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Jackie Robinson

An All-Around Athlete Who Broke
the Color Line in Baseball

by Dionna L. Mann
illustrated by E. L. Candrilli

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by

Dionna L. Mann

illustrated by *E. L. Candrilli*

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Note to the Reader:

When Jackie Robinson was growing up in a segregated United States, words like “Colored” and “Negro” were commonly used when referring to people of African ancestry. At the time, these words *by themselves* were not considered derogatory, although today their use may sound quite inappropriate to the modern ear. Young readers will find these words used herein within the names of organizations like The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Negro National [Baseball] League, both founded by African Americans of the day.

segregated: restricted based on race

ancestry: line of descent

derogatory: expressing a low opinion

1

Safe!

It's September 28, 1955. Game 1 of the World Series. Eighth inning. The Brooklyn Dodgers are up against the New York Yankees. The Yankees are ahead, 6 to 4. The Dodgers have two outs.

Frank Kellert with the Dodgers comes up to bat. Whitey Ford, the Yankees pitcher, pauses his windup. Why? Because Jackie Robinson is dancing between third and home. Robinson wants to steal a home run. It's something he's known for.

Ford lets the ball rip toward Kellert anyway. And it's all she wrote.

Jackie flies, at 25.3 feet per second, toward home.

Yogi Berra, the catcher, moves forward to catch Ford's pitch. He crouches over home, ready to tag Robinson out. But Robinson drops. He slides. He aims his toe for home, and . . .

Safe!

It was one of Robinson's best moments in baseball. It was a move that said, "I am coming for you. Just watch me. Never mind the odds. Never mind my achy knees and ankle."

For years to come, Berra shouted, "Robinson was out!" But Robinson was not out. He was safe, fair and square. The umpire—history, for that matter—had made the call.

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson broke the color line when he began playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Black men had not played on a major-league team since the late 1800s. That's because of a so-called gentlemen's agreement. This unwritten agreement was made between managers and owners of ball clubs and baseball organizations in the United States. It said that black American ballplayers were not allowed to play on the same team with white American ballplayers. And all major-league teams were all-white. It didn't matter if he was a great player. It didn't matter if he was a gentleman. It didn't matter if he was educated. It didn't matter if he was a sportsman. It didn't matter if he was a fellow human being. If the ballplayer had ancestry from Africa, he was not allowed on the team.

In the 1900s, this unequal treatment of black people,

umpire: a sports official who rules on plays

major-league: in the highest level of professional sports

known as segregation, was everywhere in the United States, not just in baseball. The so-called gentlemen's agreement was just one example of it. It was a visible sign that an invisible color line had been drawn throughout the United States by those in power. It was an outward sign of prejudice and racism.

But on that April day, Jackie was playing on that ball field with an all-white baseball team. A brave white manager had made sure of that. He placed Jackie on his team because Jackie deserved to be there—fair and square.



color line: a social or legal barrier based on skin color

prejudice: an opinion formed without knowledge or experience;
prejudgment

Still, many wanted Jackie to be out. They wanted him to stay with his “own kind.” But it was time for a man like Jackie to run ahead. It was time for a call to be made.

Jackie was *safe*!

Segregation in America

In America, from the 1850s to the 1960s, unfair state laws kept black and white children from attending the same schools. Public spaces like beaches and parks had signs that said they were only for white people. It was considered against the law for black people to use those public spaces. And yet, it was not against the law for hospitals, dentists, doctors, hairdressers, hotels, restaurants, and department stores to turn away black patients or customers. Black people could use public transportation, but they were expected to sit in the back of buses or in train cars marked for them, even if the front was empty. It was a very unfair time across the country. In response, black people had to set up their own communities to provide for their needs. Many of these communities thrived despite segregation.

Did You Know?

In many states across the nation, segregation laws and racist practices also had a negative impact on those of Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, and Native descent.

2

Born in Georgia

Jack “Jackie” Roosevelt Robinson was born on January 31, 1919, near the small town of Cairo, Georgia. His parents were Mallie Robinson (born McGriff) and Jerry Robinson. His parents gave him his middle name to honor Theodore Roosevelt, the twenty-sixth president of the United States. Roosevelt had died a few weeks before Jackie was born.

Mallie was one of fourteen children. Her parents, Edna McGriff (born Sims) and Washington McGriff, had been enslaved until the Civil War ended. Once freedom came, Mallie was able to attend a school for African American students through the sixth grade. So Mallie learned how to read and write. She then taught her father.

Jerry was the eldest child in a family of many children. He was handsome and charming. He and Mallie met at a Christmas party. Mallie’s parents didn’t like Jerry, but Mallie dated him anyway. Mallie and Jerry got married on November 21, 1909. They had five children. First came

Edgar in 1910. Then came Frank, followed by Mack, then Willa Mae, and finally, their youngest—Jackie, in 1919.

Jerry was a farmer on a plantation owned by James Madison Sasser. Jerry and Mallie lived in a tenant house on Sasser's land. It was a small place, but it was home. They worked the land as a way to pay the rent. That was a common labor practice in the South back then. Jackie's parents grew peanuts, cotton, corn, and sugarcane for Sasser. They took care of Sasser's hogs, chickens, horses, and cows. From sunup to sundown, they worked. But all the Robinsons got for all their hard work was a place to live, food scraps, and twelve dollars' worth of credit at the plantation store per month. To keep their family fed, Jackie's parents had to garden.

When Jackie was a baby, his mother grew tired of being treated unfairly. They were doing all the work on the farm and getting almost nothing for it. Mallie talked her husband into asking Sasser to let the Robinsons keep half of everything they grew. That way, they could sell their share of the crops and use the income for their family. Sasser agreed. He couldn't run the farm without her husband.

plantation: a large farm

tenant: someone who rents their home

credit: money available to spend

But having more money in his pocket was not good for Jerry. It steered him in the wrong direction. When Jackie was just a baby, Jerry told his wife he was going to visit his brother in Texas. But Jerry left for good and never returned to his wife and children.

Mallie's relatives stepped in to help her harvest Sasser's crops and sell her share for cash. But Mr. Sasser was not going to allow Mallie to live in his tenant house without her husband. A man was needed to care for the farm, or so Sasser thought. No matter, Mallie wanted to move anyway. With her share of Sasser's harvest, along with other savings, Mallie bought train tickets for herself and her children. They, like many black Americans at the time, were leaving the South for good. Mallie chose California.

The Great Migration

Throughout much of the 1900s, approximately six million black people moved from the South to northern and western parts of the country. They were seeking a better life away from the harsh racial conditions in the South. This mass movement came to be known as the Great Migration.

