



# 42 TODAY

*Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*

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## THE FIRST FAMOUS JOCK FOR JUSTICE

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Part of Jackie Robinson's legacy is as a role model for athletes who want to express their political and social views. But Robinson was not simply a sports figure who lent his celebrity status to the civil rights movement. He viewed himself as much an activist as an athlete. He recognized that his opportunity to break baseball's color line was the result of a protest movement, and he repaid that debt many times over through his own participation in the struggle for civil rights.

Robinson was the first well-known professional athlete in post-World War II America to use his celebrity to speak out against social injustice. He laid the groundwork for Muhammad Ali, Roberto Clemente, John Carlos, Tommie Smith, Jim Brown, Bill Russell, Dave Meggyesy, Jim Bouton, Curt Flood, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bill Walton, Arthur Ashe, Billie Jean King, Carlos Delgado, Adonal Foyle, Steve Nash, Sean Doolittle, Colin Kaepernick, LeBron James, Megan Rapinoe, and others.

In 2019, members of the U.S. women's soccer team announced that they wouldn't accept an invitation from President Donald Trump to visit the White House after they won the World Cup. Trump, some sportswriters, and some fans criticized them for injecting politics into the sport. Alex Morgan, the team's co-captain and women's soccer Player of the Year in 2018, told *Time* magazine, "We don't have to be put in this little box. There's the narrative that's

been said hundreds of times about any sort of athlete who's spoken out politically. 'Stick to sports.' We're much more than that, O.K.?'<sup>1</sup> Robinson heard the same criticisms during and after his playing career (1947–56) with the Brooklyn Dodgers, and he gave a similar answer. He believed that as an American citizen, and as a black man in a racist society, he had an obligation to use his fame to challenge the social and political status quo.

All social movements try to recruit high-profile celebrities—entertainers, writers, artists, and athletes—to help promote their causes. This is true across the political spectrum. On the right, celebrities like singers Anita Bryant and Ted Nugent, actors Tom Selleck, Chuck Norris, and Charlton Heston, and athletes like Pete Sampras, Jack Kemp, Jim Bunning, Mike Ditka, Charles Barkley, Tom Brady, and Curt Schilling have embraced conservative causes and candidates. On the left, entertainers like Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Harry Belafonte, Bruce Springsteen, Marvin Gaye, Phil Ochs, Aretha Franklin, Joan Baez, Holly Near, Mark Ruffalo, and Jane Fonda have been identified with civil rights, antiwar, gay rights, and feminist movements, as have writers like John Steinbeck, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Adrienne Rich, Arthur Miller, Gloria Steinem, and Tony Kushner.

Celebrities can perform a variety of roles on behalf of social movements. They can lend their names; raise money; appear at rallies and other events; write books, articles, poems, and songs; start or join movement organizations; and engage in marches, protests, and even civil disobedience to draw public attention to the issues and groups they want to promote.

When it comes to political dissent, few athletes have spoken out on big issues like war, workers' rights, environmental concerns, racism, sexism, or voter suppression. Nor do many of them endorse political candidates.

In 1990 basketball star Michael Jordan, who had a multimillion-dollar contract with Nike, refused to endorse his fellow black North

Carolinian Harvey Gantt, then running for the U.S. Senate against right-winger Jesse Helms. "Republicans buy sneakers, too," Jordan explained at the time.<sup>2</sup>

Early in his professional career, golfer Tiger Woods stirred some political controversy with one of his first commercials for Nike after signing a \$40 million endorsement contract. It displayed images of Woods golfing as these words scrolled down the screen: "There are still courses in the United States I am not allowed to play because of the color of my skin. I've heard I'm not ready for you. Are you ready for me?" At the time Woods told *Sports Illustrated* that it was "important . . . for this country to talk about this subject [racism]. . . . You can't say something like that in a polite way. Golf has shied away from this for too long. Some clubs have brought in tokens, but nothing has really changed. I hope what I'm doing can change that."<sup>3</sup>

According to Richard Lapchick, executive director of the National Consortium for Academics and Sports at the University of Central Florida, Woods was "crucified" by some sportswriters for the commercial and his comments. Nike quickly realized that confrontational politics wasn't the best way to sell shoes. "Tiger seemed to learn a lesson," Lapchick explained in a 2004 interview. "It is one that I wish he and other athletes had not learned: no more political issues. He has been silent since then because of what happened early in his career."<sup>4</sup> For example, Woods remained on the sidelines during the 2002 controversy over the intransigence of the Augusta National Golf Club, host of the annual Masters Tournament, on permitting women to join.

Fear of losing commercial endorsements is only one reason that few professional athletes speak out about controversial social and political issues. Many are simply not interested in politics or believe that they don't know enough about issues to express their opinions in public. Athletes are expected to perform, not pontificate.

On those occasions when they do express themselves, they are often met with derision and contempt. In 2018, Laura Ingraham,

a host for right-wing Fox News, scolded the Cleveland Cavaliers' LeBron James for "talking politics," including criticizing President Donald Trump. Ingraham said she wasn't interested in the political views of "someone who gets paid \$100 million a year to bounce a ball." She said that James should just "shut up and dribble."<sup>5</sup> Most notably, NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick faced censure from Trump and blacklisting by NFL teams when he protested American racism by kneeling on the field during the national anthem, starting in 2016, a gesture that sparked considerable controversy.

There is, of course, an obvious double standard when it comes to sports and politics. Most professional sports team owners regard political involvement as essential to doing business. They make large campaign contributions to both Republicans and Democrats. They invite elected officials to sit next to them at games. They lobby city, state, and federal officeholders on legislation and tax breaks for new stadiums. After President Trump attacked Kaepernick, every NFL owner—Democrat and Republican alike—fell in line with the NFL's quickly revised policy to require players to stand.<sup>6</sup>

The public is used to seeing athletes participating in a wide variety of charity and community service activities. For example, Boston Red Sox star Ted Williams often visited children with cancer in the hospital and lent his name to the Jimmy Fund, which has raised millions of dollars for cancer research. Today, many professional athletes start foundations that fix inner-city playgrounds, create scholarship funds to help poor students attend college, make commercials urging kids to stay in school and say no to drugs, play in golf tournaments to raise money for charitable causes, give talks at schools, and participate in workshops to teach kids the fundamentals of their sport. Professional teams encourage players to engage in such community service activities, which they view as good for public relations.

Only a handful of professional athletes, however, move beyond charity and social service to challenge the larger system through

both words and deeds, including activism in social and political movements. In that way, Robinson was a pathbreaker.

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Robinson engaged in both kinds of work for social reform—charity and social justice activism. As a youngster in Pasadena, he frequently got in trouble, engaging in activities that at the time were described as "juvenile delinquency," including his membership in a street gang. During his rookie year with the Dodgers, and throughout the rest of his life, Robinson participated in many acts of charity and social service, particularly, but not exclusively, in the black community, including Harlem. He mentored young people at the YMCA and the Police Athletic League. He visited sick children in hospitals and brought toys and baseballs autographed by himself and his teammates. He gave speeches at schools and universities. But during and after his playing days, he also spoke out about American racism, specifically identifying the institutions that perpetuated racial injustice, including banks and other businesses, politicians, the media, and Major League Baseball, and he participated in civil rights rallies and protests, and endorsed candidates for office. He not only talked the talk. He walked the walk.

Robinson wrote regular columns for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *New York Post*, and *New York Amsterdam News*.<sup>7</sup> He hosted radio and TV talk shows. He was frequently interviewed and quoted by mainstream media outlets on civil rights issues. He raised money for a wide variety of civil rights causes and organizations, including the NAACP, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Congress of Racial Equality, and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He sat on the boards of several civil rights and social reform organizations. He was a well-traveled speaker at meetings, conferences, and rallies around the country on behalf of civil rights and social justice causes. He was an active participant at demonstrations, pickets, and marches for civil rights. He testified before

Congress about racial injustice. He endorsed and campaigned for political candidates whom he believed to be allies of the civil rights movement. He began his engagement with the civil rights movement during the ten years he played for the Dodgers and expanded his commitment after he retired from baseball in 1956 until his death in 1972.

Robinson set the stage for other athletes to speak out, but no other professional athlete, before or since, has been so deeply involved in social change movements. The scale, depth, and variety of Robinson's activism are so remarkable that it would be almost impossible to replicate. Robinson's engagement with the civil rights movement was not something he did on the side. During his playing days, it was a central part of his life, despite the demands of being a full-time athlete under enormous physical and psychological pressure for his pathbreaking role. When his playing days ended, Robinson's involvement deepened, as he took on an incredible diversity of responsibilities, often at the expense of his health and his livelihood.

Moreover, Robinson did so during a period when social justice activism in general, and especially by celebrities, was risky. Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, just as the Cold War was emerging. People who spoke out for liberal and progressive causes—civil rights, opposition to nuclear testing, equality for women, workers' rights—could be branded radicals or communists and face economic sanctions (including loss of their job) and social ostracism. It is important to recall that the modern civil rights movement had not yet emerged. The Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, outlawing school segregation, did not occur until 1954. The Montgomery bus boycott, which brought both Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King into the national spotlight, began the following year. Students in North Carolina launched the first lunch counter sit-ins in 1960.

Some writers and activists, looking back at Robinson's life and career, claim that he was insulated from right-wing attacks because he was a pro-business, anticommunist Republican and was opposed to black separatism. But none of these beliefs shielded Robinson from severe criticism for being outspoken and militant on behalf of racial equality. In fact, the FBI kept a file on Robinson because it was concerned about his activism and influence.

A similar dynamic can be seen in the reputation of Reverend Martin Luther King. Today King is viewed as something of an American saint. A recent Gallup poll discovered that 94 percent of Americans viewed him in a positive light. His birthday is a national holiday. His name adorns schools and street signs. Americans from across the political spectrum invoke King's name to justify their beliefs and actions. But during his lifetime, in his own country, King was considered a dangerous radical. He was harassed by the FBI and vilified in the media. In August 1966—two years after he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize at age thirty-five—a Gallup poll found that 63 percent of Americans had an unfavorable opinion of King, compared with 33 percent who viewed him favorably.

