

## Jackie Robinson: A Portrait

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### INTRODUCTION

The middle school at which I teach was once a predominantly Caucasian school that was founded fifty-three years ago. The student population has changed a great deal since then and is now 80% Hispanic, 15% African American, and 5% other ethnicities. My students are academically inclined to be at risk for failure, but this school year marked an improvement both for them and for our school. Having received an “acceptable” score for several years on state standardized tests, my students have helped to raise the ranking of the school from “academically acceptable” to “recognized.” (Texas uses a system of grading schools that ranks them as “low performing,” “academically acceptable,” “recognized,” and “exemplary.”)

On my campus, students from special education and general education classes are combined in an inclusion process which helps each special education student to enhance his or her social skills and to learn the importance of organizational skills and staying on task. Our campus includes a Bilingual / LEP program inclusive of English as a Second Language (ESL).

Additionally, our school has a Vanguard (magnet school) program. The goals of the program are as follows:

- To increase program enrollment of qualified students by ten percent
- To participate in district- and campus-wide activities to improve problem-solving techniques
- To participate in academic competitions
- To have each student complete at least one major project per six weeks, including the Science and History Fairs
- To increase the percentage of students receiving academic recognition on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test
- To enhance our campus TAAS scores by 10% while maintaining a 100% passing rate on the TAAS by our gifted and talented students.

I am a homeroom teacher for seventh grade students in special education whose learning or physical characteristics range from ED (emotionally disturbed); LD (learning disabled); MR (mildly mentally retarded); to OH (orthopedically handicapped). My students' behavioral patterns range from helpful to creative by putting bulletin boards together, cutting out bulletin board items, and maintaining a clean and organized classroom.

On the other hand, their behaviors can take a negative turn: from spitting, hitting, kicking, socking, and cursing one another to throwing chairs across the classroom. At least every two weeks there is a fight in my classroom. I try to work out my own disciplinary problems by gaining the students' trust in me and working out their personal confrontations without resorting to writing a discipline referral card to the office. Some days this approach works and other days nothing works. My position is both rewarding and challenging.

My instructional time is also shared with twelve other teachers with whom I team-teach in the area of science. My areas of academic expertise branch into physical science, integrated science, biology, earth science, and life science. I monitor fifty-six students in the regular education and Vanguard classrooms in addition to operating the Content Mastery Lab for special needs students. Sometimes there are even more students added for me to assist, students from the general education populations. These students often just need a quiet place to work.

In my thinking skills class I consult with students who are having "growing" pains and family problems. I make numerous phone calls to parents to inform them about their child regarding unreturned homework, good behavior, ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) meetings, and grades. Therefore, for me, a ninety-minute instructional block means spending forty-five minutes between two buildings and forty-five minutes back in my classroom for lab.

Lab consists of working with two to twelve students. I cannot just give them the answers to their questions without their independently working out their solutions, and I usually do not have the teacher's answer key. Sometimes the students just show up without a moment's notice needing to complete a test in thirty to forty-five minutes. Most of the work in the lab is facilitated by me without the assistance of an aide.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE UNIT**

I am designing a unit which will help students to identify positive role models for their lives. Hopefully, this unit will guide my students into a world of reading. They will be able to study the lives of great sports figures and to learn what it takes to gain success and serve as a role model for others.

They will be able to learn about the life of Jackie Robinson, what gave his life meaning, and his lifelong struggles to make life better for others. There has been a long line of marvelous athletes in baseball who served as role models for children, but Jackie Robinson's significance in sports was not only as an athlete, but as a pioneer and major influence on American society as a whole. Jackie Robinson was the first African American to integrate major league professional baseball.

Jackie Robinson's role in sports was initially extremely difficult because of what appeared at that time to be an insurmountable mountain of racial prejudice to be scaled by African Americans in not only sports but all facets of American life. Therefore, Mr. Robinson knew that he not only had to be able to outperform his peers daily on the diamond but also had to be able to cope with the indignities of being a black man in a then "white man's sport," both on and off the field.

### **Definitions of a Hero versus a Celebrity**

In his book, *The End of Autumn: Reflections on My Life in Football* (1982), Michael Oriard describes heroes:

We all need heroes. They are more than role models; they teach us how to dream, what to aspire to. They tell us what our kind is capable of doing. A hero's accomplishments are ours as well, because he is one of us; he is our representative to the larger world. But in another way his labors are his alone; he both raises us vicariously to his level and remains beyond our reach—both a god and a man. We can find such heroes in the unlikeliest of places. (Oriard, 7)

Oriard also relates that as a young football player in college and later as a professional with the Kansas City Chiefs, he:

... was caught up in abstractions or the traits of a hero: toughness, courage, self-worth, personal identity, [but later Oriard became] less obsessively aware of myself, and more aware of my teammates as people. They were not obstacles to my desires, heroes to be emulated, competitors to be beaten out or humiliated if I could. They were human beings, with personalities and temperaments, vices and virtues, hopes and fears of their own... They had wives and children perhaps; some were deeply committed to their families, others chased women and stayed away from home as much as they could... All shared something in common. They were human. (Oriard, 258)

In his early years as a football player, Oriard seemed to be searching for the flash of divinity in "the great man." He compares and contrasts a hero to today's celebrities and asks us to differentiate between the two. He writes that reporters:

... remind us that professional football is really just entertainment. That we should not take it seriously. Football players, they imply, are like movie actors. They put on a show that entertains huge numbers of people. They are vaudevillians in shoulder pads, not heroes to be admired and emulated.