Jackie's family chose California because Mallie's half brother, Burton Thomas, lived and worked there. Burton told them that California was nothing like Georgia. It was

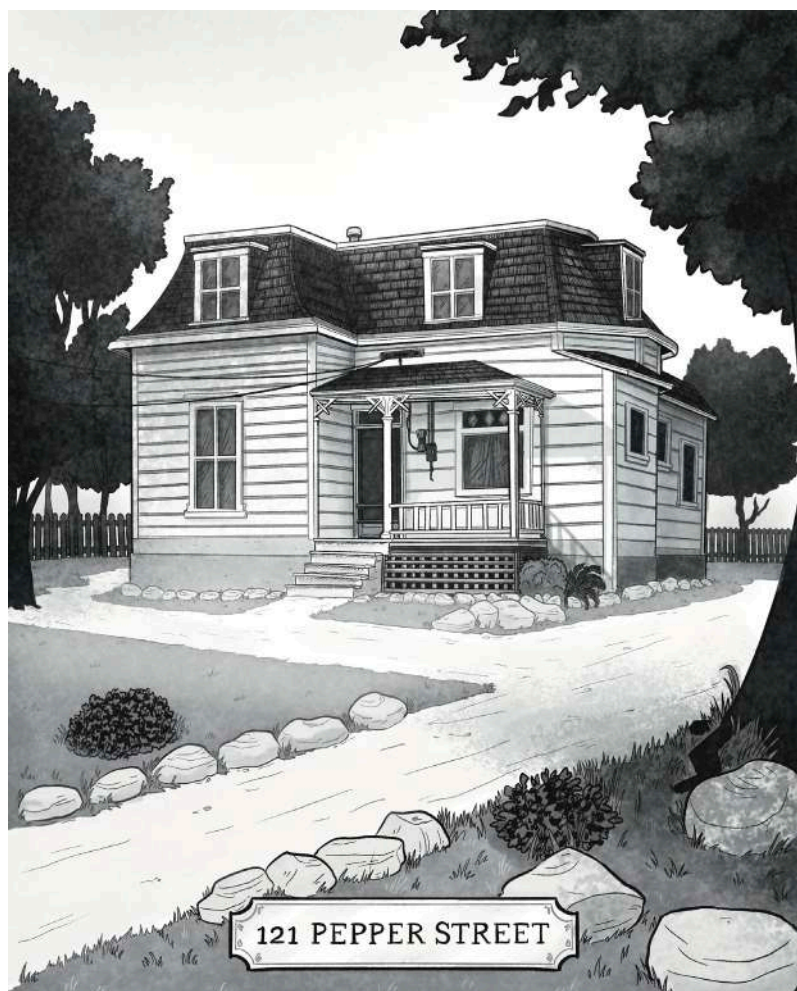
harvest: crops that have been gathered

more like paradise. Of course, prejudice and unfair laws were in California, too, but nothing like in the South. Mallie hoped her children could have a better, safer life in a sunny state full of mango groves.

One-year-old Jackie bumped along in the back of the train on Mallie's lap. His siblings, his mother's sister and her husband, his cousins, and a family friend were bumping along too.

When they arrived in California, Jackie's family shared Burton's three-bedroom apartment for a time. Jackie's aunt, who was not in the best health, looked after the children while the other adults found work. Mallie began cleaning, doing laundry, and cooking for different families. Eventually, she found a steady job doing domestic work for a well-off white family. She would go on to work for them, sunup to sundown, for the next twenty years. Mallie didn't have a lot to show for it, but it kept her children fed.

In 1922, Mallie and her sister's family put their savings together to purchase a two-story house. Once the money was paid, the five-bedroom, two-bathroom home at 121 Pepper Street in Pasadena, California, belonged to Jackie's family, and they moved right in. This upset the white families living in the neighborhood. They didn't want a black family on their block. Some tried to get Mallie's family to sell the house. One evening, someone burned a cross in their front yard. But Mallie stayed put.



She lived on Pepper Street for the next forty-five years.

The family called their new home “the castle.” Their lot had orange, apple, peach, and fig trees growing on it. Mallie and her sister grew a garden with vegetables and flowers. They had ducks, chickens, and turkeys. But it wasn’t paradise. Prejudice was all around.

Mallie taught her children that when responding to prejudice, they should repay unkindness with kindness. If her children got rightfully angry and did something mean in return, she'd make them apologize. She had her children wrap and deliver cookies and pastries to their most unfriendly neighbors. Mallie became known as a good-humored person with a big heart. Many in the neighborhood grew to love and respect her.

When times were hard for Jackie's family, sometimes all they had to eat were leftovers his mother brought home from work, or bread and sugar water. To help his mother out, Jackie would deliver papers, cut his neighbors' grass, and then give his earnings to her.

3

The Pepper Street Gang

When Jackie was a kid, he and some other children in his neighborhood formed a group called the Pepper Street Gang. The boys came from different backgrounds. There were African American, Japanese American, and Mexican American boys in the group. The gang of friends played street games. They chased rabbits near the field where the Rose Bowl stadium was being built. They raced each other. They played “Over the Line,” a kind of baseball with a homemade rag ball.



Other times, their fun turned into mischief. They threw firecrackers. They swiped fruit from vendors. They threw mud balls at passing cars. They hid in the bushes at the local golf course and waited for stray golf balls to land nearby. Then they'd grab them and sell them back to their owners!

One hot summer day, the Pepper Street Gang went swimming in a local reservoir. That was not allowed because it was the city's drinking water supply. They were splashing and swimming in the water when the police came. The police drew their guns, put the boys in police cars, and took them to jail. The police officers shouted terrible names at them. The boys were scared. In the end, the police let them go, and they weren't charged with anything. But it was likely the last time they swam in the reservoir.

In their own way, Jackie and his gang fought back against racism. If they went to the movies, they'd sneak down from the balcony and sit where only white people were supposed to sit. One day, Jackie and a friend sat at a lunch counter that didn't serve black people. The person taking the orders just ignored them at first. But the boys stayed and stayed until their order was finally taken.

vendors: sellers

reservoir: an artificial lake used to supply water to people

Another time, Jackie's gang put tar all over a mean man's lawn. They felt like they were getting even with him. He was always yelling terrible, racist things at them. But when Jackie's mother found out about the tar, she was angry. She called the boys' parents. She marched her son and all his friends down to the neighbor's house. She handed each boy a rag soaked in kerosene. She made the gang clean the tar off the mean man's grass. Then she had them use scissors to clip the tips off of any blades of grass that still had tar.

It was a lesson Jackie would remember for years to come: don't repay unkindness with unkindness.

Jackie also had male role models to point him down the right path. A mechanic in his neighborhood named Carl Anderson gave Jackie good advice about staying out of trouble. There was also Karl Downs. Downs was a minister at the church Jackie's family went to. His kindness and attention helped Jackie stay clear of Old Man Trouble, too.

The biggest thing that helped Jackie stay out of trouble was his love for sports. By the time he was in grade school, he was a great baseball player. All the kids

tar: a dark, sticky substance

kerosene: flammable oil used as fuel or solvent

minister: clergy member at a Protestant church

he went to school with—both black and white—loved to have Jackie on their team. Kids would offer him food from their lunch boxes to get him to play on their team during recess. Because Jackie played ball so well, he was earning the respect of all the kids—and getting “paid,” too!

