

0. JACKIE ROBINSON - EARLY YEARS - Story Preface

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Jackie Robinson - seen here with his Mother, Mallie Robinson - was the youngest of five children. Pictured, left-to-right, are: Mack (who became an Olympic star, in 1936), Jack, Edgar, Willa Mae and Frank. Image online, courtesy Robinson Foundation via Earlham College. Click on it for a better view.

Jack Robinson, grandson of slaves, was the son of a Georgia sharecropper. After his father left the family, a year after Jackie's birth, his mother (Mallie Robinson) moved her children to Pasadena. She thought it would be a better place for them to live.

Jim Crow laws, however, existed throughout America when Jack was a California youngster. He tells us what it was like to be taunted because of his race:

We lived in a house on Pepper Street in Pasadena. [The address was 121 Pepper.] I must have been about eight years old the first time I ran into racial trouble. I was sweeping our sidewalk when a little neighbor girl shouted at me, "N _ _ _ _ , n _ _ _ _ , n _ _ _ _ ."

... That incident was part of a pattern. Our white neighbors had done unfriendly things before ... They had signed petitions to try to get rid of us. My mother never lost her composure ... and ... made it perfectly clear to us and to them that she was not at all afraid of them and that she had no intention of allowing them to mistreat us. (I Never Had It Made, by Jackie Robinson, page 5.)

While still a boy, Jackie joined a neighborhood "gang" whose members regularly got into trouble. On his way to becoming "a full-fledged juvenile delinquent," to use his own words, Robinson was saved by a man who took the time to caution him about his misdeeds.

Carl Anderson, a car mechanic, gave the future baseball star some thought-provoking advice:

He said it didn't take guts to follow the crowd, that courage and intelligence lay in being willing to be different. (I Never Had It Made, page 7.)

Jackie Robinson never forgot that life-changing advice.

School sports - a key part of Jackie's life - helped him to become disciplined:

When I went to John Muir Technical High I earned letters in football, basketball, baseball and track. I enjoy competition and I was aggressive in my determination to win. (I Never Had It Made, page 9.)

His athletic prowess also propelled him forward at Pasadena Junior College and at UCLA where he ran track, played ball (of various types) and generally excelled in multiple sports.

World War II led Jack to a different path. After joining the Army, he soon learned that "all men are created equal" didn't exactly apply to African-Americans who served their country. It wasn't until after the war, in 1948, when President Truman declared that discriminatory policies against blacks in the military had to end.

Robinson, and other men of color, were subjected to a decades-old policy of racial discrimination officially employed by the United States military. A government report, issued in 1925, asserted that people of color were incapable of achieving what white people could achieve.

Let's take a look at that document and examine what it declared.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/JACKIE-ROBINSON-EARLY-YEARS-42-Jackie-Robinson>

Questions 2 Ponder

Does It Take Courage and Intelligence to be Different?

Do you agree, or disagree, with Carl Anderson's advice to Jackie Robinson: "He said it didn't take guts to follow the crowd, that courage and intelligence lay in being willing to be different." Explain your position.

Have you ever been in a situation where you decided that "it didn't take guts to follow the crowd, that courage and intelligence lay in being willing to be different?" Describe how you benefitted from following your own path, not the path of the crowd.

Have you ever been in a situation where you *did* follow the crowd, then later regretted it? How would you have been better-off had you followed your own path, not the path of the crowd?

Media Stream



Robinson Home - 121 Pepper Street

Image online, Wikimedia Commons.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Robinson-Home-121-Pepper-Street>



Jackie Robinson - Youngest in the Family

Photo of Jackie Robinson, online courtesy Robinson Foundation via Earlham College.

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Jackie Robinson - Basketball Star

Jack Robinson, as a Pasadena Junior College Bulldog, online courtesy Robinson Foundation via Earlham College.

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Jackie Robinson - National Broad Jumping Record

Jack Robinson broad-jumping for UCLA. Photo online, courtesy Robinson Foundation via Earlham College.

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Jackie Robinson - UCLA Track Star

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Jackie Robinson - Football at UCLA

Photo of Jack Robinson as a UCLA football star, online courtesy Robinson Foundation via Earlham College.

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