I think those reporters are wrong. Football players entertain but to much of society, they are not mere entertainers. An entertainer is a celebrity; a football

player can be a hero. A celebrity is famous for who he *is*, a football player for what he *does*. It's the difference between pretending and doing. John Wayne never fought in a war or cleared the bad guys out of a Western town.

But football players have no stand-ins on the field. The bullets John Wayne dodged were fake; the tacklers O.J. Simpson dodged were real and fans know the difference. If athletes truly can serve as heroes in our culture, then two conclusions are inescapable. One, sports such as football can have a vital function that should only be tampered with the greatest care. And two, the football player himself is an extraordinarily privileged individual, but he also bears a potentially crushing burden (of the after-effects of celebrity). (Oriard, 291)

### **Role in the Integration of American Society**

Surely in 1947, when Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers as the first African American major league baseball player, there could not have been a better flesh and blood representation of Oriard's definition of a hero/role model than Robinson as far as 1940s black America and liberal whites of the era were concerned.

Cornell West, noted Princeton scholar writes in his preface to Robinson's autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*:

In 1947, Jackie Robinson not only symbolized all of black America on trial in the eyes of white America and the expansion of the ideals of democracy, he also represented the best of a traditional black quest for dignity, excellence, and integrity. This quest was primarily a moral effort to preserve black sanity and spirituality in the face of white-supremacist barbarity and bestiality; it was a human attempt to hold on to dreams deferred and hopes dashed, owing mainly to slavery and Jim Crow in America. The deep and devastating effects of psychic scars, physical abuse, and material deprivation could not suffocate the black tradition of moral struggle and political resistance...Jackie Robinson's historic challenge to white supremacy in America was not an attempt to "prove himself and his humanity to white America.

Rather it was to be himself...he gained respect because he so deeply respected himself, because he respected black people and others. (Robinson, x-xi)

In a forward to the autobiography, sports hero Hank Aaron's perspective reiterates one of Robinson's recurring traits:

He was a pillar of strength, and he gave me a lot of inner strength... Jackie Robinson gave all of us—not only black athletes, but every black person in this country—a sense of their own strength. It's as clear now as it was then that Jackie Robinson was the right man for the right job -- intelligent, educated—I think that's

what we needed. There were so many temptations put before him. He was a man on trial -- not only on the field but off the field as well, and he had the skills to survive and transcend this ordeal...I played baseball for twenty-three years, and I owe it in part to Jackie Robinson, who gave me the strength I needed and the opportunity to play -- the chance to do everything I could. (Robinson, xiii-xvii)

In 1946, just a year prior to Robinson's entrance into major baseball—the integration of baseball and the initiation of what was and is still remembered as “Noble Experiment” (the integration of baseball), Jim Crow or segregationist laws, were still deeply entrenched in the South. These laws defined where American blacks would dine, shop, live, work, attend school, and recreate; where they could sit on public transportation; what seats they could sit in to view movies in the movie theater; what facilities would give them medical attention; and even where they would be buried when they died. The laws stripped either covertly or overtly, through poll taxes and literacy requirements, blacks' ability to vote and were used as intimidation tactics to keep blacks or “colored” people “in their place” (Marshall, 120).

At the time, “Separate but Equal” signs were supposed to give non-dominant culture Americans a sense of democracy, but instead promoted inequality, injustice, inaccessibility, inferiority, and a sense of being bound without chains. Segregation in the South was public, formal, and direct, and in the North the environment was not much better (Marshall, 120). In the North racial discrimination could be found in the form of restrictive property covenants, job discrimination, and poverty because blacks could find work only in menial labor jobs which relegated many of them to living in sections of major cities called “ghettoes,” a term originally coined for large sections in Europe inhabited by Jewish communities.

This is the America under whose Jim Crow laws Jackie Robinson had grown from childhood in Cairo, Georgia to young adulthood in Los Angeles, California, where he earned a degree at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and was an outstanding college athlete in other sports, playing with and against athletes who were white. The institutionalization of Jim Crow laws also restricted Jackie and other talented black ballplayers to playing only for the outstanding Negro Leagues of baseball until 1945 when Jackie signed with the Dodgers and played his first game in the white major leagues in 1946.

What a picture of contrast between baseball's icon, the Anglo-American Babe Ruth—burly, an orphan reared in a boy's home, a man who loved the good life and women, a man of very limited education, but possessing extreme athletic talent—and Jackie Robinson—a black man reared by a mother with four other children, a man who was educated, reserved, a one-woman family man from a strict Methodist background, yet also a very uniquely gifted and accomplished athlete.

The inclusion of black soldiers in military battalions in World War II led American people of color to believe that when the soldiers returned home, the segregationist lines which had been drawn before the black soldiers went to battle would begin to erase once the soldiers returned home. The soldiers and civilians were sadly mistaken. While Caucasian soldiers received ticker tape parades and welcome home parties, American black soldiers were given little if any fanfare and doors of opportunity to higher paying blue and white collar jobs were again closed in contrast to their white military peers. (Marshall, 120)

The only hope blacks had of receiving a sympathetic ear to their plight and hopefully a change in their conditions (or at least respect that they were equal to whites) was through the portal of sports, where such famous figures as Olympic winner Jesse Owens and boxer Joe Louis were kings. However, neither man was in a sports area which was watched on a consistent basis and that was shared, loved, and respected by both blacks and whites; baseball met the criteria. Baseball had been segregated since 1884 with the exception of Moses Fleetwood, a catcher who played for the American Association's Toledo Mudhens. Although sixty blacks had played in the professional leagues before 1900, there was a covert "gentlemen's agreement" between league owners that no blacks would be signed into the white major leagues (Marshall, 121). Enter Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson.