Jackie's Schools

In the past, African American, Mexican American, Native American, Japanese American, and Chinese American children were not allowed to attend schools with white American children in many places in California. But when Jackie was a boy in Pasadena, the schools he attended were not segregated. All the way through college, Jackie and other black students attended class and played sports with their fellow white students.

4

Team Sportsman

As a preteen and teen, Jackie was an amazing all-around athlete. He was great at track and field. He led the way in baseball. He starred as a quarterback in football. He was the top scorer in basketball. Jackie could even play tennis well.

But Jackie wasn't all about shining the light on himself. He was a true sportsman. He helped his teammates at Washington Junior High School and John Muir Technical High School play better. If Jackie was on a team—be it football, baseball, basketball, or track and field—the team worked together to win titles and championships. In high school, Jackie earned four letters, the highest honor—one in every sport he played!

After high school, Jackie continued to shine. He attended Pasadena Junior College, which was also integrated. He dazzled as a baseball shortstop. He sparkled as a football quarterback. He glistened as a

track and field: sports events held on a running track or a field, such as running, jumping, or throwing

quarterback: a football player who leads the team's efforts to score

integrated: not segregated; involving people of different races

shortstop: a baseball player who defends the infield between second and third base

basketball starter. He glittered at the broad jump in track and field. He won the junior boys' singles championship in the annual Pacific Coast Negro Tennis Tournament. Jackie was on fire!

In the early morning of May 7, 1938, while at Pasadena Junior College, Jackie stepped onto a track in Claremont, California, and broke the national junior college record for the broad jump. Then he and a friend drove to Glendale, California, where Jackie's baseball team was playing in the Southern California junior college baseball championship. He arrived during the third inning to play shortstop. He helped his team snag a win, 5 to 3!

Jackie's batting average was .417 in twenty-four games. He had forty-three runs and twenty-five stolen bases. For his great ball playing, Jackie was crowned the 1938 Most Valuable Player (MVP) in all of Southern California junior college baseball! And he was chosen to play with a 1938 all-star junior college baseball team against the Chicago White Sox, a major-league team. Jackie played so well during the game that Jimmy Dykes, the White Sox manager, wanted to sign Jackie. But unfortunately for the White Sox, the team was sticking to the "gentlemen's agreement." It was all-white.

broad jump: a track-and-field competition to jump the farthest; also called long jump

Many California universities noticed how well Jackie played at the junior college level. They offered him athletic scholarships. He accepted a football scholarship to attend the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). And he did not disappoint. As their quarterback, he played like a flash of lightning. But that's not all.

While at UCLA, Jackie was also the Pacific Coast Conference's top basketball scorer—twice. He was named the MVP in West Coast Conference basketball. He won a national track-and-field title in the broad jump. And he became known as a superfast baseballer who could steal bases. Jackie earned four letters at UCLA, in four different sports. To this day, no other UCLA athlete has been able to do that.



athletic scholarships: money given to students to pay for their education in exchange for playing on a school's sports team

It was while he was attending UCLA that Jackie met Rachel Isum. Jackie remembered the day. He was a senior working in the student lounge. Ray Bartlett, Jackie's best friend, introduced them. Rachel was a first-year nursing student at UCLA. Jackie noticed that she was shy and smart. And he enjoyed talking to her. At first, Rachel was not interested in Jackie. She thought he was full of himself because he was a star athlete. But in the end, Rachel came to love Jackie's kind and gentle way. She loved how they could talk about anything. They started dating.

After three years playing for UCLA, Jackie's sports eligibility at the university ran out. Because he had already played at Pasadena for one year, he was only eligible to play for UCLA for three years. So Jackie decided to quit college, even though he only had one semester left to earn his degree. Rachel tried to convince him to stay, but his mind was made up. He was quitting and getting a job. His mother could use the extra money anyway.

But what type of job would he do? Even though he was a four-star player at UCLA, Jackie knew he couldn't play professional football. He knew he couldn't play on a major-league baseball team. He knew he couldn't play professional basketball. At that time, no professional leagues in the United States allowed black players.

Jackie didn't even consider trying out for a pro team. Instead, he decided to share his love for sports with young people and got a job at the National Youth Administration (NYA) in California. At the NYA, Jackie taught kids whose parents had little money how to play sports well. Jackie loved his job. But not long after he started working, the NYA shut down in California. What would he do now?

Jackie was invited to play football with the Honolulu Bears in Hawaii. It was an integrated semiprofessional team that paid \$100 a game. Jackie had landed his first paying job playing sports! The only problem was that the team only played a few games in their six-month season. So Jackie got a second job working at a construction company during the week.

In December, Jackie wanted to be with his family in California and see Rachel over the holidays. So he boarded a big boat, a steamer called the SS *Lurline*. While at sea, on December 7, 1941, the *Lurline* got an SOS from a cargo ship called the SS *Cynthia Olson*. It was being attacked! A torpedo from a Japanese submarine had blasted through it! The ship was sinking fast! Then more news. Hawaii's Pearl Harbor was being bombed by Japanese airplanes! And the *Lurline* was not far from where the *Olson* was being attacked.

submarine: a vessel that can travel underwater

The skipper of Jackie's ship got orders from U.S. Navy headquarters in Hawaii: Black out the ship's windows and portholes with paint or blackout curtains. Lights out on deck after dark. Keep radio silence. And zigzag as fast as they can toward the nearest port, full speed ahead!

Jackie and the rest of the passengers, 784 in all, must have trembled as they put on their life jackets. Would a Japanese sub surface and torpedo them? If it did, would the *Lurline's* passengers make it into lifeboats before the huge ship sank? Would someone rescue them from the lifeboats before they died of thirst? Thankfully, the *Lurline* made it back to the U.S. mainland without being attacked. And so did Jackie.

The United States government responded to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in many ways. It entered World War II. And it called all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to serve in the U.S. Army, Navy, and Marines. Jackie did not return to Hawaii to play with the Bears. He was drafted into the United States Army on April 3, 1942.

torpedo: attack with underwater weapons

A Double Victory?

About 1.2 million black American men and women served in every branch of the U.S. armed forces during World War II. They were nurses, engineers, truck drivers, gunners, pilots, paratroopers, marines, and more. These soldiers, officers, and support staff bravely served. They were willing to give up their lives for a country they loved. And yet they faced racism and prejudice in the camps and communities where they were stationed. Many enlistees wore pins with a double V because they hoped their military service would prove to be a double victory: one over the Nazis in Europe, and one over racism at home.

gunners: soldiers who operate guns

paratroopers: soldiers who jump from airplanes with parachutes

enlistees: people who sign up for the armed forces

5

Move On Back

Jackie was twenty-three years old when he began basic training at Fort Riley, Kansas. He was assigned to a black army unit as a private. Back then, it was rare for black Americans to rise to a place of command in the U.S. military. But on June 25, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had passed Executive Order 8802, which banned discrimination in the defense industry. No longer could the military refuse to give an enlistee a particular job because of their race, religion, or ethnic background.