To many Americans, Jackie Robinson's success on the baseball diamond was a symbol of the promise of a racially integrated society. It is difficult today to summon the excitement and fervor that greeted Robinson's achievement. He did more than change the way baseball was played and who played it. The dignity with which Robinson handled his encounters with racism drew public attention to the issue, stirred the consciences of many white Americans, and gave black Americans a tremendous boost of pride and self-confidence.

### **Robinson Was a "Race Man"**

Due to his upbringing and his early experiences, Robinson had little tolerance for bigotry. The grandson of a slave and the son of a sharecropper, Robinson was fourteen months old in 1920 when his

mother moved her five children from Cairo, Georgia, to Pasadena, a wealthy, conservative Los Angeles suburb. During Robinson's youth, black residents, who represented a small portion of the city's population, were treated as second-class citizens. Blacks were allowed to swim in the municipal pool only on Wednesdays (the day the water was changed) and could use the YMCA only one day a week. Robinson learned at an early age that athletic success did not guarantee social or political acceptance. When his older brother Mack returned from the 1936 Olympics in Berlin with a silver medal in track, he got no hero's welcome. The only job the college-educated Mack would find was as a street sweeper and ditch digger.

Robinson was a star athlete at Pasadena Junior College before enrolling at UCLA, where he became its first four-sport athlete (football, basketball, track, and baseball), twice led basketball's Pacific Coast League in scoring, won the NCAA broad jump championship, and became an All-American football player. But, like his brother's, his success on the athletic field did not change the way he was treated as a black man in a racist society.

Robinson was particularly incensed by his mistreatment in the Army during World War II. Many of the Negro League's finest ballplayers saw military service during the war, but like other African Americans they faced discrimination and humiliation as soldiers. Most black soldiers with baseball talent were confined to playing on all-black teams. When Robinson went out for the baseball team at Fort Riley, Kansas, a white player told him that the officer in charge said, "I'll break up the team before I'll have a nigger on it."<sup>8</sup> When he was reassigned to Fort Hood in Texas, his anger boiled over. On July 6, 1944, Robinson—a twenty-five-year-old Army lieutenant—boarded a military bus at Fort Hood with the light-skinned black wife of another black officer and sat down next to her in the middle of the vehicle. "Hey you, sittin' beside that woman," the driver yelled. "Get to the back of the bus." Robinson refused, knowing that buses had been officially desegre-

gated on military bases. When the driver threatened to have him arrested, Robinson shook his finger in the driver's face and told him, "Quit fucking with me." Two military policemen soon arrived and escorted Robinson away.

He faced trumped-up charges of insubordination, disturbing the peace, drunkenness, conduct unbecoming an officer, insulting a civilian woman, and refusing to obey the lawful orders of a superior officer. Unlike the routine mistreatment of many black soldiers in the Jim Crow military, Robinson's court-martial trial, on August 2, 1944, triggered news stories in the black press and protests by the NAACP because he was already something of a public figure. Voting by secret ballot, the nine military judges found Robinson not guilty. By November, he was honorably discharged from the Army.

Describing the ordeal, Robinson later wrote, "It was a small victory, for I had learned that I was in two wars, one against the foreign enemy, the other against prejudice at home."<sup>9</sup> From that time on, and perhaps even earlier, Robinson viewed himself as a "race man"—a widely used term at the time that signified someone who was primarily committed to advancing the conditions of black Americans and viewed his own life and career as part of that effort.

While playing sports at UCLA, professional football in Hawaii, and Negro League baseball in Kansas City and while serving in the Army, Robinson was certainly aware that part of the wider movement to desegregate America included a specific campaign to dismantle baseball's Jim Crow system. Starting in the 1930s and accelerating during World War II, the black press, civil rights groups, the Communist Party, progressive white activists, left-wing unions, and radical politicians waged campaigns to eliminate discrimination in housing, jobs, and other sectors of society. The campaigns included protests against segregation within the military, mobilizing for a federal anti-lynching law, marches to open up defense jobs

to blacks during World War II, and boycotts against stores that refused to hire African Americans under the banner “don’t shop where you can’t work.” As soon as the United States entered the war in 1941, black newspapers enthusiastically supported the “Double V” campaign—victory over fascism overseas and over racism at home.

As Jules Tygiel, Arnold Rampersad, Chris Lamb, and others have documented, civil rights and progressive activists believed that if they could push the national pastime to integration, they could make inroads in other facets of American society.<sup>10</sup> The protest movement published open letters to baseball owners, polled white managers and players about their willingness to have black players on major league rosters, picketed at baseball stadiums in New York and Chicago, gathered signatures on petitions, and kept the issue before the public. They even pushed major league teams to give tryouts to black players. In 1945, Isadore Muchnick, a progressive member of the Boston City Council, threatened to deny the Red Sox a permit to play on Sundays unless the team considered hiring black players. Working with several black sportswriters, Muchnick persuaded the reluctant Red Sox general manager, Eddie Collins, to give three Negro League players—Robinson, Sam Jethroe, and Marvin Williams—a tryout at Fenway Park in April of that year. The Sox had no intention of signing any of the players, nor did the Pittsburgh Pirates and Chicago White Sox, who orchestrated similar bogus auditions. But the public pressure and media publicity helped raise awareness and furthered the cause.

In 1945, the New York State Legislature passed the Quinn-Ives Act, which banned discrimination in hiring, and soon formed a committee to investigate discriminatory hiring practices, including one that focused on baseball. In short order, New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia established a Committee on Baseball to push the Yankees, Giants, and Dodgers to sign black players. Left-wing congressman Vito Marcantonio, who represented Harlem, called for an investigation of baseball’s racist practices. Branch Rickey, the Dod-

gers’ general manager and part owner, was not enthusiastic about these efforts because he did not want people to think that his efforts to integrate the team were the result of public pressure.

### **Robinson Joins the Dodgers**

Rickey’s scouts identified Robinson, who was playing for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro Leagues, as a potential barrier breaker. Rickey could have chosen other Negro League players with more talent, experience, or name recognition, such as Satchel Paige or Josh Gibson, but he wanted someone who could be, in today’s terms, a role model.<sup>11</sup> He knew that if the experiment failed, it would set back the cause of integration for years.

Robinson was young, articulate, and well educated. Although Pasadena was rigidly segregated, Robinson had formed friendships with his white neighbors and classmates in high school and college. Rickey knew Robinson had a hot temper and strong political views, but he believed that Robinson could handle the emotional pressure, help the Dodgers on the field, and attract more fans to Ebbets Field. Robinson promised Rickey that, for at least his rookie year, he would not respond to the verbal barbs and physical abuse he would face on a daily basis. In 1946, when Robinson played for the Dodgers’ minor league franchise in Montreal, America remained a deeply segregated nation. That year, at least six African Americans were lynched in the South. Restrictive covenants, barring blacks (and Jews) from buying homes in many neighborhoods—not just in the South—were still legal. Only a handful of blacks were enrolled in the nation’s predominantly white colleges and universities. There were only two blacks in Congress. No big city had a black mayor.

Robinson endured more verbal, psychological, and physical abuse than any professional athlete before or since. When he arrived at spring training in Florida in 1946, Robinson could not stay in the same hotel as his white teammates. A white man came to the home where he was staying and warned sportswriter Wendell Smith, Rob-

inson's traveling companion, that a white mob was ready to run the black players out of town. Anyone living in or familiar with Florida at that time knew of the state's long history of lynchings. At a spring training game in Sanford, the police chief walked onto the field and ordered Robinson's manager Clay Hopper (for the Montreal Royals) to remove Robinson and black teammate John Wright from the stadium.

When Robinson played for the Royals, the team traveled to segregated cities like Louisville and Baltimore. When he played for the Dodgers, the team played in segregated cities like Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Philadelphia. In those cities, Robinson could not stay in the same hotels or eat in the same restaurants as his white teammates. He also had to endure segregated buses, trains, public parks, movie theaters, and other facilities. He received a torrent of hate mail and death threats. On the field, he heard constant racist taunts from fans and opposing players. A week after his first game in a Dodger uniform, while playing the Philadelphia Phillies, the Phillies' manager Ben Chapman called Robinson a "nigger" and shouted "Go back to the cotton field where you belong" and "They're waiting for you in the jungles, black boy," without rebuke from the umpire or National League officials. Throughout his rookie season, and even afterward, opposing pitchers threw fastballs at his head, brushed him back, and occasionally plunked him. Runners on opposing teams went out of their way to spike him when he was covering the bases.<sup>12</sup>

During spring training in 1947, some of Robinson's own teammates let it be known that they resented having a black man on the team. A handful of Dodgers, led by Georgia-born Dixie Walker, even circulated a petition asking Rickey to keep Robinson off the club. Rickey and manager Leo Durocher quickly squashed the revolt. Even so, Robinson often sat by himself in the clubhouse while his teammates played cards or just chatted. Describing Robinson's relationships with his teammates during his rookie year, columnist Jimmy Cannon called him "the loneliest man I have ever seen in sports."<sup>13</sup>

Robinson seethed with anger, but he kept his promise to Rickey, enduring the abuse without retaliating. But it took a toll. He developed stomach pains. His hair turned prematurely gray.

Robinson had an outstanding rookie season. He hit .297, led the National League with 29 stolen bases (including 3 steals of home), and led the Dodgers to the NL pennant. The *Sporting News* named him baseball's Rookie of the Year.<sup>14</sup> That year, the Dodgers set road attendance records in every National League park except Cincinnati's Crosley Field. His first appearance at the Chicago Cubs' Wrigley Field set an attendance record of 46,572. He appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine on September 22, 1947. At the end of the season, an Associated Press poll ranked Robinson second only to singer Bing Crosby as America's "most admired man." (Despite this, that year Robinson made the major league minimum of \$5,000—\$57,000 in today's dollars. In 1956, his final year in the majors, he earned \$42,500—\$400,000 in today's dollars, below MLB's current minimum salary of \$550,000.)

### The Robinson-Robeson Episode

In 1949—a year when he would be named the National League's Most Valuable Player and again led the Dodgers into the World Series—Robinson made his first major foray into the world of politics, although the circumstances were not of his own making.<sup>15</sup>

That summer, right-wing and segregationist members of Congress orchestrated a confrontation between Robinson and Paul Robeson—the two most well known and admired African Americans in the country. The media salivated at the opportunity to portray the clash of these larger-than-life figures as a surrogate for the Cold War between capitalism and communism.

