Paul Robeson was a brilliant student and champion athlete who abandoned a career in law to find worldwide fame as a performer and activist. He was undoubtedly the most famous African American of his time before losing everything for the sake of his principles. The son of a former slave, Robeson’s life took him to Hollywood via the Harlem Renaissance and London’s West End. While he stunned audiences with his performances of ‘Ol’ Man River’ and Othello, he also championed social justice around the world, travelling from the coal-mining towns of Wales, to the frontiers of the Spanish Civil War, Paul Robeson was a prize-winning scholar and the greatest footballer of his era, even before he ascended to global superstardom as a singer, Hollywood actor, and activist. The son of an escaped slave, Robeson stunned audiences with ‘Ol’ Man River’ and Othello, as his passion for social justice led him from Jazz Age Harlem to the mining towns of Wales, from the frontiers of the Spanish Civil War to Stalin’s Russia. There are many commendable aspects to this biography of Paul Robeson, but most striking is its capacity to build the portrait of a man who could seem remote to the contemporary Australian reader and yet who, thanks to Jeff Sparrow’s fine handling of the material, does not seem remote at all. Robeson was the son of a slave, a footballer, singer, actor, communist and activist.