Did You Know?

President Harry S. Truman ordered the U.S. military to totally desegregate in 1948.

Now, Jackie and other black American men could take an exam to be an officer. Jackie and several others passed the exam. But the invitation to attend Officer Candidate School did not come. Someone in authority was not following the president's order.

Jackie decided to ask a fellow black enlistee at Fort Riley for help: Joe Louis, the heavyweight boxing

champion of the world. Louis made some calls to a lawyer from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He also called some higher-ups in the government. Pretty soon, Jackie and the others who had passed the exam were enrolled in the school to become officers.

On January 28, 1943, Jackie got his rank as a second lieutenant. The army made him a platoon leader and morale officer at Fort Riley. As a morale officer, Jackie wanted to use his post to make changes for black soldiers. He knew their willingness to fight and do their best would improve if they were treated fairly. Jackie was able to get those in charge to make one small change at a post exchange snack area. Now there would be more seating for black soldiers and their family members. For Jackie, that was a victory, even though a small one.

Jackie also tried to get his post commanders to integrate the military sports teams at Fort Riley. But they wouldn't even let him try out for the baseball team. They said he could play football, but they admitted that he would not be able to play if the other team refused to compete against a black player. Jackie was discouraged. Why should he join a football team if he couldn't even play in a game? Jackie did not join the team.

platoon: a military unit

morale: the enthusiasm, confidence, and well-being of people in a group

post exchange: an army store that sells items, including services, to military personnel and their families

In 1944, Jackie was moved to a post in Fort Hood, Texas, and assigned to be a platoon leader of the 761st Tank Battalion. This was an all-black unit that would join the fight against the Nazis, starting in Normandy, France.

Before Jackie could go overseas to serve with his unit, he had to have his ankle checked. He had injured it when playing football a few years before. He boarded a bus to make his way to the hospital. He sat down beside a friend's wife. She was black, but because she had lightly colored skin, she was sometimes mistaken as white. Jackie began telling her all about his ankle. The bus driver, who was from the segregated South, glared at Jackie. In this prejudiced man's mind, Jackie, a black man, was talking in a much-too-friendly manner to a white woman. The bus driver got so angry that he demanded that Jackie get up and move to the back of the bus. Jackie refused and kept talking to his friend's wife.

After all, the bus was on military grounds, and Jackie believed no soldier on an army bus should be ordered by a civilian to sit in the back. Jackie also believed the law was on his side. In just a few days, in fact, segregation on military base buses would be against the law. But the bus driver didn't care about any of that. He raged as Jackie

assigned: chosen for a job

civilian: someone not in the military



ignored his demands to move to the back of the bus.

At the end of the line, the bus driver called the military police. He had Jackie arrested for causing him trouble. The military officers took Jackie to their headquarters. When he got there, the man in charge began to question him. The military officer's civilian secretary kept interrupting. Why didn't he move? That was how they did things down south.

Jackie didn't like being questioned by a civilian. And he was not sorry for refusing to move. He knew he was right, and he stood up for himself. But that made the officer in charge angry. He called Jackie racist names. Jackie did not back down, and the conversation got heated.

The questioning officer got so angry that he said Jackie was guilty of breaking military laws. He charged Jackie with refusing to obey a commanding officer. He accused Jackie of not conducting himself like an officer. Jackie faced being court-martialed. If found guilty, he could get kicked out of the military without any honor! He might even have to go to a military jail!

Jackie wrote letters to the highest people in the military. One of his fellow officers contacted the NAACP. Word got out that this fine UCLA athlete from California was being mistreated. The nation would know about it too. The army decided to assign Jackie three good men to defend him. The trial began. Witnesses were called. Jackie's commanding officer, who was white, even spoke as a character witness. He told the court about Jackie's fine character and leadership abilities. In the end, the truth about the matter came to light. All could see that Jackie's court-martial had racism at its roots. The court said Jackie was innocent of all charges.

By the time the trial was over, Jackie's unit was no longer in Texas. They were about to leave for France. But Jackie did not push to rejoin the 761st Tank Battalion.

court-martialed: brought to trial in a military court

character witness: someone who gives evidence about a person's moral and ethical qualities

His heart was no longer in the fight. He asked the army if he could be discharged. A few months later, on November 4, 1944, Jackie was given an honorable discharge. The army said it was granted because of his ankle. But most historians believe that the military let Jackie go because he was too outspoken.

The 761st Tank Battalion

The men of the 761st Tank Battalion went on to receive seven Silver Stars, 246 Purple Hearts, and a Congressional Medal of Honor. Many men in the unit lost their lives fighting for their country.

6

Let's Play Ball!

What would Jackie do to make a living now that he was out of the army? After all, he wanted to settle down and marry Rachel. And he wanted to help his mom out, too. How could he support them? For a little while, he coached basketball at Sam Houston State College. But his real job came in 1945, when he decided to try out for the Kansas City Monarchs, a member of the Negro American League.

Leagues to Call Their Own

As baseball became organized in the United States, teams with black ballplayers found themselves barred from joining the National Association of Base Ball Players and its successors, the American League, National League, and International League. And so, as early as 1890, owners and managers of all-black clubs organized themselves so their teams could compete against each other. In 1920, Rube Foster, a great black ballplayer, manager, and club owner, formed the Negro National League. Other black leagues followed.

The Kansas City Monarchs

The Monarchs were a winning baseball team with the Negro Leagues. Their lineup included amazing baseball players. There was Barney "Bonnie" Serrell, who was a top hitter and middle infielder. Serrell played defense so well that his teammates called him the "Vacuum Cleaner." Also on the team was an amazing pitcher named Leroy "Satchel" Paige. Paige gave his pitches nicknames like the Two-Hump Blooper, the Trouble Ball, the Bee-Ball, and Long Tom. And there was Hilton Smith, another lights-out pitcher who brought the win in for the team.

Negro League players were fast and daring, and they took chances. They made baseball fun to watch. They packed the stands with fans. Would Jackie be good enough to play with such baseball greats? Would he make the cut to play on a Negro League team? Of course he did! Jackie could play baseball as well as anyone. Frank Duncan, the Kansas City Monarchs manager, signed Jackie right away. He would play shortstop.

