, quoting an article from the book review section of *The Washington Post* on June 21, 1964, that Baldwin "is contemplating at least four future books, among which will be one 'about the FBI in the South.'" The document also offers another piece of concerning information:

The [article in *The Washington Post*] goes on to point out that Baldwin's recent books have attracted enormous response, ringing up best-selling figures all over the Nation. *The Fire Next Time*, according to the article, sold 100,000 copies in hard-cover; its paperback version, just out, is likely to sell five to ten times that many. *Another Country* is nearing the two million mark in soft cover.

Although, in the quoted text, there is no direct statement of fear or concern for Baldwin's writing, the notion that the FBI feels the need to acknowledge it *at all* leads one to believe that there was certainly an "excited fear," as Maxwell would put it, of his art. This is especially the case when thinking about Baldwin's writing in the context of Noakes's assertion, in his article, that portraying African

Americans in a positive light was considered to be inherently subversive in the eyes of Hoover's Bureau. Indeed, Baldwin certainly did generally portray black Americans in a positive light, and clearly, the FBI felt threatened by it.

In his file, as in Lorraine Hansberry's, there is a concession to Baldwin. On page 200 of Maxwell's book, there is a document pictured which flawlessly exemplifies the Bureau's fear of Baldwin. Written in early 1964, it states that the subject (Baldwin) was *not* interviewed by the FBI agent conducting an investigation at the time, because "his position as a prominent Negro author and his personal involvement in the current civil rights struggle by the Negroes in the U.S. indicates that an attempt to interview him could prove highly embarrassing to the Bureau." The agent writing the document further goes on to say that Baldwin's tendency to be outspoken and "inflammatory" in his writings show him to be "dangerous" to U.S. society—perhaps, even, to the extent of being a threat to the "public safety" of the nation. Just as in the case of Lorraine Hansberry, Hoover's FBI is well-aware of the power Baldwin holds as an African American artist in society. It is likely this "excited fear" that prompted them to follow him so closely—compiling a wide array of documents and artifacts concerning him—resulting in the largest FBI file of any African American artist to date.

Another African American of interest to Hoover's Bureau was Paul Robeson, the multitalented artist, activist, and athlete. He was a mentor to both Baldwin and Hansberry, and the FBI's scrutiny of him was just as extensive. Robeson was extremely noteworthy for a variety of reasons. In his book, *Paul Robeson: The Artist as Revolutionary*, Gerald Horne writes:

Robeson was not only an artist whose [theatrical and musical] performances stirred emotions and fealty worldwide, he was also allied with a then rising socialist left and allied trade unions (both of which had global ties), providing this performer with a reach that even Dr. King at his height found difficult to match. (1)

He was much-loved all over the world, for his artistic genius, as well as for his dedication to political activism—to maintaining a commitment to radicalism for the duration of his entire life.

A great concern for the FBI was in his international influence. Horne quotes W.E.B. Du Bois—one of Robeson's contemporaries—as naming Robeson "the best known American on Earth," with a voice and presence that permeated nearly every continent. Du Bois remarked that it was "only in his native land [that

he was] without honor and rights” (Horne 3-4). In keeping with his spirit of political activism, Robeson often performed all over the world, but he also was outspoken about the racial climate of the United States while abroad. Perhaps this is what the Bureau was primarily concerned about, because in 1950, the United States Government revoked Paul Robeson’s passport, thus preventing him from engaging in international travel. This, of course, was a problem for the artist who spent such a great deal of time performing and speaking in foreign countries. It seems, though, that this harassment and blacklisting of Robeson was rooted in fear on the Bureau’s part—just as it was in the cases of James Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry.

This fear is reflected in a multitude of the documents found in Robeson’s surveillance file. One, in particular, which falls on page 39 of the sixteenth part of the file, lists a few statements that convey subtle essences of fear on the part of the Bureau. Written in January of 1956, it highlights a quote found in a September 1955 issue of *The Daily Worker*, which asserts that Robeson’s popularity, at the time, was “greater than ever.” The document also notes perceived communistic undertones present in the publications of Robeson’s newspaper, *Freedom*, and states that “the purpose of the newspaper was to promote Negro matters...and to point out the importance to the Negro people of their alliance with the labor movement of the workers’ class.” In this statement, it is noteworthy that the information present is very much in keeping with Hoover’s view at the time that strivings for racial equality and communism fell under the same umbrella. After all, they are discussed in the very same paragraph.

Regardless, Robeson was certainly oppressed by the U.S. government, including the FBI. Horne writes, in his book, that the harassment he underwent—including the denial of his passport and his ending up blacklisted—were done with the intention of erasing him from history, of turning him into a non-entity. Naturally, everything that Robeson had to deal with had a tremendous effect on his life. Horne notes:

Robeson played the role of sacrificial lamb. His income and career and health were to erode, as the people he sacrificed for saw their fortunes improve, as the bonds of Jim Crow slowly loosened, most notably in the realm of colleges and universities. For it was certain that enterprises and entities on the west bank of the Atlantic were not inclined to ignore what was called, ironically, the ‘blacklist,’ which claimed Robeson as an early and hard-hit victim. (128)

It can be easy, perhaps, to look through the FBI's surveillance files of these African American radicals and detach from the reality of them. When perusing them for literary purposes, there is a danger of perceiving them as fiction—of forgetting that there were severe implications the artists faced in their daily lives as a result of being denied their basic human right of privacy by a hyperactively reactionary, racist Bureau. It is important to reiterate a point Maxwell makes in *F.B. Eyes*, which is that the Hoover's FBI targeted the Civil Rights Movement from its very beginnings—showing an “excited fear” of black art and attempting to oppress the artists responsible for it in any way it possibly could (3). These racist undertones—thinly veiled as a fear of communism—are extremely prominent in the cases of Hansberry, Baldwin, and Robeson, which have thus far been explored.

