the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

Inside the Vault:
Highlights from the Gilder Lehrman Collection

May 29, 2020

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The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

• We are dedicated to improving K–12 history education while also serving the general public.
  • Educational programs
  • Online resources
  • Direct access to unique primary source materials
• The Gilder Lehrman Institute has more than 70,000 documents pertaining to American history from colonization through the end of the 20th century.
Richard Gilder, 1932 - 2020

Today’s session is dedicated to the memory of

Richard Gilder, co-founder of
The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

“A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.”

Jackie Robinson
**Gilder Lehrman Staff**

**Panelists**

- Sandy Trenholm – Collection Director
- Jason Butler, Professional Learning Facilitator, DeKalb County (Georgia) School District
- Taína Quiñones - Manager of Content Development, Jackie Robinson Museum

**Support**

- Allison Kraft – Assistant Curator
- Jennifer Jensen, Curator, Jackie Robinson Museum
The Jackie Robinson Museum will celebrate the enduring legacy of one of the most important Americans of the 20th century: Jackie Robinson as athlete, activist, entrepreneur, patriot, and family man.

The exhibitions are designed for students of all ages with an interest in learning sports and civil rights history while considering contemporary issues through the lens of Robinson’s legacy. Visitors will explore key moments of his life through narrative, digital interactives, media, and artifacts.

Invoking Robinson’s role as a champion for racial, social and economic equality, the Museum’s programming for children and adults will place an emphasis on dialogue around critical issues that continue to challenge our society and recognize Robinson’s relevancy in a 21st century world.
For Security

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How to Participate on PC or Mac

- In order to keep this a safe and secure meeting, your mic is automatically muted and your camera is automatically off.
- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature which can be found along the bottom of your screen.
Today’s Documents

- A comic book about Jackie Robinson’s rookie year
- Documents written by Richard Nixon and Robert Kennedy to Jackie Robinson about the Civil Rights Movement
Negro Heroes [No. 2], Jackie Robinson: Rookie of the Year
Calling All Young Americans!

Here’s the second issue of NEGRO HEROES that you have been waiting for. It is chock full of true stories of real heroes. It gives the inside story of how they became great people.

You start right off reading about Booker T. Washington, lawyer; Toussaint L’Ouverture, Haitian patriot; Mabel K. Bangs, dynamic nurse; Jackie Robinson, outstanding baseball player; Sadie T. M. Alexander, lawyer, champion of civil rights; actor Sugar Chile Robinson.

You will get a real thrill as you read about these people. Had you ever thought that Americans with colored skins had done so many of these things? Here they are before your very eyes. And these are just a few of the hundreds of stories of true heroes that could be told.

The National Urban League and the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority are very glad to be able to make it possible for NEGRO HEROES to come to you. You see, Delta Sigma Theta is a national sorority of college women who believe in you. They want every youth to know about all jobs and have an equal chance to be trained and hired on whatever job for which he can qualify. All this is a part of the sorority’s Job Opportunity Project.

And what the sorority is doing now is right in line with what the National Urban League has been plugging away on for over thirty-seven years, opening thousands of job opportunities for Negro Americans. It is the National Urban League that has led the way in offering vocational guidance to Negro youth. Now the two organizations have put their heads together to bring out this issue of the magazine.

Here’s hoping that you are going to enjoy reading it. But what is more, that you will get some ideas that will help you make up your mind to show your teachers, parents, and pals that you too, can be among the heroes in American life.

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The publishers of NEGRO HEROES are grateful to The Parents’ Institute, publishers of TRUE COMICS, for permission to use some of its features in preparation of NEGRO HEROES.

Gilder Lehrman Collection
Jackie Robinson, Rookie of the Year
Jack Roosevelt Robinson

- Born on January 31, 1919, in Cairo, Georgia, Jack was the son of a sharecropper and the grandson of formerly enslaved people.
- His middle name honored Theodore Roosevelt, who died a few weeks before Jack was born.
- After his father abandoned the family, his mother, Mallie Robinson, moved the family to Pasadena, California when Jack was a toddler.
- His mother bought a house in a white neighborhood.
Jack Roosevelt Robinson

• He was an excellent athlete in high school and played four sports: football, basketball, track, and baseball.

• At Pasadena City College, he was named the region's Most Valuable Player in baseball in 1938.

• From an early age, Robinson was outspoken on issues of race and equality.

