



MORE THAN

A GAME.

MR. RICKEY

CALLS A MEETING

Written by: Ed Schmidt

COMPANION EDUCATION GUIDE

SEPTEMBER 24 - OCTOBER 18, 2026
CLEVELAND FOUNDATION JELLIFFE THEATRE





KARAMU HOUSE HISTORY

On June 15, 1915, two Oberlin College graduates, Russell + Rowena Jelliffe founded the Playhouse Settlement at the corner of East 38th Street + Central Avenue. With a vision that was revolutionary at the time, the couple set out to create a gathering place where people of different racial, ethnic, religious + socioeconomic backgrounds could meet + bond. The early years of the twentieth century witnessed a large influx of African-Americans from the South. Resisting pressure to exclude their new neighbors, the Jelliffes insisted that all races were welcome at the Playhouse Settlement + they soon discovered that the arts provided the perfect common ground. The institution quickly became a magnet for many of the best African-American artists of the day. Dancers, printmakers, actors + writers all found a place where they could hone their crafts. The first theatrical productions at the Playhouse Settlement were staged in 1917.

In 1920 the Jelliffes sponsored the Dumas Dramatic Club, later renamed the Gilpin Players in 1922 after the noted Black actor Charles Gilpin. A theatre was acquired adjacent to the settlement house in 1927. In the 1930s the Gilpin Players began to collaborate with Karamu alum, Langston Hughes. In 1940 a modern dance troupe trained by Marjorie Witt Johnson, won the praise of Life magazine for its appearance at the New York World's Fair.

Following a fire which destroyed the theatre in 1939, the entire Playhouse Settlement was renamed Karamu House in 1941. Karamu's Early Childhood Development Center was built in 1945 at East 89th Street + Quincy Avenue. In 1949 through the aid of Leonard Hanna, Jr. + the Rockefeller Foundation, Karamu boasted two theatres: the 200-seat Jelliffe Theatre + the 100-seat Arena Theatre at the same location.



ABOUT KARAMU HOUSE

A JOYFUL GATHERING PLACE

Over its 110 year history, Karamu has educated + cultivated generations of aspiring youth in all professions. It has developed a national reputation for nurturing African-American actors, artists + dancers. Among the notable performers who refined their crafts at Karamu + later found success in their fields were visual artists Charles Sallee + Elmer Brown, literary giant Langston Hughes, stage + film actors Robert Guillaume, Bill Cobbs, Ron O'Neal, Vanessa Bell Calloway, Richard Brooks, Debra Byrd, James Pickens Jr., + Imani Hakim to name a few. The great Ruby Dee has also been associated with Karamu House.

Today, Karamu is being reborn as a beating heart for the entire community, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, or age, + retains its Historic identity as “a place of joyful gathering.” Core programs include a five-performance, socially-relevant + professional quality, theatre season; arts education in drama, music + dance for all ages; + community programming, such as a lecture series, + spoken word + music performances, that invite participation, engagement, reflection, + a re-commitment to cultural values. Karamu House also enjoys national prominence, being recognized as the oldest Black performing arts institution in the nation + is on the U.S. National Register of historic Places.

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OUR VALUES

VISION

To be a premier professional theatre producing socially relevant entertainment, while delivering innovative, culturally responsive arts education programs + experiences for life-long learners.

MISSION

To produce professional theatre, provide arts education + present community programs for all people while honoring the Black experience.



VISION

Valuing diversity within + outside Karamu House.



COLLABORATION

Partnering to achieve winning outcomes.



JOY

Celebrating our work with community, partners, & each other.



INTEGRITY

Demonstrating high moral principles.



EXCELLENCE

Achieving the highest quality in all we do.



IMPACT

Making positive contributions in lives + community.

MR. RICKEY

CALLS A MEETING

WRITTEN BY: ED SCHMIDT

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO *MR. RICKEY CALLS A MEETING*

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Welcome to this historical + theatrical learning guide, specially designed for audiences of all generations, from school-aged children to lifelong learners. This guide can be read in order or explored chapter by chapter. It serves as your companion guide to the live, onstage performance of the play, ***Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting***. By exploring this material, you will gain the essential historical + emotional context behind one of the most monumental choices in American sports history: Branch Rickey's decision to sign Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

The integration of Major League Baseball (MLB) was far more than a sports milestone; it was a foundational catalyst for the broader American Civil Rights Movement. Breaking baseball's "color line" challenged institutional racism, altered public perceptions, + signaled a wave of social change that would reshape the United States. However, progress is rarely simple. This guide will introduce you to the real-world history in 1947, the deeply human struggles of the individuals involved, + the complex community debates surrounding racial integration + social justice.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



READ + REFLECT

Take time with the short narratives + sidebars.



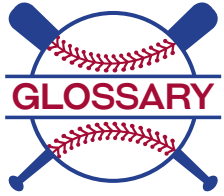
CONFIRM YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Complete the five conceptual questions at the end of each chapter.



START A CONVERSATION

Use the summary points + questions to discuss these themes with friends, family, or classmates.



GLOSSARY TERMS

SEGREGATION

The systemic, enforced separation of different racial groups in daily life.

THE “COLOR LINE”

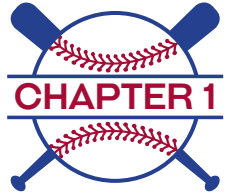
The social + institutional barrier that prevented non-white individuals from participating in white-dominated spaces or organizations

NEGRO LEAGUES

Professional baseball leagues formed by + for Black athletes during the era of segregation.

