

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #19: Jackie Robinson Ballpark

On January 4, 2025, President Joe Biden signed the Jackie Robinson National Commemorative Site Act. This bipartisan piece of [legislation](#), introduced primarily by Florida delegates in Congress, initiated the process to try and honor the stadium where Jackie Robinson played his first professional baseball game on March 17, 1946. The [Jackie Robinson Ballpark](#), located in Daytona Beach, Florida, will now be reviewed by the Secretary of the Interior to determine the possibility of giving the ballpark the designation of National Historic Landmark. This historic ballpark is the oldest in Minor League Baseball. The ballpark opened on June 4, 1914, and is currently home to the Daytona Tortugas, a Cincinnati Reds minor-league baseball team. In 1989, it was renamed Jackie Robinson Ballpark, and a statue of Jackie was added outside the gate to honor his role in breaking the color barrier in professional baseball. [Jackie Robinson](#) was born in 1919 in Cairo, Georgia, but grew up in Pasadena, California. During high school and college, Jackie was a talented four-sport athlete, most known for his time playing football for the UCLA Bruins. After college, Jackie was drafted into WWII. While serving in the Army, he was [court-martialed](#) for refusing to sit at the back of a segregated bus and eventually was honorably discharged. After his time in the military, Jackie accepted a contract to play professional baseball with the Kansas City Monarchs, a team in the [Negro league](#). In 1945, Jackie Robinson pursued an opportunity to play in the major leagues. Jackie signed a contract with the Montreal Royals, a minor league team of the Los Angeles Dodgers, making him the first Black player in the major leagues since [Moses Fleetwood Walker](#) in 1884 and effectively breaking a color barrier that had existed for the entire history of modern baseball. The Montreal Royals hosted spring training in Florida. Jackie faced several barriers on the team because Florida was still a segregated state at that time. He could not stay in the team hotel, and many cities, such as Sanford, Jacksonville, and DeLand, refused to engage with the Royals. His first major league appearance finally came at the Daytona Beach ballpark during an exhibition game between the Montreal Royals and their parent team, the Dodgers. After just one year with the Royals, the Dodgers called Jackie up. Jackie Robinson went on to have a 10-year MLB career filled with triumph and tribulation. Consistently met with racism and discrimination, Jackie embraced a nonviolent approach but stood firm as a [civil rights advocate](#). In baseball, Jackie won numerous awards, the 1955 World Series, and was the first Black player inducted into the [Baseball Hall of Fame](#). In his retirement, Jackie went on to become the first Black MLB sports announcer and the first Black person to serve as vice president of a major American corporation (Chock full o'Nuts). In reflecting on that significant day in March 1946, when the career of number 42 began, Jackie Robinson wrote, *"I knew, of course, that everyone was not pulling for me to make good, but I was sure now that the whole world wasn't lined up against me. And when I went to sleep, the applause was still ringing in my ears."*

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- What are some examples of *de facto* segregation that Jackie Robinson faced?
- How did Jackie Robinson's actions and story contribute to the overall expansion of civil rights for African-Americans?