The success of the "Noble Experiment" was aided by the following historical events, as stated by Bill Mardo in his essay, "Robinson-Robeson":

Let's be perfectly frank. Branch Rickey signed Robinson after a long and bitter campaign of social protest: ten years of struggle by key black sportswriters and their papers, ten years of struggle by progressive trade unionists, ten years of struggle by some politicians of conscience, the years of struggle by the Communist Party, and ten years of struggle by the Daily Worker Sports Page and its sportswriters. And from 1936 to 1946, democratic-minded baseball fans rang door-bells, pounded pavements, picketed outside ballparks, and collected signatures on petitions urging that America's national pastime become not in name alone but in fact. (Dorinson and Warmund, 101)

By 1940, Judge Landis, baseball's high commissioner, received one million signatures asking for the end of Jim Crow in baseball. Leo Durocher then said he "would hire colored ballplayers if they were not barred by the owners. I've seen a million good ones." Such famous white ballplayers as Joe DiMaggio, Carl Hubbard, and Dizzy Dean and baseball manager Bill McKechnie, who had all played against and had been beat by the Negro Leagues major players such as Paige and Gibson, respected black players and were in favor of their playing in the white major leagues. Landis went on to announce, "Negroes are not barred from organized baseball by the Commissioner and never have been. There is no rule in organized baseball prohibiting their participation and never has been to my knowledge" (Dorinson and Warmund, 102).

According to Mardo, in 1943, the famous black actor, singer, social activist, Phi Beta Kappa, Rutgers University scholar, and four-letter sportsman, Paul Robeson (whose action would come back to bite him) went before the major league club owners and asked that the “scar” on the face of American baseball be surgically removed once and forever by allowing black players entrance into the major white clubs (Dorinson and Warmund, 102).

The timing was now ripe for the experiment, whether Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson for profit or social concerns (it was really both according to historians). Rickey did the right thing shrewdly and well, at the right time, with the right man for the job in talent, perseverance, dignity, pride, reserve, and moral values—Jackie Robinson.

Rickey role-played with Robinson two years before Jackie signed his historical contract, displaying and discussing all the situations Robinson would find himself facing on the field as the first black man to integrate the major leagues. All the scenarios became reality. During Robinson’s ten years with the Brooklyn Dodgers he broke barriers on and off the field. He desegregated road trips, spring training, stadiums, and hotels. He brought in hundreds and thousands of diversified fans. He led his team to six pennants and one World Series triumph in 1955. His on-base percentage of .411 is ranked among the best of all time. In 1956 Jackie retired with a lifetime batting average of .311. He was Rookie of the Year in 1947, Most Valuable Player in 1949, and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1962. (Dorinson and Warmund, 111)

Robinson’s athletic exploits allowed black and Latino youth who had merely dreamed of playing in the major leagues a realistic possibility of doing so. Where would prominent sports figures of color such as Venus and Serena Williams, Tiger Woods, Jim Browns, Michael Jordan, Arthur Ashe, and Roberto Clemente have been in their struggles for access to play without him?

Jackie arrived at a time in the American story of the color line before there was a Rosa Parks and the NAACP; before Martin Luther King and the civil rights activists; before Malcolm and the Muslims; before the Brown case; before the Civil Rights laws. He had no activist on the field to shield him from racist fans or players. He faced the “color” spotlight and glared over and over, game after game for ten years. Every step of the way he was insulted with racial epithets, gouged with spikes by opposing white players sliding into bases, spat at and upon, threatened with hate mail, and not allowed to live in some neighborhoods with his family, yet we as fans, spectators, and younger students of history were not to learn of these evils until near the end of Jackie’s life; he had other things to do than write and tell at the time. (Wisensale, 189)

Most men would have wallowed in the glory or licked their wounds in drink and depression after retiring from such circumstances and unceasing spotlight, but not Jackie Robinson. His retirement from baseball only opened the doors to his next exciting and at

times controversial journeys into business and politics with some tragic family events thrown into the pot.

### **Jackie Robinson as a Political Role Model**

In his article, “Black Knight: a Political Portrait of Jackie Robinson,” Steven Wisensale quotes Mrs. Rachel Robinson, Jackie’s widow, that Jackie “used his athletics as a political forum. He never wanted to run for office, but he always wanted to influence people’s thinking” (190). Mrs. Robinson always stated that Jackie was an informal civil rights leader first and a ballplayer second.

Robinson’s first brush with political or racial issues came while serving in the military, long before he became a baseball player.

He entered the Army shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack. Despite having a college degree and completing basic training, Robinson was denied entrance into Officers Candidate School in Fort Riley, Kansas. Jackie spoke with his influential military peer at the time, Joe Louis, the famous black boxer who was also stationed at Fort Riley; Louis contacted the Department of War and a representative was sent to check out the situation. The policy of not admitting black recruits to the Officers Candidate School was immediately changed. Jackie entered the school and was made a Second Lieutenant in the cavalry and named morale officer. In this position Robinson was able to change some Jim Crow policies at the base, such as obtaining an increase in the number of seats provided at the segregated commissary at Fort Riley.

When Jackie was transferred to the even more segregated Fort Hood, Texas in July of 1944, he was asked to sit at the back of a post bus one day (long before Rosa Parks’ famous incident). Jackie refused to sit in the back and was court-martialled, but eventually was acquitted of all charges and given an honorable discharge from active duty.

Robinson’s ensuing baseball career in 1945 was a cornerstone for the civil rights movement. His desegregation of baseball in 1947 was a starting point for proof that integration could work in America, thereby inspiring others to try to bring integration into other arenas.