In early July, Robinson received a telegram from Congressman John Wood (D-GA), an archsegregationist and former Ku Klux Klan member, who chaired the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). He invited Robinson to address a hearing on "Communist



infiltration of minority groups.” Specifically, he wanted Robinson to attack Robeson for being a disloyal American and communist agitator who didn’t speak for black people.

The pretext for the hearing was a statement that Robeson had made that April at a left-wing conference in Paris. The media ignored Robeson’s main point—that most Americans, including blacks, did not want to go to war with the Soviet Union. Instead, most news outlets used the Associated Press report, which quoted Robeson saying that if a war broke out between the United States and Russia, “it is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations against a country which in one generation has raised our people to the full dignity of mankind.”

At the time, Robeson was at the height of his fame.<sup>16</sup> He was also a defiant activist. He gave free concerts for left-wing unions and progressive causes. He refused to perform in roles that demeaned African Americans. In 1945 he headed an organization that challenged President Harry Truman to support an anti-lynching law. That year the NAACP awarded Robeson the Spingarn Medal, its highest honor. He was an outspoken critic of European and American imperialism and a strong supporter of nations, in Africa and elsewhere, seeking to unleash themselves from the yoke of colonialism. He embraced the Soviet Union, which he believed had done more than his native country to battle racism and anti-Semitism.

Ironically, Robeson also played a key role in paving the way for Robinson’s breakthrough. In 1943 he led a delegation of prominent African Americans, including the owners of major black newspapers, who met with baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis and team owners to demand the sport’s desegregation. “The time has come when you must change your attitude toward Negroes,” Robeson told them. “Because baseball is a national game, it is up to baseball to see that discrimination does not become an American pattern.”

Robinson was reluctant to testify against Robeson. He didn’t agree with Robeson’s communist views, but he admired his lifetime

of activism. “I didn’t want to fall prey to the white man’s game and allow myself to be pitted against another black man,” he later wrote. “I knew that Robeson was striking out against racial inequality in the way that seemed best to him.”<sup>17</sup>

Branch Rickey was a fervent anticommunist and reminded Robinson that if he refused to testify, HUAC might subpoena him anyway. Robinson also felt a “sense of responsibility” to convey black Americans’ loyalty. So on the morning of July 18, Robinson and his wife Rachel flew to Washington, DC, a city where first-class hotels were still racially segregated. On this occasion, HUAC waived its rule against media photographs.

As expected, Robinson criticized Robeson, but it was far from the harsh attack that Wood and his HUAC colleagues were hoping for. Instead, Robinson made an impassioned demand for racial integration and challenged America’s hypocrisy around race relations.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding Robeson’s Paris speech, Robinson said that Robeson “has a right to his personal views, and if he wants to sound silly when he expresses them in public, that is his business and not mine. He’s still a famous ex-athlete and a great singer and actor.”

In contrast to Robinson’s testimony, at the time many Americans—and certainly most HUAC members—believed that communists and communist sympathizers did not have the right to express their views or hold jobs. Robinson insisted that blacks were loyal Americans who would “do their best to help their country stay out of war. If unsuccessful, they’d do their best to help their country win the war—against Russia or any other enemy that threatened us.” Robinson also challenged HUAC’s view that black Americans’ anger and activism was the result of communist agitators. “The fact that it is a Communist who denounces injustice in the courts, police brutality, and lynching when it happens doesn’t change the truth of his charges. Just because Communists kick up a big fuss over racial discrimination when it suits their purposes, a lot of people try to pretend that the whole issue is a creation of Communist imagination.” In fact, Robinson insisted, “Ne-

groes were stirred up long before there was a Communist Party, and they'll stay stirred up long after the party has disappeared—unless Jim Crow has disappeared by then as well.”

Robinson's appearance was a major news story, but the white press focused on his criticism of Robeson and virtually ignored his condemnation of racism. It was part of a wider campaign to isolate Robeson, who was denounced by the media, politicians, and conservative and liberal groups alike as being a traitor and Soviet shill. Radio stations banned his recordings. Concert halls and colleges canceled his performances. In 1950, the State Department revoked Robeson's passport so he couldn't perform abroad, where he was still popular. His annual income plummeted from over \$150,000 to less than \$3,000. His voice was marginalized during the 1960s civil rights movement. His name and photo were even stricken from the college All-America football teams.

Robinson faced a similar dilemma with regard to the film *The Jackie Robinson Story*, which was released in 1950. Robinson played himself and Ruby Dee portrayed his wife Rachel. The film depicted some of the racism that Robinson faced growing up and during his first few years with the Dodgers, but its central theme reflected the celebration of America, at the height of the Cold War, as a land of opportunity where anyone could succeed if they had the talent and will. The movie opens with the narrator saying, “This is a story of a boy and his dream. But more than that, it's a story of an American boy and a dream that is truly American.” At the time, Robinson was a fierce patriot, but he recognized that America's claim to equal opportunity flew in the face of the nation's racial caste system, a topic that the film skirted.

### Robinson Unleashes His Outrage

By 1949, after his initial two years establishing himself as a Dodger, Robinson began to unleash his frustrations and his temper. He argued constantly with umpires and opposing players. He was less

willing to stifle his anger at the second-class accommodations and mistreatment he, and the handful of other black major leaguers, had to endure. In 1950, for example, he wrote National League president Ford Frick complaining that umpires treated him differently than white players in terms of calling balls and strikes and ejecting him from games for arguing calls. Robinson saw a racist double standard when, in 1950, sportswriters chose the Giants' Eddie Stanky over Robinson as the second baseman for the All-Star team, even though Robinson was having a much better season in every category and even though Stanky, like Robinson, was known as an aggressive player, even a hothead. Appearing on a local TV talk show in 1953, Robinson publicly accused the New York Yankees—the only one of the three New York City teams without a black player—of racism. He started to speak out more forcefully on social issues, particularly the persistence of racism in America. He got more directly involved in organizations working for change.

Throughout his playing career, Robinson was constantly criticized for being so frank about race relations in baseball and in society. Many sportswriters and many other players—including some of his fellow black players, content simply to be playing in the majors—considered Robinson too angry, vocal, and ungrateful for the opportunity he was given. Syndicated sports columnist Dick Young of the *New York Daily News* complained that when he talked to the Dodgers' black catcher Roy Campanella, they always talked solely about baseball, but when he talked with Robinson, “sooner or later we get around to social issues.”<sup>19</sup> The same forthright comments or assertive behavior by white players was out of bounds for Robinson. A 1953 article in *Sport* magazine, “Why They Boo Jackie Robinson,” described him as “combative,” “emotional” and “calculating,” as well as a “pop-off,” a “whiner,” a “showboat,” and a “troublemaker.” A Cleveland paper called Robinson a “rabble rouser” who was on a “soap box.” The *Sporting News* headlined one story

“Robinson Should Be a Player, Not a Crusader.” Others called him a “loudmouth,” a “sorehead,” and worse.

During and after his playing career, Robinson utilized the media to express his views. In 1947, he wrote a column, “Jackie Robinson Says,” in the *Pittsburgh Courier*—one of the most influential black newspapers—documenting his rookie season. In the off-season after his second year in the majors, he hosted a daily radio program. The following year, he hosted a TV show. After he retired from the Dodgers, he wrote a three-times-a-week column in the *New York Post*, a liberal daily, and then in the *New York Amsterdam News*, a black weekly. He used these venues to discuss racial injustice, politics, sports, and other topics.<sup>20</sup>

In 1949, he agreed to chair the New York state committee of the United Negro and Allied Veterans of America, which helped returning World War II veterans readjust to life in the United States, including help with education, jobs, and housing. He also joined the advisory board of Harlem’s Solidarity Center, which provided health insurance and medical services. (It was sponsored by the International Workers Order, a left-wing group.) In 1954 and 1955, he chaired the Commission on Community Organizations, a civil rights campaign of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and he toured the country during the off-season on its behalf. In 1955, he became co-chair of New York’s Committee of the United Negro College Fund.

### Robinson’s Post-baseball Activism

After he retired from baseball in 1956, no team offered him a position as a coach, manager, or executive. He went to work as an executive with the Chock full o’Nuts restaurant chain. He wasn’t simply a token figure but was given considerable management responsibilities. But the firm’s liberal owner allowed Robinson to engage in his community service and civil rights activities, even though much of it was controversial. That gave Robinson the opportunity to spend

a great deal of time traveling around the country giving speeches on behalf of civil rights groups, participating in rallies and protests, raising money for civil rights causes, and serving on boards of civil rights and social reform organizations. He served as the NAACP’s fundraising chair, eventually raising a record amount for the nation’s premier civil rights organization. His willingness to speak out and his involvement with civil rights and social reform groups led the NAACP to give Robinson its highest award, the Spingarn Medal, in December 1956; he was the first athlete to receive that honor. In his acceptance speech, he explained that although many people had warned him “not to speak up every time I thought there was an injustice,” he would continue to do so.<sup>21</sup> In 1957, he publicly urged President Eisenhower to send troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to protect black students seeking to desegregate the public schools.

Robinson went beyond making public statements, serving on committees, and lending his name to letterheads for good causes. He was often on the front lines of the civil rights movement. In 1960, he was impressed with the resilience and courage of the college students engaging in sit-ins at southern lunch counters. Several of the student activists traveled to New York City to meet with Robinson, who agreed to raise bail money for the students lingering in southern jail cells. Within a few days he’d raised \$20,000, and then organized a fundraiser at his Connecticut home that featured jazz greats Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, and Duke Ellington. This became the first of Robinson’s annual “Afternoons of Jazz” at his home to raise money for civil rights causes. He also joined civil rights activists in picketing the Woolworth lunch counters in New York in solidarity with the southern sit-inners.