As soon as the 1945 season began, Jackie went to work adding his own stardust to the Monarchs. He became the team's top hitter. He made exciting plays on the field. His base running was top-notch. And he had great defensive skills, too. That year, the Kansas City Monarchs' record was 52–41–3, and they ranked second in the Negro American League!

middle infielder: a baseball player who defends the infield at either second base or the shortstop position between second and third base

After his regular season ended with the Monarchs, Jackie headed back to California. To make some extra cash during the winter, he joined Chester “Chet” Brewer’s Kansas City Royals. These Royals were a California Winter League team. The Winter League hosted barnstorming games with the best black ballers from different Negro League clubs. Those teams played against the best white ballers from different major-league clubs. The winning team’s players got cash payouts.



barnstorming games: games played on tour, usually in rural areas or small towns, that don't affect league rankings

But what about settling down with Rachel? Could Jackie support her and a family by playing ball? Jackie's salary playing baseball with the Monarchs was about four hundred dollars a month, which wasn't bad at a time when a loaf of bread cost about nine cents, but it wasn't a lot either. But Jackie's baseball salary was about to get a whole lot better, and so was his chance to marry Rachel.

On-the-Road Challenges

Playing with the Negro Leagues had its challenges. For one thing, it was a tough schedule. The teams spent weeks away from home. In hot buses, they zigzagged across the country through states where Jim Crow laws made life difficult. Restaurants and diners along the way would not allow the players to eat inside. Some would not serve them at all. Hotels and motels would not let them rent rooms. Gas stations along the way would not even let them use the bathroom. Jackie told one southern gas station attendant that they would not fill up the team's bus tank unless they could use the bathroom. That would mean a big loss of money for the gas station. So the man allowed the players to use the bathroom.

7

Mr. Rickey Finds His Man

While Jackie played with the Monarchs, Wesley Branch Rickey, manager of the all-white Brooklyn Dodgers, had his eye on him. Rickey was the manager of two teams—the Montreal Royals in Quebec, Canada, a minor-league team with the International League; and the Dodgers, a fan-favorite major-league team with the National League. Neither team had any black players on it. At the time, none of the minor, international, or major leagues were integrated.

Many felt this segregation of American life was wrong. Rickey was one of them. He was a religious man who believed all humans are equal before God. He thought the best ballplayers had the right to play baseball on the same team. Never mind if a person had an ancestor from Africa. So Rickey planned to do something about the color line.

Of course, Rickey knew quite a few people in the United States who supported the division between black and white players in baseball. They would not support the idea of integrating it. So Rickey kept his plan to integrate the Brooklyn Dodgers under wraps. He made a cover story to keep it secret.

Rickey told the newspapers that he was going to form a new league for black ballplayers. He said it would be called the United States Negro Baseball League. He said he would form his own team of all-black players to play in the league. They would be called the Brown Dodgers. True, he did form those two things. But really, Rickey was on the lookout for a great black ballplayer who would be brave enough to cross the color line. Rickey wondered if Jackie was his man. Rickey sent Clyde Sukeforth, his scout, to seek Jackie out. Jackie was in Chicago with the Kansas City Monarchs.

After watching Jackie play, Clyde called him over. Clyde told Jackie that Rickey wanted to meet him to talk about the Brown Dodgers. But Jackie soon learned the truth. When he met Rickey in his Brooklyn office, Rickey shared his plan with Jackie: one day, Jackie would play for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

But before signing him, Rickey wanted to know: Could Jackie handle being the first black American in

sixty years to play professional baseball on an all-white team? Could he stay calm if people shouted racist names? Would he start fighting if a white pitcher threw a ball at his head? What if an angry white ballplayer aimed his cleats at his leg when sliding into a base—on purpose? Would Jackie be able to keep his cool?

Rickey believed his experiment to integrate baseball would fail if the player he chose for the Brooklyn Dodgers fought back. If Jackie couldn't handle the racist storm that was sure to come, Rickey would find someone else.

What did Jackie think? Could he promise to hold in the desire to fight back? Jackie promised. He would not repay unkindness with unkindness. He would stand up for what was right in the best way he knew how: by playing his best.

And so, Rickey offered Jackie a contract. On October 23, 1945, Jackie signed it. But he wouldn't be playing for the all-white Brooklyn Dodgers just yet.

cleats: studs attached to the bottom of a shoe to prevent slipping, or shoes with such studs

contract: legal agreement



8

Show 'Em What You Got, Jackie!

Jackie must have been excited about his new opportunity to play ball on a team managed by Rickey. But he wasn't going to sit around and wait for spring training with Rickey's team to start. Jackie had been invited to play in a baseball championship in Venezuela. And he was ready to go!

Venezuela had invited an all-star black American team to play a contest against the top team from Caracas, the nation's capital, and an all-star team from the Caribbean. It was the first contest of its kind in that country. Everyone in Venezuela was excited to see the all-star team from America in action. And Jackie's team was ready to show the country what they could do.

By the end of that 1945 winter tour, Jackie's team had won twelve out of fourteen games! They had smashed it, and the crowds loved watching them.

On February 10, 1946, after Jackie returned home from Venezuela, he and Rachel got married. And it was not a moment too soon. It was time for Jackie to break through the color line. Jackie would need Rachel's love and support to get him through the tough times. Their honeymoon would be spent in Florida, where Jackie would soon begin spring training with the Montreal Royals.

Life with "Rae"

In the beginning of Jackie's career, Rachel, whom Jackie called Rae, traveled everywhere with him. Rickey knew Jackie would need Rae's support to keep his spirit strong, so he made arrangements for her to travel with Jackie. Jackie always said that he could not have broken the color line in baseball without Rachel's love and support. He and Rachel had three children together: Jackie Robinson Jr., Sharon, and David. Jackie and Rachel were a strong, supportive couple for twenty-six years, until Jackie's death in 1972.

Even though the Montreal Royals were based in Canada, several of the players did not want Jackie on their team because he was black. Unfortunately, segregation laws and racism affected black people in this country, too, though not as much as in the United States. But Rickey let the team know that if the guys wanted to get paid, they had to play with Jackie.

The Robinson's French Neighbors in Quebec

Rachel and Jackie felt welcome in Canada's French province of Quebec, where Montreal is located. Their white neighbors, who spoke French, treated them with respect and human kindness. They invited Rachel to tea. Women made maternity clothes for her. Kids volunteered to carry her groceries. Jackie played so well with the Montreal Royals that the fans loved him. They often shouted his name over and over again from the stands. Both Jackie and Rachel remembered their time living in Montreal with fondness.

Jackie's Roomies

In 1946, Rickey signed two black ballplayers besides Jackie to play for the Montreal Royals. Their names were John Wright and Roy Partlow. Both were pitchers with blazing hot fastballs and sharp-breaking curveballs. Rickey signed Wright first, then Partlow after Wright changed teams. Both men were Jackie's roommates when they traveled away from home to play games.

On April 18, 1946, in New Jersey's Roosevelt Stadium, Jackie stepped out in his Montreal Royals number 9 jersey for his first game. Many of the fifty-two thousand fans booed and called Jackie racist names when he stepped onto the field to play. But many more shouted in excitement when Jackie made a good play for the team. One of the best plays Jackie made that day was a three-run homer.