Jackie was very vocal in his push for blacks not only as players, but as managers and administrators in the game. He continually spoke out against racial injustices and asked for economic pressures to be leveled upon the South for its Jim Crow laws and abuses of blacks and others sympathetic to the black cause.



In the late 1940s and the entire 1950s Robinson became a symbol of the new black American who was proud of being black and was articulate enough to express it. He was defiant off the playing field and not willing to accept being considered “inferior” or to have to be grateful for receiving what he was already due as a man and human being.

In 1949, Robinson was asked by Branch Rickey to testify at the infamous McCarthy hearings about the famous black entertainer and activist Paul Robeson’s statements concerning blacks’ unwillingness to fight against Communist Russia because of how their own country, the United States, treated them. Robinson did speak at the hearing, not to attack Robeson, but to represent those blacks who were not famous and had no political voice. He wished the world to know that blacks were Americans who deserved the chance to fight for their country, even though black people had been so terribly mistreated and even killed because of American racism.

As Robinson later quoted the Reverend Jesse Jackson in Robinson’s autobiography *I Never Had It Made*, “It ain’t our government, but it is our country” (Robinson, 84). Ironically, Robinson testified against a man, Robeson, who just a few years earlier had personally picketed and advocated to the major league baseball owners that they should allow black baseball players in the major leagues.

This appearance by Robinson at the congressional hearings helped nail Robeson’s political and career coffin in America for the rest of his days. Reflecting on his actions later, Robinson said he would not have appeared at the hearings because as time passed he witnessed and personally experienced that discrimination by white America was still pervasive.

Robinson came to perceive that Robeson really believed that the socialistic point of view was better than the democratic perspective America was espousing hypocritically when it came to people of color.

In the 1960s Robinson was still caught in the tailspin of political controversies. He had befriended Republican governor Nelson Rockefeller by happenchance while serving as vice president in charge of personnel of the white-owned corporation, Chock Full O’Nuts. The Rockefeller name had been used in an ad much to the Rockefeller family’s chagrin and Jackie was asked to take care of the issue. Robinson, never at a loss for opportunities, asked Rockefeller about the dearth of black members in Rockefeller’s government employ (Robinson, 164-65). Rockefeller, who covertly championed the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, listened to Robinson’s suggestions and made significant changes in government positions to allow blacks into key policy-making areas.

Eventually Jackie Robinson left Chock Full O’ Nuts to become one of six deputy national directors of Rockefeller’s presidential campaign. Their ensuing friendship did not

endear Jack to the Black Panthers, the NAACP (of which he was a member until opposition caused him to resign in 1967), or Malcolm X. He was called an “Uncle Tom” because of his friendship with Rockefeller and because he tried to work through the system and not militantly outside of it like the Black Panthers. Yet, he admired the cause of the Panthers and denounced police brutality of them during their arrest in New York City in 1967.

Robinson also admired Adam Clayton Powell, the flamboyant and politically talented congressman and pastor from Harlem. Robinson admired Powell for his unflinching advocacy for black causes and his scathing honesty, but he also believed Powell had become caught up in his own excesses and had begun to negate the powerful influence he had in the political system because of his personal conduct.

Eventually, Robinson even criticized his friend Nelson Rockefeller because of his reform agendas and especially his handling of the infamous riots at Attica, where most of the prisoners were black. If there was one thing that was consistent about Robinson, it was that if black people were being hurt or mistreated, after careful deliberations and investigations, whether a person were friend or foe, if he was responsible for the problem Robinson would bring it to his attention.

Another case in point, Jackie Robinson had a deep and abiding love and respect for the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which transcended King’s assassination in 1968. Robinson originally met Dr. King through a mutual friend, but challenged King in an open letter in his newspaper column about his opposition to the Vietnam War. After Robinson and King conferred over the issue, Jackie gained a deeper understanding of King’s opposition to the Vietnam War. Later Robinson’s own perspective was even more enlightened when his own son, Jackie Robinson, Jr., went to Vietnam and returned a drug addict (Robinson, 211-15).

Robinson said of King’s nonviolent crusade for civil justice:

... I understood Martin’s inner compulsion to speak out against war and for peace. He would have been untrue to himself if he had not taken a stand for the principle in which he so deeply believed.

He was one of the world’s leading exponents of nonviolence, and it made as much sense to him to oppose wars throughout the world as it did to oppose violence in Montgomery, Selma, and Birmingham (Robinson, 213-14).

Earlier in the chapter about King, Robinson discusses his view of King’s philosophy:

As much as I loved him, I never would have made a good soldier in Martin’s army. My reflexes aren’t conditioned to accept nonviolence in the face of violence-

provoking attacks. My immediate instinct under threat of physical attack to me or those I love is instant defense and total retaliation. (Robinson, 211)

Such an honest statement reveals that all of Jackie's days of self control against verbal and physical racial attacks while playing ball were to promote a positive image of black people against stereotypical view of them as emotional, unthinking, brutes. Again, where would the Jesse Jacksons, Al Sharptons, Colin Powells, and Condoleeza Rices be without the political courage of Jackie and others?

Yes, and what Cornel West calls this "Love Supreme" of his race compelled Robinson to assist Martin Luther King whenever he needed assistance financially or emotional support (Robinson, xii). According to Henry, King once stated to one of his aides, "Jackie Robinson made it possible for me in the first place. Without him, I would never have been able to do what I did" (Dorinson and Warmund, 211). In the end, Robinson outlived a number of his political friends and opponents.

