

Jackie robinson

Sport & Tourism, Baseball



Jackie Robinson Jackie Robinson and integration are two phrases that cannot be segregated. Whether he liked it or not, he played the star role in the integration of society during the time that he played Major League Baseball with the Brooklyn Dodgers. His heroic journey that landed him in the Majors shows, “ how integration has come to baseball and how it can be achieved in every corner of the land” (Robinson 16). But this amazing triumph over the Jim Crow laws could only have been possible in New York as Robinson says, “ Cooperstown, New York, and Birmingham, Alabama, are both in the United States. In Cooperstown I had been the guest of honor in the company of three other new Hall of Famers: Bill McKechnie, Edd Roush and Bob Feller. In Birmingham I was ‘ that negrah who pokes his nose into other peoples’ puddin’” (14). Jackie Robinson was born in Cairo, Georgia on January 31, 1919 and was raised by his mother in Pasadena, California. He attended UCLA, where he was a baseball, basketball, football and track star. He played semi-professional football for a short time in an integrated league with the Honolulu Bears before being drafted into the army. He was honorably discharged in 1945 with the rank of second lieutenant. Robinson then started to play in the Negro National League and was eventually seen by a scout for the Brooklyn Dodgers. The scout brought Robinson to the attention of team president Branch Rickey, who wanted to try out his “ noble experiment” of integrating the Major League. The Major League was closed to black players at the time because no owners would sign a black man to their teams. Even a year after Robinson’s historic signing, the owners of the teams voted 15 to 1 (with Rickey dissenting) against integrating the league (Rampersad 160). Jackie Robinson, however, did sign a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers in

1945 and debuted in the Majors in April of 1947. He was only paid the league minimum of \$5, 000 a year. Although Jackie was finally signed with a Major League team, the discrimination didn't stop cold turkey and couldn't in some ways. It just wasn't realistically possible. For instance, Branch Rickey moved spring training for the Jim Crow South to the Caribbean, Cuba and Panama (Rampersad 160). Integration could only start in certain places such as Brooklyn, New York. The Dodgers got their name from the electric streetcars in Brooklyn that were so dangerous that people had to be skilled " dodgers" of them in order not to get run over. Why was Brooklyn the place that integration could occur? After World War Two, Brooklyn had transformed from a white-middle class population to a mix of blacks, Latinos and Jews. " About half of Brooklyn's population was Jewish; among the Dodger faithful, Jews were probably far more ready than any other major group, such as the Irish or the Italians, to identify with the fight against the Jim Crow embodied by Robinson" (Rampersad 220-221). Obviously, the Jews related to the blacks' plight against society's belittlement of them and the similar discriminations they both faced. Many of the Robinson's friends were Jewish, perhaps because " the Robinsons found Jews far more ready than other whites to accept them socially" (Rampersad 221). Jackie Robinson was able to live successfully in Brooklyn, and not only because he was a great athletic superstar but because he had many friends and supporters that didn't consider him an outsider. They let him live amongst them, supported him, and befriended him and his family. Rachel Robinson (Jackie's wife) sums it up by saying that, " We didn't think of them as Jewish, unless we were dealing with a specific organization. They were simply interesting people who

wanted to know us, just as we wanted to know them” (Rampersad 221). However, in some instances, the racism continued for Rachel if she wasn’t with Jackie. White waiters, if they didn’t know who she was, would be as rude to her as they were to other black customers (Rampersad 221). Perhaps it was only his stardom that eliminated some of the discrimination towards him. Possibly Jackie Robinson was effective in chipping away at the racial barriers that plagued America by playing in a formerly all-white league, living in a white neighborhood, and interacting with whites. These whites were now able to understand that blacks and whites are only different because of the pigment of their skin. Hell, he was the Most Valuable Player in 1949! He could, by no means, be considered inferior. Jackie was tremendously popular. He single handedly filled up stadiums wherever the Dodgers played. He brought in record crowds to many stadiums and caused scalpers to charge “World Series” prices for regular games. “Robinson’s popularity was not confined to blacks; white fans also stormed baseball arenas to view the new sensation” (Tygiel 197). He received so much fan mail that the team had to hire someone just to answer his letters. One such letter read, “Hi, Black Boy! Glad to read that you have arrived. Had good idea that you had the stuff and would make the grade. You are a credit to your race-the human race, son. Very glad to see you in the big leagues. Good luck. Sincerely: WHITE BOY” (Rampersad 171). Obviously, people came to see him because he was black and was playing a formerly all-white league but many also came to see him because he was a just superb baseball player. New York is where it all starts. It is a city of diversity, new ideas, and radical thought. Is New York the center of the universe? It just might be. Integration of Major League Baseball, and

by extension the whole American social culture, started here. “ Integration in baseball has already proved that all Americans can live together in peaceful competition” (Robinson 11). The “ noble experiment” of Branch Rickey obviously worked, probably even beyond his wildest dreams. Thank you Mr. Rickey and Mr. Robinson, from us all. Works Cited 1. Rampersad, Arnold. Jackie Robinson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997. 2. Robinson, Jackie. I Never Had It Made. As told to Alfred Duckett. New York: Putnam, 1972. 3. Robinson, Jackie. Baseball Has Done It. Ed. Charles Dexter. Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1964. 4. Robinson, Rachel, and Lee Daniels. Jackie Robinson, An Intimate Portrait. Ed. Sharon AvRutick. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996. 5. Tygiel, Jules. Baseball’s Great Experiment, Jackie Robinson and His Legacy. New York: Oxford, 1997.