George "Shotgun" Shuba, one of Jackie's teammates,

offered a “well done” handshake in front of everyone as Jackie crossed home plate. No one asked Shuba to offer his hand. He did it because he believed it was the right thing to do. Jackie had made a good play. He deserved that handshake. That kindness was later called the handshake of the century.

Jackie performed very well with the Montreal Royals that year—so well, in fact, that the team ended the season as International League champions. Those on the team who at first didn’t want to play ball with him had to admit it: Jackie was a great player and a true gentleman. But remember, Rickey’s real plan was to have Jackie break the color line in the major leagues. And so, during spring training for the 1947 season, Jackie went from playing with the Royals to playing with the Brooklyn Dodgers. The change took place while both teams were training in Havana, Cuba.

When the Dodgers got wind of Jackie coming to play on their team, they were not happy. They decided to sign a petition saying they would refuse to play on the same team with Jackie. But when Rickey heard about it, he stepped in. He let his white players know that Jackie would be on their team—*his* team—with or without them. If they didn’t like it, Rickey would arrange to have them traded to another team.

petition: a written request signed by many people

traded: sent to a different team in exchange for another player from that team

And so, on April 15, 1947, Jackie stepped out onto Ebbets Field wearing his Dodgers uniform, jersey number 42. Just like Rickey had planned, Jackie Robinson was breaking the major-league color line, and 26,623 people were in the stands to witness it.

Jackie's team won that first official game he played with the Dodgers, and it only got better from there. In his first season, Jackie played in 151 games, had a .297 batting average, scored 125 runs, and stole twenty-nine bases—a National League best. The numbers spoke for themselves. That year, Jackie won the first ever Rookie of the Year award. Two years later, he was named the league's MVP. His career was off and running.



Rookie of the Year: a sports award for the best new player in a league

9

Jackie Saves the Day

It was 1951. The last Sunday in September. A Philadelphia ballpark. The air was charged with excitement. The stands were packed to record-breaking levels. It was poised to be a day to remember for thirty-two-year-old Jackie and the Brooklyn Dodgers.

It was the last day of the season, and the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants were tied for the best record in the National League. The pennant would be decided by each team's final game. The Giants were playing the Braves in Boston, and the Dodgers were playing the Phillies in Philadelphia. For the Dodgers to win the pennant, they needed to win their game, and the Giants would have to lose theirs. As the Dodgers gave it their all in Philadelphia, they'd be anxiously watching the score of the Giants–Braves game.

Jackie was ready to give it his all.

In Boston, the Giants were winning late in the game. In Philadelphia, it was the fifth inning, and the Dodgers were down by three runs. Jackie stepped up to the plate. *Pow!* He batted a triple! The Dodgers were back in the game.

pennant: a flag awarded for winning a championship, or the championship itself

As the Giants clinched the win in Boston, the Dodgers and Phillies battled it out in Philadelphia. Late in the game, the Dodgers pulled even with the Phillies. After that, it seemed like it was one strikeout after the next as both teams relied heavily on their ace pitchers. The teams stayed tied as the game went into extra innings. In the bottom of the twelfth, the Phillies had the bases loaded and were one run away from winning.

Eddie Waitkus with the Phillies came up to bat. *Whack!* He hit a line drive! It flew in a straight line, close to the ground, right past second base. Jackie, who was playing second base, dove toward the speeding ball. He stretched his body, reaching out with his gloved left hand, and landed hard, knocking the wind out of him. But there was Eddie's ball, sitting snug in Jackie's glove. The game was forced into more innings.

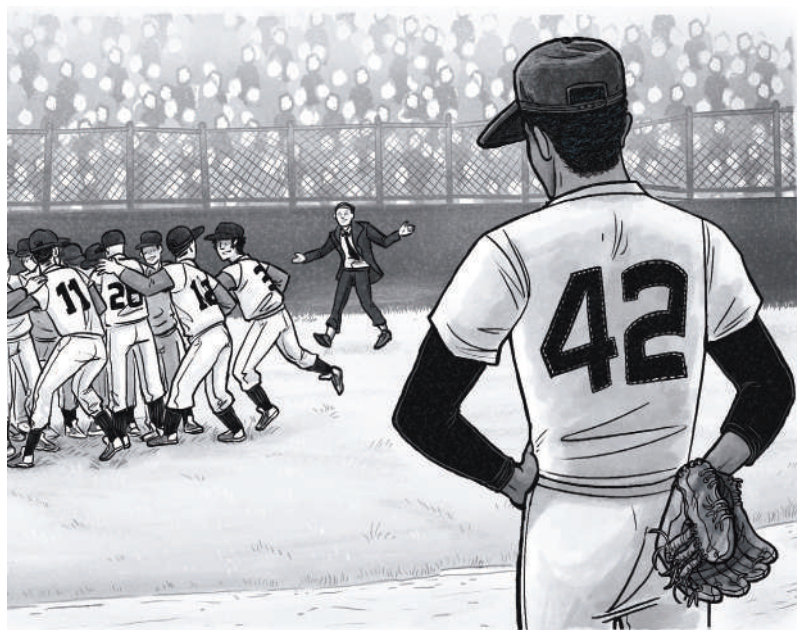
The Dodgers were struggling to break the tie. Robin Roberts, the Phillies' pitcher, was a formidable force. In the fourteenth inning, he easily struck out the first two Dodgers batters. Then the coach sent Jackie up to bat. Roberts let the ball rip. *Bam!* Jackie hit a homer off of Roberts's fastball! The Dodgers won the game, 9 to 8! The Dodgers were still tied with the Giants for the pennant, but thanks to Jackie, they had a chance.

strikeout: an out caused by a batter getting three strikes

extra innings: periods of play added after the first nine innings in order to break a tie

The 1951 National League pennant would have to be decided by a tiebreaker: a head-to-head matchup between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants. It was a nail-biting three-game competition between two rival teams. The Dodgers gave the Giants a run for their money. It seemed like they might just win, until . . .

At the very last minute, Bobby Thomson of the Giants whacked the ball for a home run, winning the game. Only one team won the pennant, but two men went down in history: Bobby Thomson, for his “Shot Heard ‘Round the World,” the most famous home run in baseball history; and Jackie Robinson, for the catch that made that moment possible.



10

The All-Around All-Star

Jackie's career was a storied one. The 1951 pennant tiebreaker loss may have made history, but the Dodgers won six pennants in Jackie's ten seasons on the team. In 1955, they won the World Series.

As Jackie got older, it became harder and harder for him to play ball. His heart was not doing well. His ankle was hurting. His legs were hurting. He had blood sugar problems. Everyone could see that his body was growing tired. His spirit to play was dimming. Rachel could see it. Still, he gave his all and made bursts of baseball magic happen on the field.

After Branch Rickey retired, the executives with the Brooklyn Dodgers decided to trade Jackie to the New York Giants. But Jackie had already decided to leave baseball. He played his last baseball game on October 10, 1956—game 7 of that year's World Series—and he had played it as a Dodger.