### **Jackie Robinson as a Businessman**

Jackie Robinson was not only an educated man, a gifted athlete, and a political and civil rights activist, he also possessed an innate savvy for business and a personality for leadership.

He was not one to pass up or overlook positive windows of opportunity which would in the end be of benefit to the black race and to the human race. In *I Never Had It Made*, he states that after resigning from Chock Full O' Nuts and beginning his political run with Rockefeller:

The knowledge I had acquired about the business world, I considered invaluable... I was becoming restless; I wanted to involve myself in politics as a means of helping black people and I wanted my own business enterprises. I had been increasingly convinced of the need for blacks to become more integrated into the mainstream of the economy. I was not thinking merely of job integration. A statement Malcolm X made was most impressive. Referring to some college students who were fighting to be served in Jim Crow restaurants, Malcolm said he wanted not only the cup of coffee but also the cup and saucer, the counter, the store, and the land on which the restaurant stood. I believed blacks ought to become producers, manufacturers, developers, and creators of businesses, providers of jobs. (166)

If you found a black man making shoes or candy or ice cream, he was a rarity. We talked about not having capital, but we needed to learn to take a chance, to be daring, to pool capital, to organize our buying power so that the millions we spent did not leave our communities to be stacked up in downtown banks. In addition to

the economic security we could build with green power, we could use economic means to reinforce black power. How much more effective our demands for a piece of the action would be if we were negotiating from the strength of our own self-reliance rather than stating our case in the role of beggar or someone crying out for charity. (166-67)

We live in a materialistic society in which money doesn't talk—it screams. (167) I became increasingly persuaded that there were two keys to the advancement of blacks in America -- the ballot and the buck. (183)

And with these insightful, frank, and eloquent words, Jackie Robinson joined an ethnically diverse group of businesspersons and opened the second predominantly black-owned bank in the country in Harlem, New York. Robinson believed in Black Power of the 1960s, but he also believed that true black power required understanding the economic system of America's capitalistic system by participating in and understanding the stock market and being a part of the boards of banks and corporations.

In contrast to its predecessors (previous black banks owned by whites), Jackie Robinson's Freedom Bank, established in 1964, is still going strong (with millions in assets). Robinson was a man of action and word whose integrity, honesty, and dignity, on and off the field, gave patrons and financial supporters security and confidence to invest and deposit their monies in the bank.

### **Jackie Robinson as a Role Model Father**

In reading the sections concerning his family in Robinson's autobiography, Robinson cuts no corners in revealing the positive and negative events in the lives of such a celebrity-centered family which had such a historical effect on the American social and political scene. The family incidents he paints reflect the extreme conditions Robinson's family faced as willing catalysts and unwilling victims in integrating the American institution of baseball.

Robinson's marriage to the beautiful, intelligent, and compassionate Rachel Isum Robinson is a concrete testimony that behind every great man is a great woman. Rachel married Jack right at the beginning of his signing with the Dodgers and she rode the hills, peaks, and valleys with him until his death in 1972. Rachel Robinson lost and found her independent identity during their marriage, earning her master's degree in psychiatric nursing in 1960 and then going on to Yale University to teach as an assistant professor in its School of Nursing.

No wife or child should endure the ugly verbal and physical threats heaped upon the Robinson family. Their celebrity status did not shield them from the overt stings of racism in the North or South, and of the three children they brought into their family spotlight,

the oldest, Jackie Robinson, Jr., seemed to be the one most affected by the negative environments the Robinsons endured in their travels and social journeys because his birth was within a couple of years of Jackie's entrance into the major leagues.

Jackie Robinson, Jr. probably internalized some of the slights his parents—particularly his mother—endured while waiting her husband's return to substandard hotels and living with other indignities of Jim Crow America. Because of her quiet nature and the racial environment of the era, Mrs. Robinson was not easily accepted as a member in the other players' wives' social milieu. Robinson was very perceptive in understanding what his wife faced in such social contexts.

The Robinsons, like any other family, wished to expose their children to the best neighborhoods and educational institutions that their celebrity status gave them access to—these environments which shielded them from such societal ills as poverty and drugs, yet exposed them to the “elite” racism of being the only black children in their neighborhoods or schools.

The eldest son Jack suffered from low self-esteem, isolation, and inability to maintain decent grades and proper behavior in his predominately white schools and felt constant comparisons to his father from outsiders. Jack, Sr. stated that because they were both quiet, reserved, and conservative in personal relationships and because of his extensive absences to play games or promote social causes including helping *other* troubled youngsters, Robinson's communication gap with his son widened, which was not unusual at this point in an adolescent's life.

However, due to the nature of Robinson's celebrity and its impact on the American social landscape, a son with his name had special mountains to climb. Eventually Jack, Jr. joined the military in order to find his own identity, but like many young men who found themselves in the reality of battle in Vietnam, he returned to the United States addicted to drugs.

With years of family love and support coupled with tough love, young Jackie had been clean and sober for three years and was involved in community outreach programs when he was killed in a one man automobile accident at the age of twenty-four while returning home after making plans for a fundraising concert. Jack, Jr. and his father had overcome their obstacles to communication long before he died, but Jack, Sr. never truly recovered from the emotional impact of his son's death.

However, the senior Robinson stoically carried on God's missions for his life until his own death while his other two children, Sharon and David, and his Rachel wife thrived as successful professionals in mainstream America.

### **Jackie Robinson's Legacy**

When viewing pictures of the older Jackie Robinson, he appears to look closer to seventy than his actual age at the time of his death, fifty-three. I can only surmise that the ten years of racial abuse he endured stoically on and off the field as the central focus point for the hopes and dreams of black America while representing the antithesis of the American dream to ethnic bigots eventually took a negative toll on his physical health.

