

0. BREAKING the COLOR LINE - Story Preface

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Baseball was not the only thing which occupied Jack Robinson's attention in 1946. That was also the year he married Rachel Isum. This photo depicts the Robinsons on their wedding day. Image online, courtesy Robinson Foundation. Click on it for a better view.

On the 28th of August, 1945 - a few weeks after two atomic bombs exploded in Japan - Jackie Robinson met Branch Rickey. He wasn't exactly sure why he'd been invited to Rickey's Brooklyn office, located at 215 Montague Street.

The Dodgers' president and general manager knew that Robinson was a very good ballplayer. But ... was he "A Man?" Was he "The Man" for whom Rickey was searching?

Jackie had grown-up around people with racist attitudes. He'd been taunted as a boy. He was court-martialed, on two frivolous charges, as an Army officer. His whole life he'd forged his own way by being strong. He kept his dignity by being forceful. He knew how to fight-back ... and did.

Now ... Mr. Rickey told him ... he could no longer fight back.

To make his point, the Dodger's president took out a book, by Giovanni Papini, which had been published in 1920. He started reading, aloud, to his guest:

There are three answers which men can make to violence: revenge, flight, turning the other cheek.

The first is the barbarous principle of retaliation ... Flight is no better than retaliation ... The man who takes flight invites pursuit ... His weakness becomes the accomplice of the ferocity of others ... Turning the other cheek means not receiving the second blow. It means cutting the chain of the inevitable wrongs at the first link. Your adversary is ready for anything but this ... (See article in *Ebony* magazine, November 1968, at [page 160](#).)

What was Branch Rickey telling Jackie Robinson? That he had to turn the other cheek when people threw baseballs at his head? That he couldn't get angry when someone pushed their spiked shoes into his body? That he had to look away when someone screamed racial slurs at him or spit on him?

The gist of Rickey's message was clear: It's against your nature to turn the other cheek, but that's what you have to do. You have no choice.

Jackie began to sense that something more was at stake than just selling tickets to a baseball game. He began to realize that he could be part of changing history in America:

He had me transfixed as he spoke. I could feel his sincerity, and I began to get a sense of how much this major step meant to him. Because of his nature and his passion for justice, he had to do what he was doing. He continued. The rumbling voice, the theatrical gestures were gone. He was speaking from a deep, quiet strength. (*I Never Had It Made*, [page 32](#).)

What did he tell Jackie?

"Mr. Rickey," I asked, "are you looking for a Negro who is afraid to fight back?"

I never will forget the way he exploded.

"Robinson," he said, "I'm looking for a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back." (*I Never Had It Made*, [page 33](#).)

Those words must have reminded Jackie of Carl Anderson, the advice-giver of his youth.

Robinson agreed that he would not fight back for three years. First he spent a season (1946) with the Dodgers' top farm club (the Montreal Royals). Then ... when Brooklyn's new first baseman walked onto Ebbets Field on the 15th of April, 1947 ... he broke baseball's color line.

Wendell Smith, sports writer for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, wrote an article about "Robbie's" debut. An African-American, like Jackie, Wendell faced his own sports-world discrimination. Among other things, he could not share pressroom space with white journalists.

The Dodgers' highly respected captain - Pee Wee Reese - knew about racial cruelties since he'd witnessed such things growing-up in the South. When he walked over to Jackie (his team mate) and put his arm around him - despite racial heckling by a Boston crowd and Red-Sox players - he helped to demolish baseball's color line.

When the Brooklyn Dodgers played better ball than they had before, with Robinson as part of the roster, they helped to further demolish baseball's color line.

Branch Rickey had picked the right man for the right team. For ten years, including when his mentor was no longer with the Dodgers, Jackie Robinson proved Rickey right.

Then ... before the 1957 season ... Robinson retired from baseball. He became an executive with a company called "Chock Full O' Nuts," had an interview with *LOOK* magazine and turned his attention to other important matters. (Don't miss the linked "Bio Channel" video which features Jackie's commentary about highlights of his life.)

One of the most important issues of the time, as far as Jackie was concerned, was the civil rights of all African-Americans.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BREAKING-the-COLOR-LINE-42-Jackie-Robinson>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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Questions 2 Ponder

How Did Jackie Robinson Demonstrate the Quality of His Character?

How hard do you think it was for Jackie Robinson to agree he would not fight back for three years? Explain your answer.

Was Branch Rickey right or wrong to take the approach he did in helping to break baseball's "color line." Explain your answer.