Although he had retired, Jackie's fans were not about to forget him. Everywhere he went, people asked him for his autograph. They wanted to take his photograph.

executives: people who manage an organization

News people wanted to know his opinion about things. And in 1962, Jackie became the first black player to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Even off the field, Jackie tried to make a difference. He used his popularity to support the civil rights movement to end racial discrimination and segregation across the United States. He wrote opinion pieces about how the nation could overcome racism. He campaigns for who he thought would make a good president. He marched, gave speeches, and became a trusted adviser to Martin Luther King Jr., one of the most important leaders of the movement. King even said he would not have succeeded if Jackie had not broken the color line in baseball.

Jackie's success did not end after baseball. He had a men's clothing store that he called "Uptown New York's most complete men's store." He starred in a movie about his own life story that hit the big screen in 1950. In 1957, he became the first black vice president of a major American corporation when he was hired for the position at Chock Full o'Nuts, a coffee and café company. In 1964, he co-founded the Freedom National Bank in New York City with Dr. Dunbar Simms McLaurin, a black American lawyer. The bank served black people who were turned

inducted: added as a member

campaigns: took part in activities designed to convince people to vote for someone

corporation: a business that is legally separate from its owners

away by other banks when they needed a loan. In 1970, he began the Jackie Robinson Construction Company, which built houses for families with low incomes. In 1972, Jackie published his autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*.

It would be his final inning.

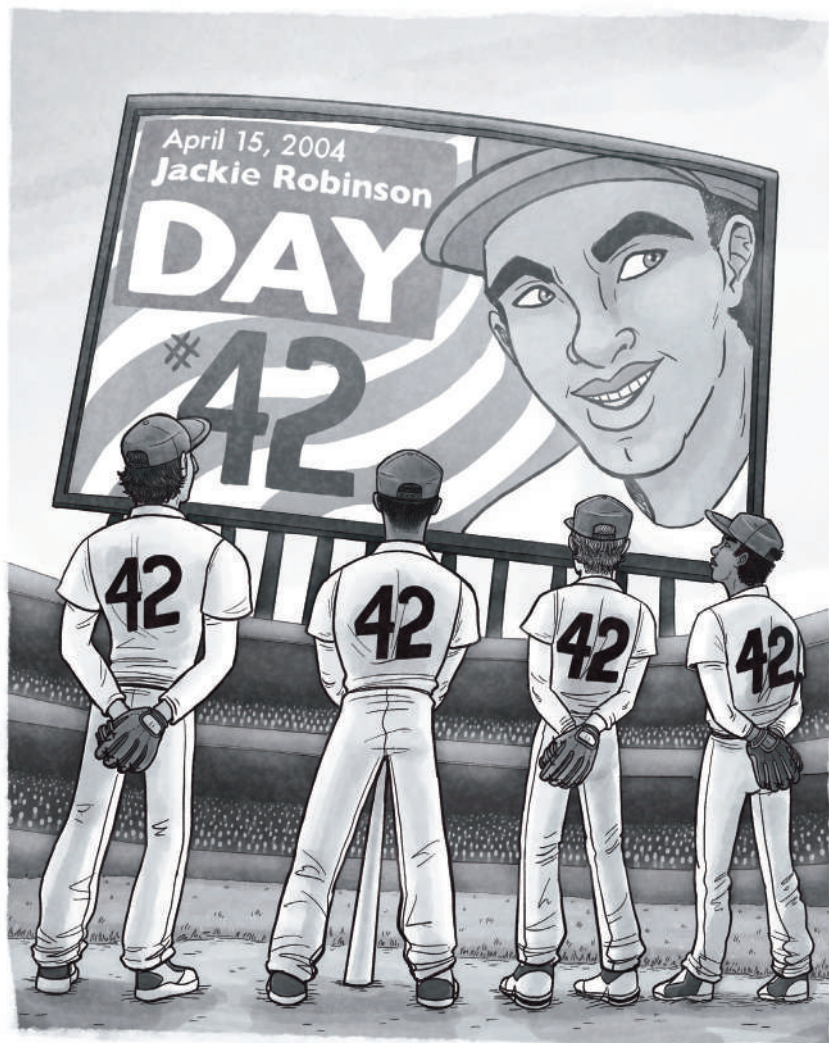
On October 24, 1972, Jackie died at home of a heart attack. Rachel, as always, was there by his side. He was only fifty-three years old.

To this day, people remember Jackie. He was the brave gentleman who, on April 15, 1947, crossed the color line of the major leagues and never looked back. On the fiftieth anniversary of that historical moment, for the first time in Major League Baseball history, a ballplayer's jersey number was retired from all major-league teams: Jackie's number 42. Jackie Robinson, an all-around athlete, gentleman, and sportsman, is *safe* in American history.

Honoring Jackie

Schools, parks, ballparks, and stadiums have been named after Jackie Robinson. At Dodgers Stadium in Los Angeles, there is an eight-hundred-pound bronze statue of Jackie sliding home like he did during game 1 of the 1955 World Series.

Even though Jackie's number is retired, sometimes an entire team will wear the number 42 in his honor. It's a way of saying, We remember you, Jackie Robinson, and all that you did.



Jackie Robinson's Major League* Baseball Stats

Primary Player Position	Second baseman, No. 42
Primary Team	Brooklyn Dodgers
Games Played	1,416
Runs Scored	972
Hits	1,563
Batting Average	.313
Stolen Bases	200
Bats	Right
Throws	Right
Doubles	286
Triples	55
RBI	761
Home Runs	141
OPS	.887

* Because the Negro Leagues are now recognized as a major league, Jackie's stats include those while playing with the Kansas City Monarchs.

Timeline: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Professional Baseball

1867	<p>The National Association of Base Ball Players refuses to admit any club with a black player.</p> <p>A “gentlemen’s agreement” bars black players from any professional club with white players.</p>
1886	A black southern league organizes ten teams to compete against one another.
1887	The International League bans its clubs from signing contracts with black players.
1889	Black player Moses “Fleetwood” Walker resigns from a professional white baseball team because of growing racial hostility.
1920	<p>Rube Foster forms the Negro National League.</p> <p>The Negro Southern League is formed.</p>
1924	The first Colored World Series is played between the eastern and midwestern champions of the Negro Leagues.
1937	The Negro American League is founded.
1946	Jackie Robinson integrates Rickey’s International League team, the Montreal Royals.
1947	<p>Jackie Robinson integrates Rickey’s major-league team, the Brooklyn Dodgers.</p> <p>Jackie Robinson is chosen as the National League’s Rookie of the Year.</p>

JACKIE ROBINSON

1949	Black players Roy Campanella, Larry Doby, Don Newcombe, and Jackie Robinson are invited to play in an all-star game with white players. Jackie Robinson is chosen as the National League's Most Valuable Player (MVP).
1960	The Negro American League ends.
2020	Major League Baseball recognizes seven Negro Leagues as major leagues.