• In 1936, Jack’s brother Mack was a member of the US Track & Field team at the 1936 Olympics. He won the silver medal in the 200 meter race.
Jackie Robinson at UCLA

- In 1939, Robinson transferred to UCLA.
- He became UCLA’s first four-sport letter winner for football, basketball, track & field, and baseball.
- The press began calling him Jackie.
- Robinson left college just shy of graduation.
2nd Lieutenant Jackie Robinson

- Drafted in April 1942
- At Fort Riley, Robinson befriended prizefighter Joe Louis.
- Robinson & Louis and attorney Truman Gibson challenged the Army to include African American soldiers in Officer Candidate School.
- They were successful and Robinson was commissioned a second lieutenant.
The Court Martial of Jackie Robinson

- In August 1944, he was arrested for sitting in the front of an Army bus next to a fair-skinned black woman who the driver thought was white.
- He was charged with violating Articles of War 63 and 64: "behaving with disrespect to a superior officer" and "willful disobedience of lawful command."
- 13 people testified against him and no one testified on his behalf.
- He was found not guilty.
- He was discharged later that year due to an ankle injury.
This second issue of NEGRO HEROES, like the first, comes to you full of honest-to-goodness true stories of Negro Americans who are real Champs. They are fighters! They are folks who kayoed everything that tried to stop them, and stood up winners. There’s never been anything like NEGRO HEROES! If you want additional copies for your friends, see reverse side.
Jackie Robinson & Branch Rickey

- Branch Rickey recruited Robinson to become the first African American to play with the all-white Dodgers' farm team, the Montreal Royals.
- Rickey told Robinson he was "looking for a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back."
- He also asked Robinson if he “had a girl.”
Making Jackie Robinson a hero

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Jackie Robinson’s Major League debut, 1947

- April 15, 1947: Robinson played his first game with the Brooklyn Dodgers, beginning an unparalleled career in baseball.
- In 1955, he helped the Dodgers beat the New York Yankees to win their first World Series Championship.
Rachel Isum

- Rachel Isum was born in Los Angeles on July 19, 1922.
- In 1940, she entered the nursing program at UCLA.
- During World War II, Rachel served with the Cadet Nurse Corps and worked at Lockheed Martin.
- Jackie and Rachel married on February 10, 1946 and three weeks later, they travelled to Florida for spring training with the Montreal Royals.
- Rachel was the only wife allowed at spring training. Rickey knew Jackie would need a support system.
Rachel Robinson graduated from New York University June 1961 with a master’s degree in psychiatric nursing.

In 1961, Mrs. Robinson began her career in Psychiatric Nursing as a researcher and clinician at Albert Einstein College of Medicine’s Department of Social and Community Psychiatry.

From 1966 to 1972, she served as both an Assistant Professor at the Yale School of Nursing and the Director of Nursing at the Connecticut Mental Health Center.

In May of 1973, Mrs. Robinson established the Jackie Robinson Foundation to provide scholarships, mentoring, and leadership development opportunities to talented college students with limited financial resources.
Q&A

How?

Did you know?

Why?

Who?
Jackie Robinson’s career after baseball

- Robinson officially retired from baseball, January 8, 1957 to become the Vice President for Personnel at Chock Full o’Nuts. This made him the first African American to work as vice president of a major U.S. company.

- In 1959, Robinson began working as a columnist for the New York Post where he wrote passionately about social issues, sports, and family life.

- In January 1962, Robinson began writing for New York’s black weekly Amsterdam News. His column was called “Home Plate,” and focused on politics, sports and civil rights.

- In 1964, he co-founded Freedom National Bank of Harlem, a black-owned and operated bank that financially aided African American communities.
Jackie Robinson - activist

- Robinson was a prominent leader in the Civil Rights Movement.
- He was a member of the NAACP and served on the board of directors from 1957 to 1967.
- He won the NAACP’s Spingarn Medal in 1956.
- Robinson was often a featured speaker at civil rights rallies—including the March on Washington in 1963.
Jackie Robinson’s involvement in politics

• He worked for New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller in 1964 and again in 1966.

• In the 1960 presidential election, Robinson supported Richard Nixon over John F. Kennedy.

• In 1968, he shifted his support away from Nixon and backed the Democratic candidate, Hubert H. Humphrey.

• Robinson later said, "I do not consider my decision to back Richard Nixon...one of my finer ones."
Robinson, Nixon & the Kennedys

- Robinson viewed Nixon’s civil rights record as more promising than Kennedy’s.
- Robinson considered Kennedy’s civil rights commitment to be “insincere.”
- In a *New York Post* article, Robinson publicly stated that Kennedy courted bigoted southerners while also claiming to support sit-ins and blacks' civil rights aspirations.
- Robinson also said that he felt Kennedy had not made it “his business to know colored people.”
Richard Nixon to Jackie Robinson, August 8, 1957

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON
August 8, 1957

Personal

Dear Jackie:

It was most thoughtful of you to write as you did on August 2. Although the Senate vote on August first was most discouraging, you can be sure that I shall continue to do everything I can to see that a more effective bill than the watered-down version which was approved by the Senate on Wednesday night is eventually passed.

