

Thursday, April 21, 2011

Jackie Robinson Day

April 15th 2011

On April 15th, Major League Baseball honored the accomplishments of Jackie Robinson. Every Major League Baseball Player wore number 42 in his honor. Many well produced documentaries were heard and seen throughout the country, all doing justice to a great man. I'm not a professional writer and I'm certainly not an authority on Mr. Robinson's life. I may not be able to fully explain what Jackie Robinson must have felt or experienced or even what his accomplishments mean to me. However; I do have an understanding. An understanding validated from my own experiences of segregation, back entrances to doctors, restaurants and even refused services and housing. As some of us have shared in a fraction of what Jackie endured, we now enjoy the fruits of his labor.

During this celebration, we acknowledge and worship the significance of this event in baseball history that changed the face of sports and influenced the attitudes of change in America. The signing of Jackie Robinson, an African American, to a contract to play professional baseball in the Major League was a surprisingly bold move. This was significant because Jackie would be the first African American to play in a league that was reserved for white players at that point in history. The signing of Jackie Robinson represented the beginning of an end to an era that tolerated injustice, social and cultural bigotry. He also represented the beginning of a new era where diversity and equality were not a gift, compromise or sacrifice but rather a right given to all men embedded in the foundation of this country. Although the signing of Jackie Robinson did not mean the end of all that what was wrong with baseball or society, it did represent the willingness of people to acknowledge a great injustice and a desire for change.

Acknowledging that playing in the Major Leagues is a great honor, we celebrate and salute Mr. Robinson for his sacrifice, patience, wisdom, courage and strength. It was his bold and courageous efforts that enabled people of color to participate in the great American pastime of baseball. Let's not be misguided in thinking that the signing of Jackie Robinson was solely to give African Americans an equal opportunity to play in the Major Leagues. They were other economic, political and social benefits that motivated such a bold move which was nothing more than an experiment at the time, an experiment requiring a special person such as Jackie Robinson to be successful and to accomplish the vision. This experiment proved to be more than showing the ability of a Black man to compete in a hostile environment. It would change the face of sports and lead to the restructuring of a protected culture.

The signing of Jackie Robinson revealed that opportunity brings change and change is not always welcomed but it is necessary. Change brings suffering, compromise and tolerance. America is the land of opportunity when opportunity is given.