



Urban & Environmental Policy Institute

OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE

...for a more just, livable and democratic region.

## IN THESE GREEDY TIMES, REMEMBER JACKIE ROBINSON

---

### THE FADING LESSONS OF THE GREAT BALLPLAYER'S CIVIL-RIGHTS STRUGGLE AND TRIUMPHS SHOULD BE KEPT ALIVE IN HIS HOMETOWN.

By PETER DREIER. Los Angeles Times, Mar 22, 1995.

I recently talked with several teens hanging around Pasadena's Jackie Robinson Park, and only one had even the vaguest idea who Robinson was. Although 1997 marks the 50th anniversary of Robinson's courageous triumph over baseball's apartheid system, there is a great danger that our memory of this Pasadena native and American hero will soon fade away.

Robinson first took the field in a Brooklyn Dodgers uniform—the first black major leaguer—on April 16, 1947. It is time to plan a public celebration of this milestone. Token gestures, like a "Jackie Robinson Day," won't do. Pasadena needs a permanent educational facility to enshrine Robinson's place in our local and national history.

Robinson (1919-1972) grew up in Pasadena, attended Muir High, Pasadena Junior (now City) College and UCLA. He starred in football, track, basketball and baseball. Many consider him America's greatest all-around athlete. When Branch Rickey, the Dodgers' general manager, selected Robinson to break the color barrier, the team gained the loyalty of millions of black and white Americans who saw it as a steppingstone to tearing down other forms of racism.

In 1953, only six of 16 teams had black players. But by 1959, every team had followed the Dodgers' example. Today—on the field if not in the front office—black and Latino players are well represented in major league baseball.

The integration of baseball was bigger than Robinson's personal crusade. It took a protest campaign waged by the Negro press, civil-rights groups and the political left.

Robinson's actions on and off the diamond paved the way for America to confront its racial hypocrisy. His dignity in handling racism among fellow players, fans, hotels and restaurants stirred white Americans' consciences and gave black Americans a tremendous boost of pride. His efforts were as important as the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision or the Montgomery bus boycott in dismantling legal segregation and reducing bigotry. Martin Luther King told Robinson's black teammate Don Newcombe, "You'll never know what you and Jackie and Roy (Campanella) did to make it possible to do my job."

Pasadena has a community center, park and post office named after Robinson. A citizens committee has raised funds to erect a statue of Robinson in the new water and power building. But there is no place where young people can learn about Robinson's upbringing, athletic exploits or his odyssey as a sports pioneer and civil-rights activist.

There is no local site that documents Robinson's struggle against segregation as an Army officer in World War II, his brief career in the Negro Leagues or the protests that broke baseball's color barrier.

Robinson's courage, persistence, intelligence and accomplishments should serve as a model to all young people. Current public anger with both spoiled players and greedy owners should make professional baseball eager to remind disenchanted fans that the game's Establishment was once on the cutting edge of social change.

In Robinson's youth, Pasadena's black residents (5% of the city in 1940) were second-class citizens; its movie theaters and municipal pool were segregated. Today, it prides itself as a diverse city with an international profile. A Robinson museum, library and archives would be an educational resource and a tourist attraction, like Babe Ruth's boyhood home in Baltimore. This will take time, money and commitment. The Dodgers' owners should raise most of the funds. Pasadena should enlist the help of Robinson's family, friends, historians, local businesses and foundations.

Best known for its Rose Parade, Rose Bowl and Cal Tech, Pasadena should also be recognized as the hometown of one of America's most important pioneers and perhaps baseball's most exciting player.

Credit: Peter Dreier, a Pasadena resident, is a professor of politics and director of the Public Policy Program at Occidental College.

(Copyright, The Times Mirror Company; Los Angeles Times 1995 all Rights reserved)

[UEPI Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [Programs](#) | [Blog](#) | [Publications](#) | [Media](#) | [Staff](#) | [Site Map](#)  
[Contact the Webmaster](#) | [farmtoschool.org](#) | [progressivela.org](#) | [arroyofest.org](#) | [Occidental College](#)

Website hosted by [Occidental College](#). All content is the property of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College unless otherwise noted.