Assess the actions of Pee Wee Reese toward his team mate, Jackie Robinson, who also became his friend. Why would Reese risk damaging his own reputation by showing kindness and support to Robinson?

Media Stream



Jackie Robinson Signs a Dodgers Contract

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Jackie Robinson as a Montreal Royal

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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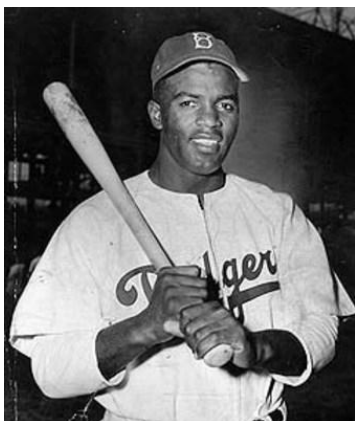


Jackie Robinson - In Action with the Montreal Royals

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Jackie Robinson - April 15, 1947

Robinson at Ebbets Field, 15 April 1947, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Jackie Robinson - Rookie Season

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Brooklyn Dodger Infielders - 1947

Image online, Library of Congress.

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Jackie Robinson - Dodger's First Baseman

Image online, courtesy TSN ("The Sports Network) Archive.

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I Never Had It Made by Jackie Robinson

Jackie Robinson was the right man who played with the right team to break major-league baseball's "Color Line." But as he makes clear in his autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*, the road for Jackie and his family was never easy.

Publishers Weekly ([via Amazon's website](#)) tells us more about the book:

This autobiography, which was originally published in 1972, the year Robinson died, is not about baseball: it's about the deep commitment that Robinson made to achieve justice for himself and all Americans.

He recalls his years at UCLA, where he became the school's first four-letter athlete and met his future wife, Rachel. With the advent of WWII he was drafted into the army, became a lieutenant and was court-martialed for refusing to move to the back of a bus. He was honorably discharged.

He played for the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues until he was recruited by Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1947 Robinson broke the color line in the major leagues and suffered terrible abuse for doing so.

He discusses his relationships with the sports figures he admired, like Rickey and teammate Pee Wee Reese, and also recalls his run-ins with those he did not like, such as Dodger owner Walter O'Malley, who was "viciously antagonistic," and sportswriter Dick Young, a "racial bigot."

Much of the book, written with freelancer Duckett, focuses on Robinson's political involvements after his career ended in 1956 and his friendships with such diverse characters as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, William Buckley and Nelson Rockefeller.

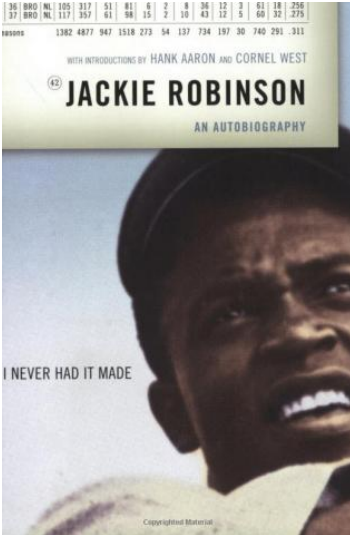
The most wrenching episodes in the book deal with Jackie Jr., who overcame his heroin addiction only to be killed in an automobile accident at age 24 in 1971. A disturbing and enlightening self-portrait by one of America's genuine heroes.

When we think of Jackie Robinson, and the enormous contributions he made to American society, we think first about his breaking of "the color line." But Robinson was far more than a famous athlete who happened to excel at baseball. He was also a man of great courage who, even during his U.S. Army days, resisted the racial discrimination he faced on a daily basis. Click on the image for a better view.

Bookcover image online, courtesy Amazon and the publisher. Copyright, Rachel Robinson, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new readers with the work.

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Jackie Robinson and Pee Wee Reese

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

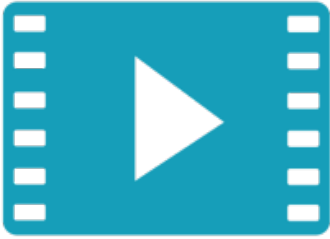
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BREAKING the COLOR LINE

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Pee Wee Reese - Captain of the Dodgers

Historic footage and interviews, compiled by Argenta Images, online courtesy Argenta Images' Channel at YouTube.

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Jack Robinson - I've Got a Secret"

Clip from "I've Got a Secret," online via YouTube.

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