National Baseball Hall of Fame inductees who played in or managed a Negro League club

Baseball Great	Birth Year	Year In-ducted	Primary Team	Primary Position
Jackie Robinson	1919	1962	Brooklyn Dodgers	Second baseman
Roy Campanella	1921	1969	Brooklyn Dodgers	Catcher
Satchel Paige	1906	1971	Kansas City Monarchs	Pitcher
Josh Gibson	1911	1972	Homestead Grays	Catcher
Buck Leonard	1907	1972	Homestead Grays	First baseman
Monte Irvin	1919	1973	Newark Eagles	Left fielder
Cool Papa Bell	1903	1974	St. Louis Stars	Center fielder
Judy Johnson	1899	1975	Hilldale Daisies	Third baseman
Oscar Charleston	1896	1976	Pittsburgh Crawfords	Center fielder
Ernie Banks	1931	1977	Chicago Cubs	Shortstop
Martín Dihigo	1905	1977	Cuban Stars	Pitcher
Pop Lloyd	1884	1977	New York Lincoln Giants	Shortstop
Willie Mays	1931	1979	San Francisco Giants	Center fielder
Rube Foster	1879	1981	Chicago American Giants	Executive
Hank Aaron	1934	1982	Milwaukee Braves	Right fielder
Ray Dandridge	1913	1987	Newark Eagles	Third baseman
Leon Day	1916	1995	Newark Eagles	Pitcher
Bill Foster	1904	1996	Chicago American Giants	Pitcher
Willie Wells	1905	1997	St. Louis Stars	Shortstop
Larry Doby	1923	1998	Cleveland Indians	Center fielder

JACKIE ROBINSON

Bullet Rogan	1893	1998	Kansas City Monarchs	Pitcher
Joe Williams	1885	1999	New York Lincoln Giants	Pitcher
Turkey Stearnes	1901	2000	Detroit Stars	Center fielder
Hilton Smith	1907	2001	Kansas City Monarchs	Pitcher
Ray Brown	1908	2006	Homestead Grays	Pitcher
Willard Brown	1915	2006	Kansas City Monarchs	Center fielder
Andy Cooper	1897	2006	Kansas City Monarchs	Pitcher
Frank Grant	1865	2006	Cuban Giants	Executive
Pete Hill	1882	2006	Chicago American Giants	Center fielder
Biz Mackey	1897	2006	Hilldale Giants	Catcher
Effa Manley	1897	2006	Newark Eagles	Executive
José Méndez	1885	2006	Kansas City Monarchs	Pitcher
Alex Pompez	1890	2006	New York Cubans	Executive
Cumberland Posey	1890	2006	Homestead Grays	Executive
Louis Santop	1889	2006	Hilldale Daisies	Catcher
Mule Suttles	1900	2006	Newark Eagles	First baseman
Ben Taylor	1888	2006	Indianapolis ABCs	First baseman
Cristóbal Torriente	1893	2006	Chicago American Giants	Center fielder
Sol White	1868	2006	Philadelphia Giants	Executive
J. L. Wilkinson	1878	2006	Kansas City Monarchs	Executive
Jud Wilson	1896	2006	Philadelphia Stars	Third baseman
Bud Fowler	1858	2022	Page Fence Giants	Executive
Minnie Miñoso	1923	2022	Chicago White Sox	Left fielder
Buck O'Neil	1911	2022	Kansas City Monarchs	Executive

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between prejudice and racism? Which one do you think is harder to overcome?
2. Do you think Mallie was glad that she moved from Georgia to California to raise her children as a single mother? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think home ownership was important to Mallie and her family?
4. Mallie taught her children to repay unkindness with kindness. Do you think that's a good rule to live by? Why or why not?
5. After college, Jackie didn't at first try out for the Negro Leagues. Why do you think that was the case?
6. Imagine you are a passenger on the SS *Lurline* on your way from Hawaii to California when Pearl Harbor is being bombed and submarines are sinking ships. Write a pretend letter to your parents expressing your feelings.

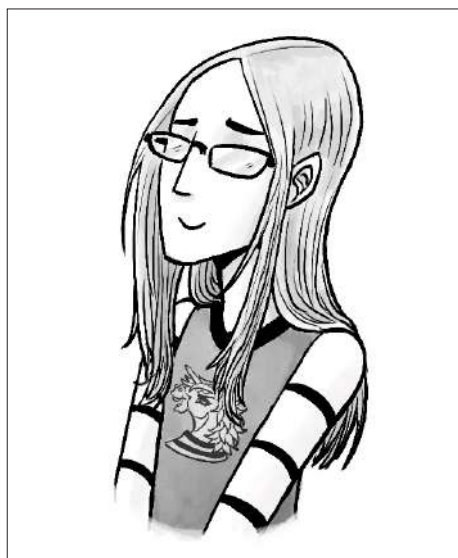
7. If you had been a black Army officer like Jackie and had been asked by a civilian bus driver to move to the back of the bus, but you believed it was against the law for the driver to ask that of you, would you have stayed in your seat or moved to the back anyway? Why or why not?
8. Why do you think Mr. Rickey believed that the black player he chose for his experiment to integrate baseball would fail if that player fought back against the racist attacks he was sure to receive? Do you think it was right of Mr. Rickey to expect that of Jackie? Why or why not? Why do you think Jackie went along with it for as long as he could?
9. Why do you think both black and white fans loved to watch Jackie play baseball and wanted his autograph even after he retired?
10. Do some research about the 1955 World Series when the Brooklyn Dodgers won. Write a pretend newspaper article detailing one of the games. Be sure to include Jackie's feats on the field.

Meet the Author



Dionna L. Mann is a children's book author of fiction and nonfiction. Her work has appeared in *Ladybug*, *Cricket*, and *Spider*. As a work-for-hire author, she's written for Scholastic, Lerner, Capstone, Sports Illustrated Kids, and other educational markets. Dionna loves discovering lesser-known individuals who shine within the margins of African-American history and sharing their stories with young readers. Dionna's debut novel, *Mama's Chicken and Dumplings*, was released from Margaret Ferguson Books, an imprint of Holiday House Books for Young Readers, on August 6, 2024. Find Dionna online at dionnalmann.com.

Meet the Illustrator



E. L. Candrilli (Erin to friends) is a comic artist and illustrator who loves to inject fun and personality into whatever she makes. She's done work for NBC, Marvel, tech startups, several indie studios and creators, and has worked on a variety of projects. From editorial illustrations, assets for tabletop games, character design, and visual novels to comics both self-published and commissioned, Erin is a passionate, versatile artist who is thoroughly enamored with visual storytelling.

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Title Page Illustration by

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Text Illustrations by

E. L. Candrilli / 3, 9, 11, 17, 25, 30, 35, 40, 43, 47

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