Despite the gravity of the oppression the artists faced as a result of the Bureau's surveillance, though, there is aspect of hope—of triumph—that should not be ignored. Were it to be ignored, this paper would do nothing but simply give Hoover's racist, reactive FBI the power it worked so diligently to exert over a wide range of African American writers and artists. It does not deserve to be acknowledged for its power any longer than it already has been, for that may only serve to continue to marginalize the greatness of the artists in question. Perhaps—as the Bureau's racism was thinly masked as a wild fear of communism—its influence, at the time, was merely an attempt to poorly conceal its realization that the artists in question were more powerful than the FBI could ever be. Effectually, by attempting to quash the influence of Hansberry, Baldwin, and Robeson (and a slew of other African American artists, writers, and activists, all of whom deserve to have papers written extensively about them), Hoover's Bureau gave them no choice but to empower themselves. All three artists—in their own ways—managed to rise above the oppression, despite its heavy weight, and continue to advocate for peace, equality, and justice.

Lorraine Hansberry, for instance, simply refused to be quiet. In 1963, after having already been through more than a decade of government surveillance, she was present at a meeting with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, in which a variety of civil rights activists had gathered to discuss racial issues plaguing the country. During the meeting—and as always—Hansberry exhibited an unflinching posture of confidence and elegance, which gave way to the fire in her soul. In Perry's biography of Hansberry, she writes that, by this time, she had “proven herself to be unwavering and even confrontational in ways that did not leave much

room for working with elites and powerful politicians” (162). She goes on to note that Robert Kennedy had, perhaps, underestimated her, which left him surprised at her firm convictions. Actually, after Hansberry spoke up at the meeting on behalf of Jerome Smith, James Baldwin, who was also present, noted that Kennedy would not even turn his head from Hansberry (164). She absolutely commanded his attention with the fire in her expression and words—and all this happened in the presence of a powerful politician. Hansberry was simply unaffected and unintimidated. She faced a great deal of oppression and attempts of silencing by influential groups of people, including Hoover’s Bureau. Nevertheless, she persisted. She grew. She overcame. Although the immeasurable stress of her efforts led to health problems and, ultimately, an early death, Hansberry fought for her convictions to the very end of her life. As a result of this—and, too, the FBI’s scrupulous attention to her artistic creations—it seems that her influence has been even further-reaching than it may have otherwise been.

Baldwin had his own ways of fighting back against the reactionary Bureau and claiming his personal power. His, it seems, were a bit more aggressive and taunting than Hansberry’s quiet commitment to continue using her voice. Baldwin, while on a tour of speaking engagements, at some point made a promise that he was determined to publish “an anti-FBI screed with the power to expose Hoover’s racism at last” (Maxwell 10). Whether this was something Baldwin was actually going to do, or whether it was simply a distraction to bother and ridicule the FBI, it certainly had the Bureau in arms. Maxwell writes that, despite the ways in which Baldwin was driven mad by surveillance, he “drove the FBI mad in turn, his real and virtual communications to the Black Freedom Movement compulsively screened, cataloged, and reviewed by the Bureau at the cost of thousands of dollars and agent-hours” (10). The Bureau may have harassed him, but he harassed the Bureau right back. He seemed unafraid. In a passport photograph from 1966, which is pictured on page 30 of Maxwell’s book, Baldwin is shown looking confidently at the camera—a look which predicts “his efforts...to spy on and write about the Bureau in return—to do unto the FBI...what his file had done to him” (29). Like Hansberry, Baldwin, too, was filled with the fire of triumph.

Perhaps both of these artists were able to learn something from their mentor Robeson, who also showed a determination to continue fighting the oppression of the Bureau, even when it seemed like the odds were against him. He showed his resolve after his passport had been taken from him by the U.S. government. Despite not being able to travel internationally for a period of eight years, he managed to continue to spread his messages of justice and racial equality

domestically. Horne notes, in his book, that it was during the period of his life in which his passport was revoked that Robeson began publishing *Freedom*, which was “one of the few periodicals—even among Negro journals—that highlighted the anti-apartheid struggle” (135). Robeson, having been blacklisted and seemingly erased, still managed to use his voice. Furthermore, during this time, people all over the world stood in solidarity with Robeson, supporting them however they could and maintaining the value of his voice. According to Horne, while his passport was banned, “two million young people from scores of nations—as was to become the pattern elsewhere—lined up in Berlin to hear Robeson’s voice over loudspeakers via telephone lines, as he sang in various languages” (131). Even when Robeson could not physically be present to sing internationally, his voice was still heard and became incredibly important at revolutionary meetings on a global scale. In this way, despite the oppression he faced, Robeson was still able to empower himself and use his voice in any way he possibly could.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover was inherently reactionary and racist, attempting to quash stirrings for racial equality from the very beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Of course, rather than blatantly acknowledging its racism, it instead masked it as an excited fear of communism, which makes itself evident in the surveillance files of an entire spectrum of African American writers, artists, and activists. Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, and Paul Robeson are among the artists in question. Over the courses of their lives, the Bureau attempted to quash their artistic efforts, discredit their work, blacklist them, and even erase them from the public eye. Nevertheless, the oppression they faced ultimately served as a platform for them—one which gave them no choice but to empower themselves, rise above, and, effectually, step into themselves in a way that seems to have significantly bolstered their legacies. Their hard work and persistent dedication to justice and equality—even in the face of opposition—hold powerful influence over the freedom fighters of today, who are indebted to their love, struggle, and bravery.

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