In 1961, Robinson used his column to support the Freedom Riders, even writing a public letter to the chair of the federal Interstate Commerce Commission demanding that he immediately order the desegregation of interstate bus travel. Robinson drew on his own anticommunist credentials to criticize segregationist senator James

Eastland of Mississippi, who attacked the Freedom Riders as communists. The next year, at King's request, Robinson traveled to Albany, Georgia, to draw media attention to three black churches that had been burned to the ground by segregationists. He then led a fundraising campaign that collected \$50,000 to rebuild the churches and returned to Georgia once they were rebuilt to demonstrate the civil rights movement's resilience and resistance to intimidation. In 1963, he devoted considerable time and travel to support King's voter registration efforts in the South. He also traveled to Birmingham as part of King's campaign to dismantle segregation in that city. Although he was personally close to King, he did not confine his fundraising efforts to SCLC. He continued to raise money for the NAACP, SNCC, and other civil rights groups. "His presence in the South was very important to us," recalled Wyatt Tee Walker, chief of staff of King's SCLC.<sup>22</sup>

### **Robinson's Forays into Politics and Business**

Once he retired from baseball, Robinson took a more active interest in partisan politics, but he was never interested in running for office. Although he was frequently criticized by liberals for his support for Republicans, his embrace of candidates was based almost entirely on their views and track record on civil rights issues, not party affiliation. In fact, in the 1960 presidential election, he initially supported Hubert Humphrey, a Democratic senator from Minnesota and longtime civil rights stalwart. He traveled to different cities to speak on Humphrey's behalf during the Democratic primaries. By May, however, Senator John Kennedy's primary victories forced Humphrey to drop out.

Both Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon, the GOP candidate, actively sought Robinson's endorsement. Robinson met with both candidates. He was not impressed with Kennedy's commitment to civil rights (including his waffling on the 1957 Civil Rights Act) and worried that the Massachusetts senator would be beholden

to the segregationist Democrats who controlled Congress. At the time, there were a significant number of liberal Republicans who supported civil rights, and many African Americans still viewed the GOP as the party of Abraham Lincoln. Robinson even used his *New York Post* column to criticize Kennedy "as long as he continues to play politics at the expense of 18,000,000 Negro Americans."<sup>23</sup>

Nixon had been cultivating Robinson as early as 1952, when they met by accident in Chicago.<sup>24</sup> They occasionally exchanged letters. When they met in 1960, Nixon persuaded him that he would be more forceful on civil rights issues than Eisenhower and that he would appoint black people to positions of responsibility in his administration. In September 1960, Robinson shocked his liberal fans by endorsing and campaigning for Nixon. He quickly regretted his choice, especially after Nixon refused to make an appearance in Harlem and refused to take action after Martin Luther King was arrested for participating in an Atlanta sit-in and sent to an isolated prison in rural Georgia, where his family and friends feared he would be killed. (In contrast, JFK's aides secured King's release from the jail, which turned many blacks into Kennedy voters.) Three weeks before Election Day, Robinson said that "Nixon doesn't deserve to win."

In 1962, Robinson endorsed the reelection campaign of New York's governor Nelson Rockefeller, the last of the high-ranking liberal Republicans who supported activist government and civil rights, even donating money to King's civil rights crusades. After the election, Robinson briefly worked as an aide to Rockefeller and in 1964 supported him for president, but when reactionary senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona won the nomination, Robinson left the GOP convention commenting that he now had "a better understanding of how it must have felt to be a Jew in Hitler's Germany," and left the Republican Party behind.<sup>25</sup> In 1968, he supported Humphrey over Nixon for president.

Robinson was not naïve about the realities of racial segregation and white racism. He and Rachel had to use a white intermediary in

order to buy a home in white, affluent Stamford, Connecticut. His children faced racism in the local public schools. He was rejected for membership in a local country club. Even so, he was a firm believer in racial integration. In his newspaper column and in other public forums, he clashed with Malcolm X, who accused Robinson of being a puppet of "white bosses." Some young black nationalist militants called Robinson an "Uncle Tom" because of his support for racial integration.

Ironically, Robinson's ventures into the business world reflected some of the ideas of black nationalists, who believed in the creation of black-owned businesses as an alternative to black ghettos being colonized by white corporations. Robinson openly criticized American business for discriminating against blacks as executives, employees, and consumers. He was particularly angered by white-owned banks and by slumlords. He lent his name to several businesses, including a residential construction company and a black-owned bank in Harlem, to help address the affordable housing shortage and white banks' persistent redlining. Both businesses fell on hard times and dimmed Robinson's confidence in black capitalism as a strategy for racial advancement and integration.

As he grew older, Robinson became more impatient with the slow progress against racism in sports and society. In 1964, Robinson expressed his displeasure with Muhammad Ali when the boxer announced he had joined the Nation of Islam (under the tutelage of Malcolm X) and refused to submit to the draft during the war in Vietnam due to his religious convictions. "He's hurting, I think, the morale of a lot of young Negro soldiers over in Vietnam," said Robinson, whose son was serving (and would later be wounded) in Vietnam.<sup>26</sup> But by 1967, after Ali was convicted, Robinson talked about the "heroism and tragedy" of Ali's situation and said that Ali "has won a battle by standing up for his principle."<sup>27</sup> Even so, he was upset when King came out against the Vietnam War that year. In 1967, too, Robinson resigned from the NAACP board for its failure

to include "young, more progressive voices." The following year, he publicly supported track stars John Carlos and Tommie Smith's fist-raising protest at the Olympic Games in Mexico City.

He was frustrated by the slow pace of racial progress in baseball. It was not until 1959 that the last holdout, the Boston Red Sox, brought an African American onto its roster. In 1970, Robinson was one of two former ballplayers (the other was Hank Greenberg) to testify in federal court in support of Curt Flood's challenge to baseball's reserve clause, which kept players in indentured servitude to their teams.

Robinson refused to participate in a 1969 Old Timers' Game because he did not yet see "genuine interest in breaking the barriers that deny access to managerial and front office positions."<sup>28</sup> Robinson's statement irked fellow Hall of Famer Bob Feller. He and Robinson happened to be at the same press conference in Washington, DC, to celebrate baseball's alleged hundredth anniversary. Feller, who in 1946 predicted that Robinson was not good enough to make it in the majors, took the opportunity to attack Robinson. "Robinson has always been bush," Feller said. "He's always been a professional agitator more than anything else. He's just ticked off because baseball never rolled out the red carpet when he quit playing and offered him a soft front office job." An angry Robinson responded, "My big thing is I don't believe that the black players are getting an equal opportunity with the whites after their playing days are through. I think the public is more ready for a black manager than the owners."<sup>29</sup> At his final public appearance, throwing the ceremonial first pitch before game 2 of the 1972 World Series, shortly before he died, Robinson accepted a plaque honoring the twenty-fifth anniversary of his major league debut; he then observed, "I'm going to be tremendously more pleased and more proud when I look at that third base coaching line one day and see a black face managing in baseball."<sup>30</sup> No major league team had a black manager until the Cleveland Indians hired Frank Robinson in 1975. The majors'

first black general manager—the Atlanta Braves’ Bill Lucas—wasn’t hired until 1977.

“I cannot possibly believe,” Robinson wrote in his autobiography *I Never Had It Made*, published shortly before he died of a heart attack and complications from diabetes at age fifty-three in October 1972, “that I have it made while so many black brothers and sisters are hungry, inadequately housed, insufficiently clothed, denied their dignity as they live in slums or barely exist on welfare.”<sup>31</sup>

He also apologized to Robeson, writing that he would reject HUAC’s invitation to testify “if offered now.” He added, “I have grown wiser and closer to the painful truths about America’s destructiveness and I do have an increased respect for Paul Robeson, who, over the span of that 20 years sacrificed himself, his career and the wealth and comfort he once enjoyed because, I believe, he was sincerely trying to help his people.”<sup>32</sup>

Years before Colin Kaepernick was born, Robinson wrote, “I cannot stand and sing the anthem. I cannot salute the flag; I know that I am a black man in a white world.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Athletes Climb on Robinson’s Shoulders**

During the 1960s and 1970s, other athletes began to follow Robinson’s example, using their celebrity status to speak out on key issues, particularly civil rights and Vietnam. Bill Russell (born in 1934) was an All-Star center with the Boston Celtics from 1956 to 1969 and later became the team’s first black coach. He was the first black superstar in the National Basketball Association. Reflecting his growing racial consciousness, in 1959 he traveled to Africa, including Libya, Ethiopia, and Liberia. In a Liberian classroom, a student asked him why he was there. “I came here because I am drawn here, like any man, drawn to seek the land of my ancestors,” he responded.<sup>34</sup> Prior to the 1961–62 season, the Celtics were scheduled to play an exhibition game in Lexington, Kentucky. After Russell and his black teammates were refused service at a

local restaurant, he persuaded them to refuse to play in the game and flew home. The boycott was a bold move at a time when black athletes were supposed to accept such indignities without complaining, and it drew a great deal of publicity and controversy. Russell subsequently was outspoken on civil rights issues. After NAACP leader Medgar Evers was assassinated in 1963 in front of his home in Jackson, Mississippi, Russell flew down to lead the city’s first integrated basketball camps. He frequently spoke out about the widespread racism he and other blacks encountered in Boston.<sup>35</sup>

Jim Brown (born in 1936) was an outstanding running back with the Cleveland Browns from 1957 through 1965. During his playing days, he founded the Black Economic Union (BEU), through which professional athletes helped establish black-owned and black-run businesses, athletic clubs, and youth motivation programs. After the BEU folded, Brown persuaded some companies to adopt the program. In 1986, he founded Vital Issues to teach life management skills to inner-city gang members and prison inmates. By 1989, Vital Issues had evolved into Amer-I-Can, which sponsored programs in several cities. His efforts to create black-owned enterprises were based in part on his own experiences confronting racism as one of the NFL’s few black superstars. “I was a highly paid, overglamorized gladiator,” he told the *Washington Post*. “The decision-makers are the men who own, not the ones who play. I was never under an illusion as to who was the boss.”<sup>36</sup>

Even as the civil rights movement was gaining momentum, black baseball players still had to put up with segregated housing, hotels, and restaurants in the southern towns that hosted minor league teams. They faced constant insults on and off the field. In addition, most teams still held spring training in Florida, where public facilities, restaurants, hotels, and ballparks remained segregated through the mid-1960s. Black fans were consigned to the stadium’s “colored” sections, and black players had to stay in second-rate black hotels or

at the homes of local black families rather than in the same hotels as their white teammates.