Mrs. Jackie Robinson was later to reveal in interviews that during his major league years, Robinson suffered from severe and persistent headaches and bouts of depression and later from advanced stages of diabetes and other medical complications. Most doctors would say Jackie's ailments were all organic and biological in nature, but the duress and abuse which he endured as a black professional ballplayer in the 1940s and 1950s can only be internalized for a certain amount of time before they begin to ravage the body and become evident to the human eye. However, Robinson never wavered or faltered in his fight for dignity, respect, and justice for his race and the preservation of such values for all of mankind.

Author Patrick Henry writes in his article, "Jackie Robinson, Black Profile in Courage" the following retrospective on the life and career of Jackie Robinson:

Jackie knew, whether he liked it or not, from the very beginning, that he was an individual ball player, a symbol of black people, and part of an experiment with immense social ramifications for the advancement of blacks in America.

He accomplished what he did because he practiced daily acts of courage—real courage—born of his deep awareness of community and his profound sense of responsibility, not only toward black America but toward that segment of white America that supported him. . . . As much as Robinson did for blacks, however, he did far more for white America. By appealing to the national consciousness, he compelled white Americans to confront the reality of racial prejudice and to redefine their values. (Dorinson and Warmund, 211)

In these times of rising racial tensions, church bombings and burnings based on hatred, the James Byrd killing, continual racial profiling, police violence against people of color, and the heinous acts of September 11, 2001, I again quote Patrick Henry:

Jackie's passion for justice and dedication to harmony among all races in America has a particular relevance. Jackie's ideas and the way he held them, his spirit and courage under fire shine forth through the fog of hatred and bigotry, like an ebony monstrosity, a beacon, a symbol, and a glowing example for all members of his race—the human race. (Dorinson and Warmund, 212)

Finally to quote Robinson himself in the epilogue to his autobiography:

I have many memories, standing alone at first base—the only black man on the field. I had to fight hard against loneliness, abuse, and the knowledge that any mistake I made would be magnified because I was the only black man out there. I had to deny my true fighting spirit so that the “noble experiment” could succeed. When it finally did I could become my own man. Many people resented my impatience and honesty. But I never cared much about acceptance as much as I cared about respect...

I worked as hard to do as much as I could for my people...I have had the love of family, my wonderful mother, brothers and sister. I have always fought for what I believed in. I have had a great deal of support and I have tried to return that support with my best effort. However, there is one refutable fact of my life which has determined much of what happened to me: I was a black man in a white world. *I never had it made.* (275)

In conclusion, from an educational perspective, teachers must be about keeping alive the tradition of the hero. We have a mission, a mission to save children and offer each one the best possible education as possible. There must be a sense of purpose and worth for all of our students to strive towards.

Reading about the autobiographies of sports figures encourages our students to think about peace, justice, and the American way in the manner in which some of the more nobler athletes conducted their lives. We should not use the American public school system to control and punish our students; we should reconstruct the image of public education by telling of the American dream as it is revealed in the stories of great sports heroes and role models such as Jackie Robinson, Ty Cobb, Michael Jordan, Wilma Rudolph, and the list goes on.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **STUDENT ACTIVITIES FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH UNIT**

#### **Objectives**

I will teach my students cognitive, psychomotor, and tactile-kinesthetic comprehension skills in the areas of nonfiction reading, cause and effect, prediction, comparison/contrast, reading for detail, chronological sequencing, evaluation, and inferential reading. My students will also make informative and effective oral presentations based upon research using technology and create portfolios as part of their Black History Month projects.

#### **Curriculum**

I will begin the first week of the Black History Month celebration by decorating my room with posters and displays of famous African American athletes, including African American cowboys because the students identify most with athletes and know least about the cowboys who were prime athletes as well as businessmen in their day. I will, in consecutive class periods and during the following weeks, ask students to define the word “hero” and make a notebook list comparing and contrasting the attributes of a sports hero with the attributes of an ordinary citizen.

Next, my students and I will orally read or listen to tapes, novels, short stories, or narratives that focus on the particular obstacles faced by African American athletes in the context of the struggles of African Americans in American history; I will utilize information from my Jackie Robinson curriculum unit because his entrance into the American cultural scene through baseball is a pivotal moment in American race relations.

During week two my students will be given a list of names of African American sports, cowboy, education, science, and business figures of the past and present for a two-week research project which will involve use of the Internet and library visits in order to gain information from primary and secondary materials using autobiographies, biographies, encyclopedias, magazines, newspaper articles, and Internet biography-specific websites.

I will not allow students to study current entertainment figures because there is too much spotlight on African Americans in the entertainment world and students know very little about other areas of culture in which African Americans have had a profound impact. There is as much spotlight on today’s athletic figures as well, but many of the early athletes broke down entrenched racial barriers at key points in American history. The sports figures chosen must have played their sport prior to the 1980s. The only exception will be entertainers who became famous before the 1970s because they also helped to subtly change Jim Crow laws in theaters, concert halls, and other places of recreation.

During the second week of student activities, I will inform students that they must



create a portfolio or a mini-booklet on their chosen athlete and a history of the sport within which the athlete participates or participated, if the student chooses to make a presentation on an athlete. A rubric will be provided for all students so they will know what I will expect in their portfolios, which must include magazine, Internet, or newspaper pictures or clippings or student drawings representing their subject.

