

10 October 1949

Mr. Alan Barth  
The Washington Post  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Alan:

Here's that story I was telling you about on the phone: A group of students at Oberlin College called "The Forum Board," hearing that Paul Robeson was coming to Cleveland, asked Robeson to appear at Oberlin on October 6. The Forum Board did this without asking the college whether it could get a hall for Robeson to appear in. Robeson and his Cleveland committee called "The Cleveland Committee to Welcome Paul Robeson" accepted the invitation. Thereupon, the Forum Board asked the president of Oberlin, William E. Stevenson, whether they could not have Finney Chapel, the largest hall in Oberlin.

Stevenson said that Robeson, of course, could appear but inasmuch as this Forum Board ostensibly conducted forums, somebody should appear on the platform with Robeson to present the opposite point of view. Stevenson in a statement to the press and Robeson said:

"Oberlin College has traditionally supported the cause of free speech and public discussion of controversial issues. The College must assume a responsibility to assure that all sides of public issues be represented. A true forum procedure would necessarily mean the presentation of other views in addition to those expressed by Mr. Robeson. In this particular situation it is our judgment that the presentation of the opposite point of view should be made at the same time. Therefore Oberlin College will grant to the Forum Board a platform on which Mr. Robeson can be heard on a forum basis upon the express condition that an equal opportunity be given on the same program for a person or persons who may hold divergent views."



Robeson asked for 24 hours to think it over, at the end of which time the Cleveland Committee to Welcome Paul Robeson released the statement in which it said that:

"Injecting into the Oberlin invitation the appearance of controversy, however, is not connected with affirming and reaffirming the rights of an artist to be heard and the need of all citizens to come together to guarantee full democracy. That right and that need are not subject to debate."

Thereupon Robeson declined the invitation.

Incidentally, the name of the man suggested by the college to appear on the platform with Robeson was Rev. Horace White of Detroit. The subject of the forum was to be "The American Negro and Civil Liberties Today."

I thought this might make a nice little piece on how to lick Paul Robeson.

Sincerely,

E. W. Kenworthy  
Executive Secretary