In 1961, Bill White, the St. Louis Cardinals slugger, complained to an Associated Press reporter about the team's segregated accommodations in St. Petersburg, where they held spring training. The *St. Louis Argus*, a black newspaper, picked up the story, adding an editorial comment suggesting that black Cardinals fans consider boycotting beer made by Anheuser-Busch (the Cardinals' owner). That same year, under pressure from the Dodgers' black players, owner Walter O'Malley told local officials in Vero Beach that he would no longer comply with laws requiring segregated entrances, bathrooms, water fountains, and seating at Holman Stadium, where his team played its spring games.<sup>37</sup>

In 1963, Arthur Ashe (born in 1943) became the first black player ever selected for the U.S. Davis Cup team and was soon recognized as one of the greatest tennis players of all time as both an amateur and a professional (at a time when pro tennis players were not well paid). In 1969, Ashe was denied a visa by the apartheid government in South Africa to travel to that country to play in the South African Open. In subsequent years, he continued to apply for visas, but each time the racist government turned him down. Angered by such blatant discrimination, Ashe became an early leader in the American and global movement to dismantle South Africa's apartheid regime. He campaigned for U.S. sanctions against South Africa and the expulsion of the nation from the International Lawn Tennis Federation (ILTF). In March 1970, the country was expelled from the Davis Cup competition.

Ashe also led a campaign to improve tennis professionals' pay, which he believed was not commensurate with the sport's growing popularity and revenues. He was an early supporter of the Association of Tennis Professionals and became its elected president in 1974. In 1973, with the South African government hoping to end their Olympic ban and rejoin the Olympic movement, it finally granted

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Like Robinson, Arthur Ashe took a vigorous stand against apartheid in South Africa. International Tennis Hall of Fame.

Ashe a visa to enter the country for the first time to play in the South African Open. By 1977, he believed that it had been a mistake to play in South Africa and called for South Africa to be expelled from the professional tennis circuit and Davis Cup competition. Ashe's activism helped draw attention to the global divestment movement and the eventual dismantling of apartheid in 1994.<sup>38</sup>

Muhammad Ali (born in 1942) is probably the most well-known example of an outspoken athlete. The heavyweight boxing champion publicly opposed the war in Vietnam and refused induction into the Army in 1967 on the grounds of his religious beliefs as a conscientious objector. However, Ali also explained his antiwar feelings on straightforward political grounds, including America's mistreatment of black people as second-class citizens. "I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong," he told reporters. He also observed that "no Vietcong ever called me nigger." Ali was stripped of his heavyweight title and sentenced to five years in prison. (He eventually won a Supreme Court appeal and didn't serve any time.) Dur-

ing and after his involuntary hiatus from boxing, he was a frequent antiwar speaker on college campuses and elsewhere. At the time, sportswriters and politicians relentlessly attacked him and he lost millions of dollars in potential paydays and endorsements. By the 1980s, however, he was among the world's most admired people for his convictions and his efforts to promote human rights around the world.<sup>39</sup>

After Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, many baseball players refused to play the last few spring training games out of respect for his memory and in defiance of their teams' owners. The following week, Commissioner William Eckert announced that each team could decide whether to play or cancel Opening Day games. Players took the matter into their own hands. Led by star outfielder Roberto Clemente, Pittsburgh Pirates players held a closed-door meeting and voted to sit out the opener. They also asked the general manager to postpone the next game, which would take place on the day of King's funeral. Their statement explained, "We are doing this because we white and black players respect what Dr. King has done for mankind."<sup>40</sup> Players on other teams followed the Pirates' lead. In response, Eckert announced that Opening Day would be postponed until the day after King's funeral.

The civil rights movement was the impetus for Curt Flood's challenge to baseball's reserve clause, which had enormous ripple effects across the sports world.<sup>41</sup> Flood was only thirty-one and in his prime—an outstanding hitter, runner, and center fielder with Hall of Fame statistics—when he stood up to baseball's establishment. Flood played for the Cardinals for twelve seasons. After the 1969 season, the Cardinals tried to trade him to the Philadelphia Phillies. Under the reserve clause, part of the standard player's contract, players could be traded without having any say in the matter. But Flood didn't want to move to Philadelphia, which he called "the nation's northernmost southern city." More importantly, he objected to being treated like a piece of property and to the reserve clause's restriction

on his freedom. Flood considered himself a "well-paid slave." In a letter to Commissioner Bowie Kuhn, Flood wrote, "After 12 years in the major leagues, I do not feel I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes. I believe that any system which produces that result violates my basic rights as a citizen and is inconsistent with the laws of the United States and of the sovereign States."

With the backing of the Major League Baseball Players Association and its executive director Marvin Miller (who recruited former U.S. Supreme Court justice Arthur Goldberg to be Flood's lawyer), Flood became the plaintiff in the case known as *Flood v. Kuhn*, which began in January 1970. In June 1972, the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled against Flood by a five to three vote and upheld baseball's absurd exemption from federal antitrust statutes. Although the Supreme Court ruled against Flood, he had paved the way. In 1975, in a case involving pitchers Dave McNally and Andy Messersmith, arbitrator Peter Seitz invalidated the reserve clause and gave them the right to free agency. This allowed ballplayers the ability to veto proposed trades, bargain for the best contract, and decide where they wanted to work.

Flood paid a huge financial and emotional price for his course. His 1970 salary would have been \$100,000, but he was no longer employable—and blacklisted by the owners—despite his talent. Instead, he spent years traveling to Europe, devoting himself to painting and writing, including his autobiography, *The Way It Is*. Looking back, Flood explained,

I guess you really have to understand who that person, who that Curt Flood was. I'm a child of the sixties, I'm a man of the sixties. During that period of time this country was coming apart at the seams. We were in Southeast Asia. Good men were dying for America and for the Constitution. In the southern part of the United States we were marching for civil rights and Dr. King had been as-



sassinated, and we lost the Kennedys. And to think that merely because I was a professional baseball player, I could ignore what was going on outside the walls of Busch Stadium was truly hypocrisy and now I found that all of those rights that these great Americans were dying for, I didn't have in my own profession.

In 1999, *Time* magazine named Flood (who died in 1997 at age fifty-nine) one of the ten most influential people in sports in the twentieth century.

In November 1967 San Jose State University professor Harry Edwards organized a workshop about the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), urging athletes to boycott the upcoming Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City as a protest against racism in the United States and overseas. Some athletes boycotted the games, while others decided to participate but use the event as an opportunity to protest. Track medalists John Carlos and Tommie Smith generated international media attention and controversy with their Black Power salute during the medal ceremony. Smith explained his protest this way: "If I win, I am American, not a black American. But if I did something bad, then they would say I am a Negro." Their protest hurt their subsequent professional careers.<sup>42</sup>

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (born in 1947)—who played in the NBA for twenty seasons and was a record six-time NBA Most Valuable Player and a record nineteen-time NBA All-Star—had attended Edwards's workshop and was one of the athletes who boycotted the games. Born Lew Alcindor, he was politically conscious as early as high school, influenced by the civil rights movement. In the summer of 1964, an incident of police abuse triggered riots in Harlem, where he lived. He wrote an article for the Harlem Youth Action Project newspaper based on interviews with black residents frustrated by the persistence of police violence against blacks, segregated schools, slum housing, and job discrimination.

In June 1967, while a student at UCLA, Abdul-Jabbar joined Jim Brown, Bill Russell, and six other black professional athletes at a meeting in Cleveland to lend support to Ali, who had just been stripped of his heavyweight title for refusing induction into the U.S. military and his opposition to the Vietnam War. He was the only college athlete at the gathering, and it had a significant influence on his thinking. Years later, in his autobiography *Becoming Kareem*, he wrote, "Being at the summit and hearing Ali's articulate defense of his moral beliefs and his willingness to suffer for them reinvigorated my own commitment to become even more politically involved."<sup>43</sup> Alcindor addressed the two hundred people at the church: "Everybody knows me. I'm the big basketball star, the weekend hero, everybody's All-American." But on the streets of Harlem, he explained, he was just another black man who could be a victim of police brutality.

The following year, he (along with his UCLA teammates Mike Warren and Lucius Allen) boycotted the 1968 Summer Olympics by not trying out for the U.S. basketball team. As the most famous college basketball player in the country, he was a target of much criticism, including those who called him ungrateful and unpatriotic. On the *Today Show*, host Joe Garagiola, a former Major League Baseball player, suggested that "maybe you should move" out of the United States. But he stood his ground. Instead of participating in the Olympics, he spent that summer working for Operation Sports Rescue, leading basketball clinics and mentoring black and Puerto Rican young people, encouraging them to get an education.

In 2011, Abdul-Jabbar was awarded the Double Helix Medal for his work raising awareness for cancer research. In 2014, he wrote an article in the left-wing magazine *Jacobin* urging fair compensation for college athletes: "In the name of fairness, we must bring an end to the indentured servitude of college athletes and start paying them what they are worth."

As a convert to Islam, he has often challenged prevailing stereotypes about the religion. Appearing on the TV talk show *Meet the Press* in 2015, he said that Islam should not be blamed for the actions of violent extremists, just as Christianity should not be blamed for the actions of violent extremists who profess Christianity. In 2017, he condemned Donald Trump's travel ban, explaining, "The absence of reason and compassion is the very definition of pure evil because it is a rejection of our sacred values, distilled from millennia of struggle." He has written several books on black and sports history and wrote a regular column for *Time* magazine.

