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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Robinson, Jackie (1919-1972) | [Next entry](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_robinson_jo_ann_1912_1992) | |
| Jackie Robinson, the ﬁrst African American to play major league baseball, used his prestige as a star athlete to garner support for the civil rights movement. Following his retirement from baseball in 1957, Robinson often appeared with Martin Luther King at rallies, fundraising events, and demonstrations. King told Robinson, ‘‘You have made every Negro in America proud through your baseball prowess and your inﬂexible demand for equal opportunity for all’’ (King, 14 May 1962).   Born 31 January 1919, in Cairo, Georgia, Robinson grew up in Pasadena, California. After graduating from high school he attended Pasadena Junior College and the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), where he excelled in baseball, football, basketball, and track. In 1942 Robinson was drafted into the Army. Initially informally barred from Ofﬁcer Candidate School because of his race, he eventually graduated as a second lieutenant. In July 1944 Robinson was court martialed for resisting a demand to move to the back of an Army bus. Eventually acquitted of the charges, he later received an honorable discharge from the Army.   Robinson was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1946, and 15 April 1947 Robinson broke the color line in major league baseball when he took the ﬁeld as ﬁrst baseman for the Dodgers. Despite enduring insults, threats, isolation and aggression on the playing ﬁeld Robinson eventually won over teammates and fans with his skill and competitive drive. He was named Rookie of the Year after his ﬁrst season, and two years later he won the National League batting title and was named Most Valuable Player.   After leaving baseball in 1957, Robinson became an executive at Chock Full O’Nuts Corporation. Robinson also served as chairman of the [National Association for the Advancement Colored People (NAACP)](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_national_association_for_the_advancement_of_colored_people_naacp1/) Freedom Fund Drive, and later joined its Board of Directors.   In October 1958 Robinson and King served as honorary chairmen of the [Youth March for Integrated Schools](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_youth_march_for_integrated_schools_25_october_1958_and_18_april_1959/) in Washington, D.C. Two years later Robinson raised concerns with King that some people afﬁliated with the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_southern_christian_leadership_conference_sclc/) were claiming that the NAACP had outlived its usefulness, but King reassured Robinson that he had, ‘‘always stressed the need for great cooperation between SCLC and the NAACP’’ (Papers 5:477).   Robinson continued to work with King, and when he became the ﬁrst African American to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962, Robinson donated the proceeds of a dinner in his honor to SCLC’s voter registration project. In an article King wrote for the [New York Amsterdam News](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_new_york_amsterdam_news/) upon this occasion, King applauded Robinson for choosing ‘‘truth’’ rather than ‘‘repose,’’ because ‘‘back in the days when integration wasn’t fashionable, he underwent the trauma and the humiliation and the loneliness which comes with being a pilgrim walking the lonesome byways toward the high road of Freedom. He was a sit-inner before the sit-ins, a freedom rider before the Freedom Rides’’ (King, ‘‘Hall of Famer’’).   The following year, Robinson joined the platform guests at the [March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_march_on_washington_for_jobs_and_freedom/). In 1964 he co-founded the interracial Freedom National Bank in Harlem, and served as chairman until his death in 1972. In 1966 New York Governor [Nelson Rockefeller](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_rockefeller_nelson_aldrich_1908_1979/) hired him as a Special Assistant for Community Affairs.   Robinson disagreed with King’s opposition to the [Vietnam War](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_the_vietnam_war_1961_1975/) and his calls for the United States to stop its bombing campaigns. In an open letter published in his regular *Chicago Defender* newspaper column in May 1967, Robinson questioned King’s stance: ‘‘I am confused Martin, because I respect you deeply. But I also love this imperfect country’’ (Robinson, ‘‘An Open Letter’’). After King called Robinson to elaborate on his beliefs, Robinson replied that despite disagreeing with King, he still saw King as ‘‘the ﬁnest leader the Negro people have and one of the most magniﬁcent leaders the world has today’’ (Robinson, ‘‘What I Think’’). Robinson died of a heart attack in 1972 at the age of 53.  **SOURCES**   King, ‘‘Hall of Famer,’’ *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 August 1962.  King, ‘‘The Measure of a Man,’’ *New York Amsterdam News*, 29 September 1962.  King to Robinson, 19 June 1960, in *Papers* 5:475–478.  King to Robinson, 14 May 1962, MLKJP-GAMK.  Rachel Robinson, *Jackie Robinson*, 1996.  Robinson to King, 5 May 1960, in *Papers* 5:454–455.  Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 1972.  Robinson, ‘‘An Open Letter to Dr. Martin L. King,’’ *Chicago Defender*, 13 May 1967.  Robinson, ‘‘What I Think of Dr. Martin L. King,’’ *Chicago Defender*, 1 July 1967. |