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## Jim Brown

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
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Today when the College Football Hall of Fame finally inducts Jim Brown, one of the greatest runners of all-time, it will be correcting one wrong. When they induct Paul Robeson they will be correcting an injustice.

Paul Robeson was one of the most remarkable Americans of the Twentieth Century. The fact that he was the son of a North Carolina runaway slave and a New Jersey school teacher only serves to underline that fact. Born on April 9, 1898, in Princeton, New Jersey, Paul Robeson grew not only to be a great college and professional football player, but also a great actor and singer on the world stage.

In high school Robeson graduated at the head of his class and won a scholarship to Rutgers by achieving the highest score on a statewide exam. From this point on he said, "Equality might be denied, but I knew I was not inferior."

In fact few were his equal. From 1915-19 he excelled in his classes at Rutgers and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa his junior year; won every oratorical competition he could enter; and earned twelve varsity letters in four sports.

Robeson was only the third African-American to attend Rutgers, and was the only African-American on campus during his four years at the university. A number of racial incidents occurred on the football field, but despite that Robeson was named to Walter Camp's All-America teams in his junior and senior years. Camp considered him the greatest defensive end of all-time.

After a sparkling collegiate football and academic career Robeson moved on to Columbia University Law School, paying his tuition by playing professional football for Akron of the American Professional Football Association and later the Milwaukee Badgers of the NFL.

After law school Robeson was refused admission to the American Bar Association on racial grounds, and withdrew from a New York law practice because of discrimination. He moved on to concentrate on his acting and singing talents. In the Twenties he starred in several plays by Eugene O'Neill and became the first black to play the lead in Othello on Broadway. In his singing career he concentrated on spirituals and folk songs and to this day his recordings can raise the hair on the back of your neck. He also took his talents to Hollywood.

By this account it would seem that Paul Robeson was an ideal American, black or white, and the perfect example of the success of the student athlete. A role model for role models. What went wrong? Why did he slip into obscurity?

The problem was that Paul Robeson was also a political activist. He opposed fascism strongly in the 1930s, became enamored of the Russian people whom he found treated him as a person not as a racial category, and he became identified with Communism. He was an advocate of racial equality on the world stage, and in America he pressed for the desegregation of baseball. In the 1940s and 50s as the Cold War heated up his associations with Communism led to his blacklisting.

The most serious breach of racial and Cold War etiquette came in the late forties when in Paris Robeson, in a speech before the World Peace Congress, said "It is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations against the Soviet Union which in one generation has raised our people to full human dignity." This was a particularly sensitive issue as black activists in the United States had just recently forced President Truman to order desegregation of the armed forces by threatening to lead a black boycott of the draft.

There was an immediate outcry against Robeson in the white press and the white community in the United States. He had his passport taken away by the State Department on the direct order of John Foster Dulles. His public acting and singing careers ceased, as his concerts were boycotted or in some cases violently disrupted by the Klan. Robeson was constantly harassed by the FBI, a group of Rutgers Alumni moved to have his name removed from the class rolls, football publications removed his name from the lists of All-Americans for 1917 and 1918, and his picture was removed from the walls at Rutgers.

In the wake of Robeson's pronouncement on the draft the House Un-American Activities Committee persuaded Jackie Robinson to come before the committee to counter Robeson's statement. To his discredit, and later regret, Robinson did appear and was instrumental in the public discrediting of Paul Robel Robeson. In American sporting circles Robeson became a non-person and was never voted into either the college or professional football halls of fame.

At long last this injustice is being corrected.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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