Bill Walton, who entered UCLA in 1970, followed Abdul-Jabbar as the school's star basketball player. He led the team to eighty-eight consecutive wins and two national championships. He also led campus protests against the Vietnam War, including getting arrested for participating in a civil disobedience action in 1972 that stopped traffic on busy Wilshire Boulevard, despite the fact that his mentor, coach John Wooden, objected to his stance and activism. He recorded a message on his answering machine in favor of Richard Nixon's impeachment.<sup>44</sup>

Dave Meggyesy, an All-Pro linebacker for the St. Louis Cardinals in the late 1960s, was a vocal opponent of the Vietnam War. He allowed a local antiwar group to hold meetings at his house. In 1968, he refused to put his hand over his heart or stand at attention during the playing of the national anthem. Instead, he "dropped his head, scuffed the dirt with his cleats and spit on the ground."<sup>45</sup> Local sports writers and fans criticized him, and team executives told him to keep his political views to himself, but as he recounted in his memoir *Out of Their League*, Meggyesy refused to back down, was consequently benched, and retired in 1969 at age twenty-eight while still in his athletic prime. He taught courses at Stanford University on sports consciousness and social change and on the athlete and society.<sup>46</sup>

The 1969 World Series between the Mets and Orioles coincided with the nationwide Vietnam Moratorium Day, which included pro-

tests outside the Mets' Shea Stadium. An offshoot of the antiwar group, calling themselves Mets Fans for Peace, circulated a leaflet with a photo of the Mets' twenty-four-year-old pitching ace Tom Seaver and a reprint of a *New York Times* article from the previous week headlined "Tom Seaver Says U.S. Should Leave Vietnam." The story quoted Seaver promising to pay for an ad in the *New York Times*: "If the Mets can win the World Series, then we can get out of Vietnam."<sup>47</sup> Seaver, who had served in the Marines and attended the conservative University of Southern California, was upset by the leaflets and refused to wear a black armband that day, as the antiwar demonstrators were doing. But the Mets won the World Series and Seaver kept his promise. On December 31 that year, he and his wife Nancy put an ad in the newspaper that was more tepid than his original statement. It read, "On the eve of 1970, please join us in a prayer for peace."<sup>48</sup>

In his iconoclastic 1970 book *Ball Four*, former Yankees pitcher Jim Bouton expressed his opposition to the Vietnam War with reference to a member of his Yankee fan club: "It just doesn't seem right that a member of my fan club should be fighting in Vietnam," Bouton wrote. "Or that anybody should be."<sup>49</sup> In 1972, Washington Redskins lineman Ray Schoenke organized four hundred athletes to support Senator George McGovern's antiwar presidential campaign, despite the fact that his coach, George Allen, was a close friend of McGovern's opponent, Richard Nixon.<sup>50</sup> Pittsburgh Pirate pitcher Dock Ellis, who often spoke out against racism, stayed quiet on the war. When reporters asked him about the goodwill tour to Vietnam that he and other players participated in, he initially said, "I don't want to answer questions about Vietnam. I don't want to get political."<sup>51</sup> However, when the Nixon administration tried to get him to endorse the war, he angrily shot back, threatening to publicly describe all the drug-addicted American soldiers he saw there.

Billie Jean King's commitment to feminism, and later to LGBTQ equality, paralleled Robinson's full-scale involvement with the civil

rights movement.<sup>52</sup> Like Robinson, she overcame barriers in sports and then used her celebrity to break barriers in society. King is one of the greatest tennis players of all time. She was ranked number one in the world five times between 1966 and 1972 and was ranked in the top ten for seventeen years, beginning in 1960. In total, she won 67 singles titles, 101 doubles titles, and 11 mixed doubles titles, amassing almost \$2 million in prize money after turning professional in 1968 and before retiring in 1983. She coached the U.S. Olympic women's tennis team in 1996 and 2000.

King's advocacy for women's sports in the 1960s and 1970s revolutionized school, amateur, and professional athletics. There had been many great women athletes before King, but she helped make it more acceptable for girls and women to be athletes. In the late 1960s professional women's tennis was widely dismissed as a frilly sideshow. Male "amateur" tennis stars would get paid under the table, but women athletes were not taken as seriously. For winning her first two Wimbledon tournaments, she received nothing except the \$14 daily allowance. In 1970, when King and eight other female players defied the tennis establishment to form their own professional circuit, many experts doubted that they could attract big enough crowds to generate prize money. Women's tennis is now as popular as men's.

In addition to her dominance on the courts, King made significant contributions to women's sports and feminism in general. King campaigned tirelessly for Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in all federally funded school programs, including sports. Her efforts, which included testifying before Congress, helped persuade lawyers to adopt the law in 1972, which President Nixon signed in June of that year. The year before Title IX passed, only 1 percent of college athletic budgets went to women's sports programs. At the high school level, male athletes outnumbered female athletes 12.5 to 1. Since Title IX's enactment, female participation in sports has grown by 1,057 percent at the high school level and by 614 percent at the college level, reaching close to parity.

In 1972, almost a year before the Supreme Court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling, King was one of fifty-three women to sign an ad in the first issue of *Ms.* magazine boldly proclaiming "We Have Had Abortions," putting her on the front lines of the battle for reproductive rights. Also in 1972, she became the first woman to be named *Sports Illustrated's* "Sportsperson of the Year." King pushed for higher fees for women athletes, which led firms like Philip Morris and Virginia Slims to sponsor women's tournaments. When she won the U.S. Open in 1972, she received \$15,000 less than did the men's winner, Ilie Nastase. She threatened to boycott the 1973 U.S. Open if it did not equalize prize money between women and men athletes. The tournament agreed to do so, setting a precedent. In 1974 she was one of the founders and the first president of the Women's Tennis Association. That year, with support from Gloria Steinem and *Ms.*, King also founded *womenSports* magazine and the Women's Sports Foundation. With King's backing, the magazine and foundation became powerful voices for women in sports. In 1975 *Seventeen* magazine polled its readers and found that King was the most admired woman in the world. In 1981 King was forced out of the closet by a former girlfriend who sued her, unsuccessfully, for palimony, while she was still married. She soon embraced her new role as the first openly lesbian major sports star. She serves on the Elton John AIDS Foundation and has received numerous honors for her work with the LGBTQ community. King's foundation developed and promotes It Takes a Team!, an educational program to end homophobia in school sports.

In the 1970s, as the number of Latino ballplayers increased, some players began speaking out against human rights abuses and other international issues. Pirates outfielder (and future Hall of Famer) Roberto Clemente condemned American support for the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua. Pitcher Albert Williams, a native of that country, fought with the rebels to defend the Sandinista Revolution in 1977 and 1978. White Sox and Tigers outfielder Magglio

Ordóñez and White Sox shortstop Ozzie Guillén, both Venezuelans, supported socialist Hugo Chávez. In 2013, Ordóñez was elected the socialist mayor of Juan Antonio Sotillo Municipality. The most notable dissenter from American policy and its war on terrorism was first baseman Carlos Delgado, the two-time All Star who played with the Blue Jays, Florida Marlins, and New York Mets during his seventeen-year career. Delgado, a Puerto Rico native, was no stranger to political protest. He had campaigned for years against the American naval presence in Vieques, a Puerto Rican island used for sixty years as a weapons-testing ground. Remembering older residents' horror stories about the explosions, Delgado believed the military was waging a form of war on the tiny island.

After the U.S. Navy left, Delgado and others called for the American government to clean up the economic, psychological, environmental mess it left behind, which included high cancer rates. Rallying others, he contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the campaign. As sportswriter Dave Zirin has noted, Delgado "viewed the people of Vieques as casualties—collateral damage—from the war on Iraq because they served as guinea pigs."<sup>53</sup> Delgado created the Extra Bases Foundation in Puerto Rico as a platform to express his commitment to social justice. The foundation has assisted ill and disadvantaged children, promoted local hospitals, and publicized the island's education crisis.

After the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center, Commissioner Bud Selig required teams to play "God Bless America" at each game's seventh-inning stretch. "After all," he claimed, "we do have troops in Iraq and Afghanistan." For three years, Delgado joined players and fans and stood while the song played, but in 2004 he decided to sit in the dugout instead, concerned that the song was being used to justify ongoing military intervention. Delgado claimed, "I don't stand because I don't believe it's right. . . . It's a very terrible thing that happened on September 11. It's also a terrible thing that happened in Afghanistan and Iraq. I feel so sad for the families that

lost relatives and loved ones in the war. But I think it's the stupidest war ever."<sup>54</sup>

While Blue Jays president Paul Godfrey and catcher Gregg Zaun strongly supported the Iraq War, both honored Delgado's right to dissent. But when the team played at Yankee Stadium, boos and derision showered down on Delgado. After each of his outs, chants of "USA! USA!" went up in the crowd. Some right-wing fans and commentators labeled him "un-American," unfit to collect his paycheck, and even "a terrorist [who] should be jailed."

In response, Delgado reiterated his antiwar message: "I say God bless America, God bless Miami, God bless Puerto Rico and all countries until there is peace in the world." Delgado claimed that some fellow athletes supported him, but others attacked him, saying, "Go back to Puerto Rico." He wasn't surprised that some fans would object to his views. "I felt people booing me [but] when you do [something like this], you do it because it is the right thing to do. . . . The most important thing is to stay true to your values and principles." According to Delgado, "Athletes, who have this platform where they can reach millions of people, should use it."<sup>55</sup>

In 2003, just before the United States invaded Iraq, Dallas Mavericks guard Steve Nash wore a T-shirt to media day during the NBA's All-Star weekend that said "No War. Shoot for Peace." Numerous sports columnists criticized Nash for speaking his mind. (One wrote that he should "just shut up and play.") David Robinson, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate and former naval officer and then center for the San Antonio Spurs, said that Nash's attire was inappropriate. Flip Saunders, coach of the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves, told the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, "What opinions you have, it's important to keep them to yourselves."<sup>56</sup>

During and after his thirteen years (1997–2010) as a center with three NBA teams—the Golden State Warriors, Orlando Magic, and Memphis Grizzlies—Adonal Foyle was an outspoken critic of America's political system. "This mother of all democracies," Foyle said,

“is one of the most corrupt systems, where a small minority make the decisions for everybody else.” In 2001, Foyle started Democracy Matters, a nonprofit group dedicated to educating young people about politics, mobilizing them to vote, and bringing pressure on elected officials to reform the nation’s campaign finance laws. The group has chapters on fifty college campuses, staffed with paid interns.<sup>57</sup>

When he was not playing basketball, Foyle was frequently speaking at high schools, colleges, and conferences about the corrupting role of big money in politics. Foyle refused to be intimidated by those sportswriters and fans who objected to his beliefs and activism. “How can we say we are creating a society in Iraq based on democracy and freedom and tell people here who have the audacity to speak out to keep quiet?” he said in a 2004 interview. “If people shut down because they are afraid the media is going to spank them or fans are going to boo them, then the terrorists have won.” He also observed, “When you talk about campaign finance reform, you are talking about all of the issues—war, civil rights, environment, gender, globalization—because they are all connected.” He echoed similar views in 2018, telling the *San Francisco Chronicle*, “With the political climate we are in, there is a much bigger sense that this (money influencing politics) is the central issue of our time. If you look at what’s happening with almost any policy now in Washington, there is still a force that is causing politicians to not really recognize the will of the American people.”