My students will be able to receive up to 500 points on their assignments, including oral presentations of their work. The oral presentations will occur in the last week of Black History Month or the first week of March in order to give my students, some of whom are academically challenged, enough time to pull together their work and presentations. I will remind my students that Black History Month is indeed every day of the month so that they will understand that each culture's contributions to American society are not defined by a month. Their finished products will be displayed in our classroom and throughout the campus' hallways, which will make them think about the quality of their work in a positive manner because their campus peers and other teachers will see it.

During the third week my students will engage in role-play activities about their chosen athletes as well as other black history notables and will portray black history events that are important in American history.

Between the last week of February and the first week of March, I will invite local well-known athletes and businesspersons to share their experiences in sports and focus on the need for education after careers are no longer possible in sports (when the athlete's body will not perform at its peak due to age or injury). The month's activities will culminate with museum field trips to view the city of Houston's black history collections of sports, military, business, political, education, science, military, and entertainment figures.

**APPENDIX II**  
**EXAMPLES FOR INTERMEDIATE AND UPPER GRADES**  
**Concept: Black Protest**

*Generalization*

African Americans have protested against racism and discrimination throughout their history in America. The protests were displayed in various formats in the context of the climate of the times.

I will begin this unit by showing and discussing with my students Part I of the videotape series *Eyes on the Prize* (or a similar genre video). In the discussion I will direct my students to focus on the reasons black people protested and in what ways they chose to protest, especially in the mid- and late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.

*Class Activities*

1. My students will create a timeline. They will trace the Civil Rights Movement from its beginning and they will color the timeline.
2. Students will compare the life of Jackie Robinson to a modern day baseball player and will include events in Jackie Robinson's life on the timeline.
3. I will next have the class role-play a civil rights conference in 1966, including some of the leading civil rights organizations of the era. Each student will study the philosophies of the organization they represent, using a teacher handout that gives a brief synopsis of each of the organizations.

The conference will include the following organizations:

- a. Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)
- b. National Association for the Advancement of Colored people (NAACP)
- c. National Urban League
- d. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)
- e. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
- f. Black Panther Party
- g. Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM)

As a creative dimension of this unit, the students may be asked to perform their role-playing in the auditorium program for Black History Month, wearing the hairstyles and clothes of the era. My students will be given extra credit points for their participation.

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## Dodgers Purchase Robinson, First Negro in Modern Major League Baseball

### ROYALS' STAR SIGNS WITH BROOKS TODAY

International League Batting Champion Will Bid for Job in Big League Infield.

### MONTREAL TRIPS DODGERS

Lund and Campanile Hit 2-Run Homers Against Branca in Fourth for 4-3 Triumph

By LOUIS EFFREAT

Jackie Robinson, 23-year-old infielder, yesterday became the first Negro to achieve major-league baseball status in modern times. His contract was purchased from the Montreal Royals of the International League by the Dodgers and he will be in a Brooklyn uniform at Ebbets Field today, when the Brooks oppose the Yankees in the first of three exhibition games over the week-end.

A native of Georgia, Robinson won fame in baseball, football, basketball and track at the University of California at Los Angeles before entering the armed service as a private. He emerged a lieutenant in 1942 and in October of that year was signed to a Montreal contract. Robinson's performances in the International League, which he led in batting last season with an average of .349, prompted President Branch Rickey of the Dodgers to promote Jackie.

The decision was made while Robinson was playing first base for Montreal against the Dodgers at Ebbets Field. Jackie was blanked at the plate and contributed little to his team's 4-3 victory before 14,222 fans, but it was nevertheless, a history-making day for the well-proportioned lad.

#### An Inopportune Moment

Jackie had just popped into a double-play, attempting to hunt in the fifth inning, when Arthur Mann, assistant to Rickey, appeared in the press box. He handed out a brief, typed announcement: "The Brooklyn Dodgers today purchased the contract of Jackie Roosevelt Robinson from the Montreal Royals."

Robinson will appear at the Brooklyn offices this morning to sign a contract. Rickey does not anticipate any difficulty over terms.

According to the records, the last Negro to play in the majors was one Moses Fleetwood Walker,

### THE DODGERS ACQUIRE A NEW INFIELDER



Jackie Robinson being congratulated by Clay Hopper, manager of the Montreal Royals, at Ebbets Field yesterday after it was announced that the Brooklyn club had purchased the Negro from its farm team.

American Association when that circuit enjoyed major-league classification back in 1884.

The call for Robinson was no surprise. Most baseball persons had been expecting it. After all, he had proved his right to the opportunity by his extraordinary work in the A.A.A. minor league, where he stole 40 bases and was the best defensive second baseman. He sparked the Royals to the pennant and the team went on to annex the little world series.

Robinson's path in the immediate future may not be too smooth, however. He may run into antipathy from Southerners who form about 80 per cent of the league's playing strength. In fact, it is rumored that a number of Dodgers expressed themselves unhappy at the possibility of having to play with Jackie.

#### Robinson Is "Thrilled"

Jackie, himself, expects no trouble. He said he was "thrilled and it's what I've been waiting for." When his Montreal mates congratulated him and wished him luck, Robinson answered: "Thanks, I'll need it."

Whether Robinson will be used at first or second base is not known. That will depend upon the

Rickey, in answer to a direct query, declared he did not expect trouble from other players, because of Robinson. "We are all agreed," he said, "that Jackie is ready for the chance."

Several thousand Negroes were in the stands at yesterday's exhibition. When Robinson appeared for batting practice, he drew a warm and pleasant reception. Dixie Walker, quoted in 1942 as opposed to playing with Jackie, was hooped on his first turn at bat. Walker answered with a resounding single.

