



0. CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER - Story Preface

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After his baseball-playing days were over, Jackie Robinson continued to focus on civil rights for all Americans. In this photo, from the Library of Congress, we see him with Jackie Robinson, Jr., at a Washington, D.C. civil-rights gathering on August 28, 1963.

For a *decade*, during his adult life, Jack Robinson was a major-league baseball star. For *all* of his adult life he did whatever he could to promote the civil rights of African-Americans.

Although history remembers Robinson for his athletic abilities, and breaking baseball's color line, he did much more than that. He had the ear of U.S. Presidents and never hesitated to tell them what he thought.

Avoiding politics by party affiliation, he was an independent who voted for people based on their positive contributions to civil rights (not their adherence to a "party" or its "platform"). Concerned about the welfare of black Americans - and the protection of their leaders, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. - Jackie never doubted his right to question America's leaders about the slow progress the country was making toward civil rights for all people.

Not everyone appreciated Robinson's independent thinking. Not everyone agreed with his political philosophy. Jackie cared less what people thought about him and more about the progress black people were making. He thought the pace of the progress was far slower than it should (or could) have been.

By his side, supporting his endeavors, stood Rachael Isum Robinson (a nurse who'd married Jack in 1946). Together, the couple had three children - two boys and one girl. Together they built a life which mattered.

As Jim Crow gave way to Civil Rights, Robinson wanted the U.S. government to pass (and enforce) beneficial laws ensuring the dignity of all people. When the country, and the Congress, were distracted by war in Vietnam, Robinson kept his focus. Unequal practices against people of color, he urged, had to end:

Negroes aren't seeking anything which is not good for the nation as well as ourselves. In order for America to be 100 per cent strong - economically, defensively, and morally - we cannot afford the waste of having second-and-third class citizens.

Successful in the private sector, as an executive for a private company known as "Chock Full 'O Nuts," the former baseball star also wrote his memoirs. He called his book *I Never Had it Made*. One of his famous quotes makes the point:

I won't 'have it made' until the most underprivileged Negro in Mississippi can live in equal dignity with anyone else in America.

Robinson was inducted into Baseball's Hall of Fame at the earliest possible time. His family, and Branch Rickey, helped him to celebrate.

He started a bank in Harlem and appeared on television programs (like "Meet the Press" and "What's My Line"). He founded a construction company, building low-to-moderate-income housing, to help families live in their own homes.

His health, however, began to fail him.

Soon after he retired from the Dodgers, following the 1956 season, Jackie learned he had diabetes. A bit later he developed heart difficulties.

As the years passed, Robinson did not see the kind of racial tolerance and equality that he so-longed for in America. Political leaders kept urging "patience," but Jackie wondered how long "patience" should apply to a

people kept down by a lack of civil rights.

By 1971, Jackie's hair had turned nearly white. Life had not been easy for him, and he remained concerned about black lack-of-progress in a white American society. Then ...in a string of gut-rending events, he lost his mother and his oldest child. (He'd already lost Branch Rickey - in 1965 - who'd been like a father to him.)

The next year - in October - Jackie and Rachel appeared at the 1972 World Series where Jackie was honored. Twenty-five years had passed since he broke baseball's color line.

Nine days later, at the age of 53, Jack Robinson died of a heart attack. He had prevailed in the face of intentional humiliation, racial slurs and slanders, countless denials (based on the color of his skin) and death threats (for showing that a black man could succeed in a white man's world).

Four decades later, those who taunted him are long-forgotten. Those who claimed blacks could not succeed are proven-wrong. Justice is still imperfect, despite some progress, but Jackie's words still inspire:

I believe in the goodness of a free society. And I believe that society can remain good only as long as we are willing to fight for it - and to fight against whatever imperfections may exist.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CIVIL-RIGHTS-LEADER-42-Jackie-Robinson>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CIVIL-RIGHTS-LEADER-42-Jackie-Robinson>

Questions 2 Ponder

Was Jackie Robinson a Civil-Rights Leader?

Before reading this story, would you have considered Jackie Robinson a civil-rights leader? Would you consider him a civil-rights leader now? Explain your answers.

Jackie Robinson was an "independent" when it came to politics. Did that help, hurt or not make a difference in the standing he maintained with leaders across the political divide? Explain your answer.

Provide your assessment of Jackie Robinson's contributions not just to baseball, and the breaking of the "color line," but to American life in general.

Media Stream



Jackie Robinson - Brooklyn Dodgers Star

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Jackie-Robinson-Brooklyn-Dodgers-Star>



Jackie and Rachel Robinson with Their Three Children

Photo of the Robinson family, in 1956, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Jackie-and-Rachel-Robinson-with-Their-Three-Children>



Jackie Robinson - Baseball Hall of Famer

Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey - on July 20, 1962 - celebrating Robinson's induction into the Hall of Fame. Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Jackie-Robinson-Baseball-Hall-of-Famer>



CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

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Jackie Robinson - What's My Line?

Clip from November 1969 episode of "What's My Line," online courtesy YouTube.

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Jackie Robinson - Mini-Bio

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