A magna cum laude history major at Colgate University, Foyle explained, “If people want us [athletes] to be role models, it’s not just saying what people want you to say. It’s pushing the boundaries a bit, saying things that you may not want to think about. That’s good for a society. Morality is much bigger than athletics.” In 2005, Foyle founded the Kerosene Lamp Foundation, which serves children in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, where he grew up. In 2008, he was elected to the board of Common Cause, an influential nonprofit organization committed to strengthening democracy. He

also became a member of the executive committee of the NBA Players Association. In 2014, the Warriors appointed Foyle as the team’s community ambassador.

### Activist Athletes in the Trump Era

Presidents have sought to align themselves with athletes. They appear at professional sports events, where the American flag is ubiquitous, patriotic songs are played, and sometimes Air Force jets fly overhead. But on occasion, players have turned the tables. In 1991, for example, when President George H. W. Bush invited the Chicago Bulls to the White House to celebrate their NBA championship, Bulls guard Craig Hodges handed Bush a letter expressing outrage about the condition of urban America. On the other side of the political spectrum, in 2012 Boston Bruins goaltender Tim Thomas declined to visit the White House over disagreements with President Barack Obama’s policies.

Pitcher Sean Doolittle had become the most outspoken contemporary professional athlete against social injustice. He explained to the *New York Times*, “When I was a kid, I remember my parents would say, ‘Baseball is what you do, but that’s not who you are’—like that might be my job, but that’s not the end-all, be-all. I feel like I might even be able to use it to help other people or open some doors or explore more opportunities.”<sup>58</sup> In 2015, when he was with the Oakland Athletics and ticket sales for the team’s LGBT Pride Night were not going well, Doolittle and his girlfriend (now wife) Eireann Dolan hatched a plan to buy tickets from season ticket holders and donate them to LGBT youth who otherwise might not attend an A’s game. They wound up purchasing nine hundred tickets.<sup>59</sup> In 2016, after Trump dismissed his vulgar “grab their pussy” comment as just “locker room talk,” Doolittle denounced Trump on Twitter: “As an athlete, I’ve been in locker rooms my entire adult life and uh, that’s not locker room talk.” A week after his inauguration, Trump signed the first iteration of his travel ban, sparking na-

tionwide protests. “These refugees are fleeing civil wars, terrorism, religious persecution, and are thoroughly vetted for 2 yrs,” tweeted Doolittle. “A refugee ban is a bad idea. . . . It feels un-American. And also immoral.”<sup>60</sup> He and Dolan also organized a Thanksgiving meal for seventeen Syrian refugees and got Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel and several aldermen to serve as greeters and waiters to get publicity for the refugee cause. He and Dolan worked with Human Rights Watch and wrote an op-ed in *Sports Illustrated* urging the Veterans Affairs Department to provide adequate mental health services to military vets with less than honorable discharges, called “bad paper.” They’ve supported Operation Finally Home, which builds houses for wounded veterans and their families. They started a registry to help furnish two such houses in Northern California and offered signed Oakland A’s gear to those who donated. Within weeks, fans had filled every cabinet and drawer with the necessities for the recipients. He’s also supported Swords to Ploughshares, a Bay Area organization devoted to helping veterans with housing and employment. After Nazis and white supremacists descended on Charlottesville, Virginia, triggering violent protests that resulted in the death of one anti-Nazi protester, Doolittle, who went to the University of Virginia, tweeted, “The C’Ville I knew from my time at @UVA is a diverse and accepting community. It’s no place for Nazis.” And “People say ‘if we don’t give them attention they’ll go away.’ Maybe. But if we don’t condemn this evil, it might continue to spread.” And “This kind of hatred was never gone, but now it’s been normalized. They didn’t even wear hoods. It’s on us to condemn it and drive it out.”<sup>61</sup>

Doolittle wasn’t alone. President Trump inspired a new wave of protest by athletes. During the 2016 presidential election, Dodgers first baseman Adrián González refused to stay at a hotel owned by Trump. Asked to explain his action, González simply told reporters, “You can draw your own conclusions. They’re probably right.”<sup>62</sup> On election night, Dodgers pitcher Brandon McCarthy tweeted, “To-

night’s result affects me none because I’m rich, white and male. Yet, it’ll be a long time until I’m able to sleep peacefully.”<sup>63</sup> Two months after Trump’s inauguration, McCarthy was back on Twitter poking fun at Trump’s campaign pledge to “drain the swamp” of corporate and Wall Street influence peddlers. “Was the ‘swamp’ Goldman Sachs itself?” McCarthy tweeted, referring to the powerful investment bank that has provided top officials in Trump’s administration.<sup>64</sup> St. Louis Cardinals outfielder Dexter Fowler, whose wife immigrated from Iran, told ESPN that he opposed Trump’s anti-Muslim executive order. In response to angry comments from fans, Fowler tweeted, “For the record. I know this is going to sound absolutely crazy, but athletes are humans, and not properties of the team they work for.”<sup>65</sup> In 2016, to protest police brutality toward black Americans, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick decided to kneel, rather than stand, during the national anthem before his team’s preseason games.<sup>66</sup> Throughout that season, other NFL players followed Kaepernick’s example of silent protest. Their crusade widened after Trump launched an attack on the players’ protest during a political rally in Alabama in September 2017. “Wouldn’t you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, say, ‘Get that son of a bitch off the field right now? Out! He’s fired. He’s fired!’” Trump bellowed.<sup>67</sup> The next weekend, more than two hundred players sat or kneeled in defiance of Trump. After his protest, Kaepernick was blacklisted by NFL teams, who refused to hire him, despite the fact that he was more talented than many NFL quarterbacks.

Kaepernick’s act inspired many other professional and amateur athletes to follow his example. In May 2018, NFL owners capitulated to Trump by voting to require players to stand on the field for the national anthem or be subject to a fine. The next day, Trump applauded the owners for doing “the right thing.” “Players who refuse to stand for the anthem,” Trump declared, “shouldn’t be in this country.” Many NFL players reacted with anger over the league’s

policy and Trump's comments. "It's disgusting because of our First Amendment rights," said Denver Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall.<sup>68</sup>

"[Trump is] an idiot, plain and simple," said Seattle Seahawks wide receiver Doug Baldwin.<sup>69</sup> Bruce Maxwell, the Oakland Athletics African American rookie catcher, son of an Army veteran, bashed Trump on Instagram: "Our president speaks of inequality of man because players are protesting the anthem! F- this man!"<sup>70</sup> Later that day, he became the first major league player to kneel for the national anthem before a game against the visiting Texas Rangers. Outfielder Mark Canha, who is white, stood behind Maxwell and placed his right hand on his teammate's shoulder. "My decision had been coming for a long time," Maxwell told the media, citing his own experiences with racism growing up in Huntsville, where Trump made his derogatory remarks about NFL players.

In 2017, Trump withdrew his White House invitation to the NBA champion Golden State Warriors after players criticized him. The next year, after the Warriors' Steph Curry and the Cavaliers' LeBron James said they wouldn't go to the White House if they won the championship, Trump didn't even bother extending an invitation to the victorious Warriors. (In January 2019, the Warriors met with former president Barack Obama at his Washington office when they were in town to play the Wizards.)

After most of the 2018 NFL Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles announced that they were skipping the White House victory celebration in protest, Trump proclaimed that they were no longer invited. In May of that year, Houston Astro players Carlos Beltrán and Carlos Correa, both natives of Puerto Rico, skipped the team's visit to the White House to celebrate their 2017 World Series victory as a way of expressing their dismay with Trump's recovery efforts after Hurricane Maria devastated the island. In 2019, nine African American and Latino members of the 2018 World Series winners Boston Red Sox—Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Rafael

Devers, Hector Velázquez, Xander Bogaerts, Sandy León, Christian Vázquez, Eduardo Núñez, and David Price—refused to join Trump at a White House celebration. Manager Alex Cora, a native of Puerto Rico, also refused to attend because of Trump's failure to provide adequate aid to the island after it was devastated by the hurricane.<sup>71</sup> The University of Virginia men's basketball team—which won the 2019 NCAA championship—turned down an invitation to Trump's White House in part over their outrage over Trump's response to the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville two years earlier.<sup>72</sup>

The celebrity status of Megan Rapinoe reflects the growing popularity of soccer—and women's soccer in particular—in the United States over the past two decades. It is similar to the booming interest in women's tennis in the 1970s, except that more young girls participate in soccer than in tennis. Like Robinson and like Billie Jean King, Rapinoe has used her fame as a platform for social justice. In 2018 Rapinoe and WNBA star Sue Bird were the first openly gay couple to appear on the cover of *ESPN the Magazine's* body issue. In 2019, twenty-eight members of the women's national soccer team filed a class-action gender discrimination lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation demanding equal pay for female players.

A month after Kaepernick's take-a-knee protest in 2016, Rapinoe knelt during the national anthem in solidarity with the NFL star. After the U.S. Soccer Federation revised its rules to require all players to "stand respectfully" when the anthem is played, Rapinoe refused to sing the anthem and stood with her hand at her side instead of over her heart. In 2019, as co-captain of the U.S. women's national soccer team, she announced that she would refuse an invitation to visit Trump at the White House if her team won the World Cup. After Trump scolded Rapinoe on Twitter, her teammates voiced their support for her. Teammate Ali Krieger tweeted, "In regards to the 'President's' tweet today, I know women who you cannot control or grope anger you, but I stand by @mPinoe & will sit this one out



as well. I don't support this administration nor their fight against LGBTQ+ citizens, immigrants & our most vulnerable."<sup>73</sup>

Until the 1960s and 1970s, many professional athletes earned little more than ordinary workers. Many lived in the same neighborhoods as their fans and had to work in the off-season to supplement their salaries. In both team sports like baseball, football, soccer, hockey, and basketball and individual sports like tennis and golf, professional athletes are better organized and better paid than were their counterparts a generation or two ago. The emergence of players' unions and associations has dramatically improved athletes' pay, working conditions, pensions, and bargaining clout. A growing number of pro athletes come from suburban upbringings and attended college, and they increasingly also come from Asia and Latin America. Regardless of their backgrounds, however, all pro athletes have much greater earning power than their predecessors. Since the 1970s, television contracts have brought new revenues that have dramatically increased salaries.

The Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) was the first major professional players' union. When Marvin Miller, a former Steelworkers Union staffer, became the MLBPA's first executive director in 1966, he sought to raise players' political awareness. "We didn't just explain the labor laws," he recalled. "We had to get players to understand that they were a union. We did a lot of internal education to talk to players about broader issues." According to Ed Garvey, who ran the NFL players union from 1971 until 1983, the civil rights movement was critical to the union's early development. The union "was driven by the African-American players, who knew there was an unwritten quota on most teams where there would not be more than a third blacks on any one team," explained Garvey. "And they knew they wouldn't have a job with the team when their playing days were over." The players also understood that team owners were "the most powerful monopoly in the country," he says. Garvey brought the association into the AFL-CIO—the only profes-

sional sports union to do so—to give the players a sense that they were part of the broader labor movement. In the early 1970s several NFL players walked the picket lines with striking Farah clothing workers, joined bank employees in Seattle to boost their organizing drive, and took other public stands.<sup>74</sup>

Although today's professional athletes are better organized and better paid, they also face enormous job insecurity. There is massive competition for the few slots in the ranks of professional sports. The average career of a Major League Baseball player, for example, is only four years. Except for the superstars, athletes who speak out, or who are considered controversial or "troublemakers," can put their careers at risk, as Colin Kaepernick quickly discovered. Team executives and players' agents warn them not to risk their high salaries and commercial endorsements by taking contentious public stands. With some exceptions, the players' unions no longer view their mission as educating players about the broader labor movement or engaging them in social and political matters. Thus you had the spectacle, during the 2018 playoffs and World Series, of the New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers crossing the hotel workers' union's picket lines at Boston hotels where workers were on strike. It would have been a significant gesture for a few Yankees, Dodgers, and Red Sox players to show up and join the hotel workers' picket lines.<sup>75</sup>

In early 2019, the MLBPA tried but could not stop the New Era Cap Company, which makes caps for all major league teams, from closing its union factory near Buffalo and moving production to nonunion facilities in Florida and overseas. In an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, Doolittle, then pitching for the Washington Nationals, expressed his concern that he and other players "will be wearing caps made by people who don't enjoy the same labor protections and safeguards that we do."<sup>76</sup> The MLBPA could insist that teams purchase players' uniforms, bats, and other equipment from union companies—or at least from those that provide decent pay, working



conditions, and benefits. After the Washington Nationals won the World Series in October 2019, Doolittle announced that he would not join his teammates at the White House celebration with President Trump. "I don't want to hang out with somebody who talks like that," he told the *Washington Post*.<sup>77</sup> All-Star third baseman Anthony Rendon, outfielders Víctor Robles and Michael A. Taylor, and pitchers Javy Guerra, Joe Ross, and Wander Suero also boycotted the event.<sup>78</sup> Taking a knee or locking arms during the national anthem and tweeting and making public statements opposing Trump's racism and ignorance of the First Amendment give athletes a platform to speak out on controversial issues. But there is much more athletes can do to challenge the political status quo, as Jackie Robinson, Billie Jean King, Sean Doolittle, and others have shown.

When was the last time you saw a celebrity athlete standing in front of a post office or grocery store, holding voter registration forms, or walking precincts and going door-to-door in low-income and minority neighborhoods, urging people to vote? If athletes ventured onto the streets to participate in rallies, protests, and pickets about police abuses, voter suppression, workers' rights, or deportation of immigrants, their gestures would generate considerable media attention for these causes. Billboards and TV commercials saying "LeBron James wants you to vote" and "Megan Rapinoe wants you to call your Congressperson to raise the minimum wage and adopt paid family leave" could serve as a powerful rallying force to improve our democracy and society.

Jackie Robinson's legacy is to remind us of the unfinished agenda of the civil rights revolution, the importance of protest movements in moving the country closer to its ideals, and the role that athletes can play in challenging social injustice.

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- 11 "A Tribute to Jackie Robinson," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, October 16, 2007, <http://jfklibrary.org>.
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- 14 "Jackie Robinson: Man of the Year," *Hartford Courant*, October 24, 1964, 12.
- 15 Dick Gregory quoted in "Jackie Robinson Day," *Montreal Gazette*, September 10, 1966, 7.
- 16 Ibid., 7.
- 17 "Mixed Emotions over Boycott of Olympics," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 16, 1967, 7.
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#### 11. The First Famous Jock for Justice

- 1 Sean Gregory, "You Have to Take a Stand': Soccer Phenom Alex Morgan Wants the Respect—and Money—Female Players Deserve," *Time*, May 23, 2019.
- 2 The criticism must have stung. Six years later he contributed \$2,000 to Gantt's second unsuccessful effort to unseat Helms. And in 2000, like many NBA players, he publicly supported former New York Knicks star Bill Bradley's campaign for president. He later contributed \$10,000 to Barack Obama's campaign for the U.S. Senate seat from Illinois. But labor activists tried and failed to enlist Jordan in their crusade to improve the sweatshop conditions in Nike's overseas factories.
- 3 L. Jon Wertheim, "The Ad That Launched a Thousand Hits. Tiger Woods Came under Fire for Failing to Take a Stand on Augusta National. After All, Hadn't He Volunteered for the Job?," *Sports Illustrated*, April 14, 2003.
- 4 Peter Dreier and Kelly Candaele, "Where Are the Jocks for Justice?," *Nation*, June 28, 2004.
- 5 Jonah Bromwich, "To Me, It Was Racist': N.B.A. Players Respond to Laura Ingraham's Comments on LeBron James," *New York Times*, February 16, 2018.
- 6 There have been exceptions to this trend. The most obvious is Bill Veeck, who at different times owned the Indians (1946-49), the St. Louis Browns (1951-53), and the Chicago White Sox (1959-61 and 1975-81). In 1942, Veeck tried to buy the bankrupt Philadelphia Phillies so he could stock the team entirely with black ballplayers. When Commissioner Landis learned of his plans, he made sure another buyer got the Phillies. In the early

- 1950s, Veeck outraged the other owners by proposing the “socialistic” idea of sharing television revenue. Veeck’s revenue-sharing idea eventually took hold in the 1990s, helping small-market teams remain competitive with bigger clubs and their lucrative television contracts. Veeck idolized Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party leader who ran for president six times (and for whom Veeck voted several times). Because of his radical views, Veeck’s enemies kept him out of the Hall of Fame until 1991, five years after his death.
- 7 Brian Carroll, “‘Jackie Robinson Says’: Robinson’s Surprising, Lengthy, and Multifaceted Career in Journalism,” in *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture 2017–2018*, ed. William Simons (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2019).
  - 8 Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 91. See also Jules Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 61–62.
  - 9 Jackie Robinson, *Baseball Has Done It* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964).
  - 10 Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment*; Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson*; Chris Lamb, *Conspiracy of Silence: Sportswriters and the Long Campaign to Desegregate Baseball* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Irwin Silber, *Press Box Red: The Story of Lester Rodney, the Communist Who Helped Break the Color Line in American Sports* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); Lee Lowenfish, *Branch Rickey: Baseball’s Ferocious Gentleman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Kelly Rusinack, “Baseball on the Radical Agenda: The Daily Worker and Sunday Worker Journalistic Campaign to Desegregate Major League Baseball, 1933–1947,” in *Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports, and the American Dream*, ed. Joseph Dorinson and Joram Warmund (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); David K. Wiggins, “Wendell Smith, the *Pittsburgh Courier-Journal* and the Campaign to Include Blacks in Organized Baseball, 1933–1945,” *Journal of Sport History* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 5–29; Henry Fetter, “The Party Line and the Color Line: The American Communist Party, the ‘Daily Worker,’ and Jackie Robinson,” *Journal of Sport History* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 375–402.
  - 11 Had Robinson lost his case and been dishonorably discharged, Rickey would certainly not have picked him to break Major League Baseball’s color line.
  - 12 Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson*, 172.
  - 13 Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment*, 188.
  - 14 In 1947 and 1948, only one award was given. After that, each league had its own Rookie of the Year award.
  - 15 This account of Robinson’s congressional testimony draws on the following sources: Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson*; Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Knopf, 1989); Howard Bryant, *The Heritage: Black Athletes, a Divided America, and the Politics of Patriotism* (Boston: Beacon, 2018); Joseph Dorinson, “Paul Robeson and Jackie Robinson: Athletes and Activists at Armageddon,” *Pennsylvania History* 66, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 16–26; Dan W. Dodson, “The Paul Robeson-Jackie Robinson Saga and a Political Collision,” in *The Jackie Robinson Reader*, ed. Jules Tygiel (New York: Dutton, 1997); and Peter Dreier, “Half a Century before Colin Kaepernick, Jackie Robinson Said, ‘I Cannot Stand and Sing the Anthem,’” *Nation*, July 18, 2019.
  - 16 Born in 1898 to a former runaway slave, Robeson had starred in four sports at Rutgers, was twice named to the football All-America team, won Rutgers’s oratory award four years in a row, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and was valedictorian of his 1919 graduating class. He played professional football to pay his tuition at Columbia University Law School but gave up practicing law to pursue a theater career. A highly successful film and stage actor, he could also sing opera, show tunes, Negro spirituals, and international songs in twenty-five languages. His concerts drew huge audiences. His recordings sold well. During World War II he entertained troops at the front and sang battle songs on the radio (Duberman, *Paul Robeson*).
  - 17 Jackie Robinson as told to Alfred Duckett, *I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson* (New York: Putnam, 1972).
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  - 27 Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson*, 415.
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  - 29 Ron Briley, “‘Do Not Go Gently into That Good Night’: Race, the Baseball Establishment, and the Retirements of Bob Feller and Jackie Robinson,” in Dorinson and Warmund, *Jackie Robinson*.
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  - 31 Robinson, *I Never Had It Made*, 268–269.
  - 32 *Ibid.*, 85–86.
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- 41 This account of Curt Flood draws on Brad Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave: Curt Flood's Fight for Free Agency in Professional Sports* (New York: Viking, 2006).
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