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BIOGRAPHER SAYS FBI HOLDS BACK INFORMATION ON ROBESON
NEW YORK

The FBI is holding back information that could either confirm or refute suspicions that the U.S. government broke down Paul Robeson's health by slipping him drugs, a biographer of the trailblazing black actor and singer said Wednesday.

In a suit filed Dec. 28 in federal court, author Martin Duberman alleged that the FBI violated the Freedom of Information Act by denying him files on Robeson and Robeson's family and by "radically censoring" the files it turned over.

The FBI has 60 days to respond to the suit. In Washington, spokesman Bill Carter said the bureau would not comment on pending litigation.

Robeson, who died in 1976, spent "his last 12 years as a kind of recluse and physically a wreck," Duberman said.

"He lived in a room in his sister's house in Philadelphia and I'm trying to explain what happened to him, what caused the physical and emotional decline," he said.

"One of the theories that's been very prominent is that our government in the early 1960s the FBI, the CIA, it isn't very clear who's being assigned the role was responsible for a drug-induced nervous breakdown," Duberman said.
"The CIA was doing that elsewhere, that's well documented."

Much of what has been turned over to him "has been almost totally censored," said Duberman.

"Whole pages are inked out from top to bottom and are absolutely useless," he said.

Duberman said that among the large chunks of evidence withheld by the FBI were documents on Robeson called "status of health files," about which "they have refused to release even a single piece of paper, even inked out."

"If they have nothing to hide, why don't they just release them and clear the whole thing up?" Duberman said.

From as early as 1942, there never was a day that Robeson wasn't tracked by an agent of the government, Duberman said.

During his life as a performer and champion of left-wing causes, Robeson was lionized in the Soviet Union and widely condemned in the United States.

Duberman, who said he has been working on Robeson's biography with Robeson family cooperation for about three years, is a distinguished professor at Lehman College of the City University. His earlier biography, "Charles Francis Adams," won the 1962 Bancroft Prize.