So that I can more adequately respond to your letter of June 25, I have been having a study made of my voting record in the House and Senate. This should be completed in the next few days and I will send it to you.

The next time you are down this way I hope you can stop by the office for a visit because I would enjoy the opportunity of discussing with you some of the issues in which we are mutually interested.

With every good wish,

Sincerely,

Richard Nixon

Mr. Jackie Robinson
Chock Full O’ Nuts
425 Lexington Avenue
New York 17, New York
Jackie Robinson to Richard Nixon, June 25, 1957

“They ask, “How can you support Nixon after the poor civil rights record he had in the Senate? Can’t you see he’s making these speeches now with his eye on the presidency in 1960?”

“I am sure you understand that I am not active in partisan politics and do not write either as a Republican or Democrat but as a person seeking reassurance in his beliefs.”
“Since you were a star player for the Brooklyn Dodgers, I know you realize that anyone who is in the public eye is subject to comment on all kinds of matters. One simply learns to roll with the punches and keeps trying to do as well as one can.”

“The enactment of Civil Right legislation is a positive action that can be taken toward living up to our ideals. I believe we will see passage of Civil Rights legislation during this session of Congress.”
Jackie Robinson to Richard Nixon, August 2, 1957

“Thanks for the position you took in behalf of all Americans. I assure you that as an individual I and many others will never forget the fight you made and what you stand for. The Negro is finally realizing the power of unity, and the defeat by a few bigots who were able to carry enough influence to defeat a measure that in just a small way insured a little freedom for people that have been hoping for a chance in a country we are all so proud of – I am sure this will unite us even more. I assure you, we will not forget those of you with enough courage to stand by your conviction, nor shall we forget the others.”
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Robert F. Kennedy and Robinson

- During the 1960 presidential campaign, there was an angry exchange of letters between Robinson and Kennedy.
- Robinson believed that John Kennedy was courting racist southerners while also claiming to support civil rights.
- Robert Kennedy accused Jackie of being anti-union.
- May 6, 1961: Robert Kennedy gave his first speech as Attorney General at the University of Georgia Law School in which he pledged his support for the Civil Rights Movement including
  - School integration
  - *Brown v. Board of Education*
  - Enforcing civil rights statutes and other federal legislation
Robert F. Kennedy and Robinson

- On May 8, Robinson wrote to Kennedy. Portions of that letter were quoted by Peter Lisago in the Chicago *Daily News*:
  
  “I find it a pleasure to be proven wrong,” he said. “May you continue to give your demonstrated leadership, which is so necessary at this time.”

  Robinson called Kennedy’s speech “most encouraging” and said that the Attorney General’s attitude “tends to increase our prestige in the world.”
Office of the Attorney General  
Washington, D.C.  

Mr. Jackie Robinson  
Chock Full o' Nuts  
425 Lexington Avenue  
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Robinson:

May I say I have not in a long time received a letter which gratified me more than did yours. It was very kind of you to write.

We intend to follow through with vigorous enforcement of the civil rights laws and I believe we will make progress. However, the record will speak for itself three or four years from now. You will make a judgment and so will the people of the United States, as well as those overseas.

You have made a great contribution in the civil rights field and you can be of considerable assistance in seeing that we keep moving ahead in this field. Therefore, I hope you will continue to make your views known to me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Attorney General

[Handwritten notes]
Robert F. Kennedy to Jackie Robinson, 1961

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Q&A

Did you know?

How?

Who?

Why?
Upcoming Programs

**Book Breaks** - Sunday, May 31 at 2 pm
- Historian Richard Stengel will discuss his book *Information Wars.*

**Inside the Vault** - June 12 at 2 pm ET
- A love letter from Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler
- Angelica Church’s letter announcing Alexander Hamilton was shot by Aaron Burr
Jackie Robinson Museum resources

Visit JRLegacy.org for:

- Book readings and video clips with special guests
- Trivia, puzzles, and resources for children and adults
- Activities and projects to educate, inspire, and challenge you

Contact museum@jackierobinson.org to inquire about virtual group programs for children and adults.
**What’s next?**

1. We will send you a packet with the documents we talked about today.

2. Please complete a 2-minute feedback survey:
   
   [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ITV_May29](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ITV_May29)

1. Visit [gilderlehrman.org](http://gilderlehrman.org) for
   - Documents
   - Essays
   - Digital Exhibitions
   - Videos
   - Lesson Plans
   - Hamilton Education Program

**Thank you!**