If, however, Robinson is to make the grade, he will have to do better than he did against the Brooks. Against Ralph Branca, Jackie rolled meekly to the mound, walked and then popped an intended sacrifice bunt into a double play. At first base—a new position for him—he handled himself bravely, but did not have a difficult chance.

#### Six Hits for Each Club

The biggest crowd to watch the Dodgers this spring saw the Brooks, under Clyde Sukeforth (he's the pro hem manager), go down to defeat before the sound pitching of Ervin Falica and Jack Santa, who combined for a six-hit effort. The Royals collected

and Lefty Paul Mincer, but two were round-trippers.

The homers, both in the fourth inning at the expense of Branca, accounted for all the Montreal runs. After Robinson had walked and Jack Jorgensen had flied out, Don Lund blasted a liner into the lower left-field stand. Then a pass to Earl Naylor and a longer four-bagger to left center by Al Campanile made it 4-0.

The Dodgers retrieved two runs in the same stanza. Walker walked and Duke Snider doubled to center. Walker tallied and when Lou Welsch, Montreal shortstop, threw wild on the relay, Snider went all the way around. A walk to Stan Rojek and Gene Hermann's double netted the last Brooklyn run in the seventh.

While Lund's and Campanile's round-trippers were well lagged, both would have been caught last year. The walls are fourteen feet closer to home plate this season.

"I'm for Robinson" buttons were sold outside the park.



## **APPENDIX III**

### **DOCUMENT 3: April 11, 1947**

#### **Discussion**

1. Why was this week different from all others?
2. Why did Jackie Robinson play Minor League baseball for Montreal rather than for an American team?
3. Why was Robinson shifted to first base from his usual position at second base?
4. Discuss the symbolic significance of Robinson's signing. Describe Robinson's reaction.
5. "One picture is worth a thousand words." More concisely, perhaps analyze the photo.
6. What is an editorial?
7. Do you agree or disagree with the sentiments expressed in the editorial, especially in the last sentence?

#### **Activities**

##### ***Writing***

Compose an editorial on a subject of vital concern to you.

##### ***Research***

Find out why Leo Durocher was banned from baseball. Why did this action dominate press coverage?

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Autobiography of the life of former football player turned English professor Michael Oriard.
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Introspective, frank, myth-breaking, set-the-record straight autobiography of the great athlete, businessman, and political activist, Jackie Robinson. Cornell West writes the foreword to the autobiography (pp. ix –xii) and Hank Aaron writes the introduction (pp. xiii-xviii).
- Rutkoff, Peter, ed. *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, 1997*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997.  
Symposium articles and essays from sports historians and writers on the life and political, social, and sports contributions of Jackie Robinson to American society.

Wisensale, Steven. "The Black Knight: A Political Portrait of Jackie Robinson." In *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, 1997: Jackie Robinson*, pp. 189-98. Edited by Peter M. Rutkoff. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997.  
Political retrospective essay on the life and contributions of Jackie Robinson.

## **Black History Unit Resources**

My Black History Month unit is based upon a historical unit about African Americans in *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies* by James Banks. The following books are some of the bibliographic references he lists for both teachers and students in studying the culture and history of black Americans. I chose those which would be relevant to my particular objectives and activities.

### ***Teacher Resources***

Banks, James A. *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies*. 6th ed. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1997.

The information found on pages 230-249 of this text is the basis of my Black History Month unit included in the Appendix.

Bennett, L. *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black Americans*. 6th revised ed. New York: Penguin, 1998.

An excellently written, popular history by a senior editor of *Ebony* that includes an extensive chronology, a list of black "firsts," and comprehensive bibliography.

Franklin, J.H. and Moss, A.A., Jr. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Black Americans*. 7th ed. New York: Knopf, 1994.

This comprehensive history of African Americans is still regarded as the best. The senior author is one of the most highly regarded American historians in the United States.

Hughes, L., Meltzer, M., Lincoln, C.E., and Spencer, J.M. *A Pictorial History of African Americans: From 1619 to the Present*. 6th ed. New York: Crown, 1995.

The history of African Americans told with more than 1,300 illustrations and through text. The photographs are excellent for teaching purposes.

Logan, R.W. and Winston, M.R., eds. *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*. New York: Norton, 1982.

Every school and college library should have this book. It contains a gold mine of information about the lives of African Americans who have shaped the nation's history.

### ***Student Resources***

- Adler, D A. *A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass*. New York: Holiday House, 1993.  
This book introduces young readers to the civil rights leader with a clearly written text and appealing color illustrations. Primary grade levels.
- Adler, D.A. *A Picture Book of Rosa Parks*. New York: Holiday House, 1993.  
A brief introduction to civil rights leader Rosa Parks enhanced with color illustrations. Primary grade levels.
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This well-written history of the movement is profusely illustrated with excellent teaching photographs.
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This book provides a history of American baseball from an African American perspective. Secondary grade levels.
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The lives of several African American doctors and their contributions to medicine. The author has also published with the same press, *Nine African American Inventors* (1992) and *Seven African American Scientists* (1992). Secondary grade levels.
- Lyons, Mary E. *Letters from a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs*. New York: Scribner's, 1992.  
A young girl poignantly reveals the daily life of a slave through her journal. Intermediate grade levels. The author has also published with Scribner's *Starting Home: The Story of Horace Pippin, Painter* (1993) and *Stitching Stars: The Story Quilts of Harriet Powers* (1993).
- Miller, R. *Reflections of a Black Cowboy*. Morristown, N.J.: Silver Burdett Press, 1992.  
Children learn about new heroes of the wild West from the author's look at four African American cowboys. Intermediate grade levels.