MAJOR LEAGUES

The historically white-dominated, highest-level professional baseball organization in the United States.



BASEBALL BEFORE JACKIE: THE COLOR LINE

TOPIC STATEMENT

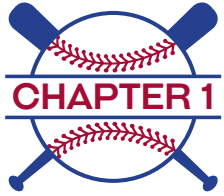
This chapter explains what the "color line" in baseball was, + why the sport was segregated before Jackie Robinson.

COURSE OF LEARNING

For decades, American baseball was strictly divided by race. Under a system of racial segregation often referred to as "Jim Crow," Black Americans were legally + socially forced to use separate schools, buses, hotels, + even sports leagues. In baseball, an unwritten "gentlemen's agreement" among white team owners barred Black players from Major League Baseball (MLB).

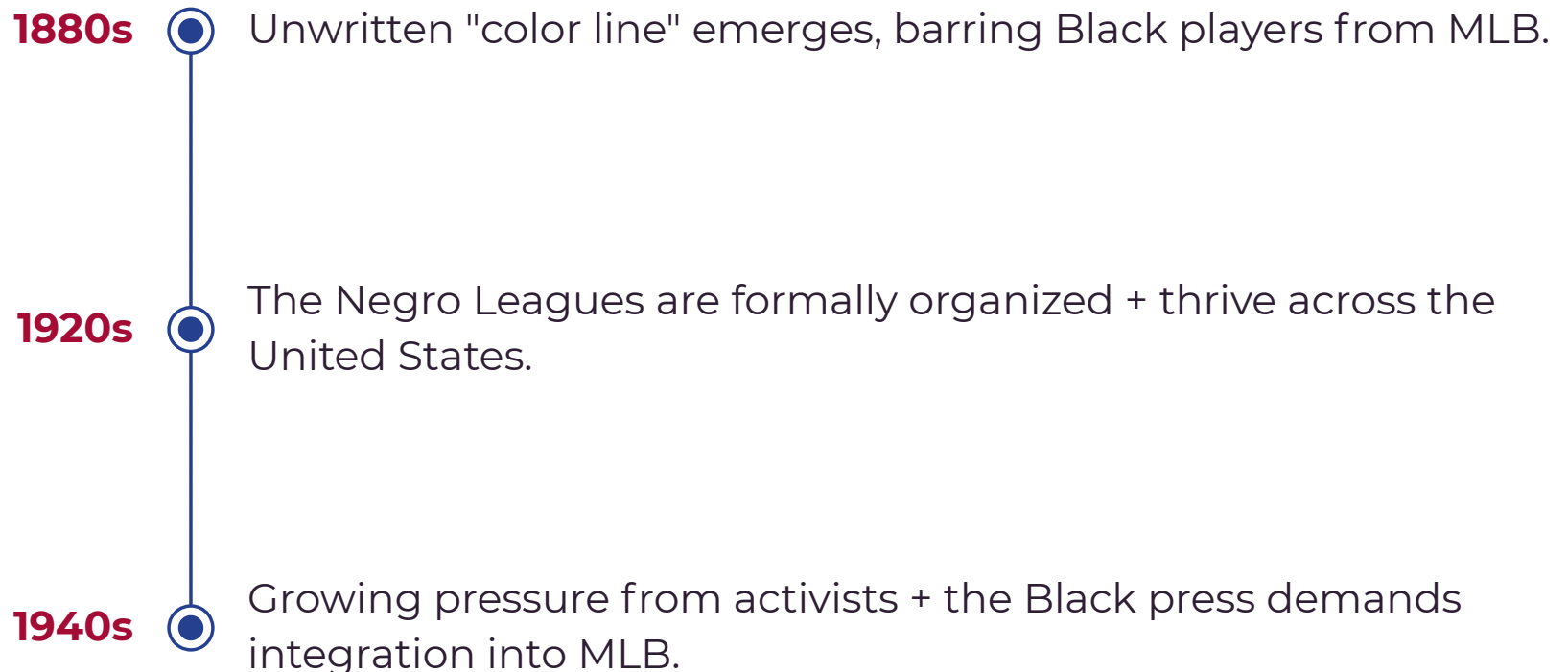
Despite being denied entry into the Major Leagues, Black athletes built their own thriving professional networks, known collectively as the Negro Leagues. These leagues featured athletes whose talent equaled or exceeded that of their white counterparts. Beyond providing top-tier sports entertainment, the Negro Leagues became vital anchors for Black communities, fostering immense civic pride, creating jobs, + generating significant economic growth.

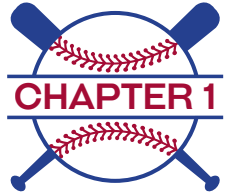
By the 1940s, the push to change this system intensified. Driven by a relentless campaign from the Black press, civil rights activists, + a growing number of white allies, the demand to integrate baseball became an urgent fight for basic American fairness.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF THE COLOR LINE

This chapter explains what the "color line" in baseball was, + why the sport was segregated before Jackie Robinson.





REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

1. What did "the color line" in professional baseball mean?

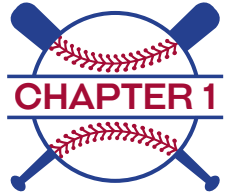
- A) The painted boundaries on a baseball field
- B) An unwritten rule that barred Black players from Major League Baseball
- C) A specific strategy used by managers to win games
- D) The rule dictating what uniforms teams could wear

2. Before Jackie Robinson integrated the sport, where did most Black professional baseball players play?

- A) In international leagues across Europe
- B) In the minor league systems of the Midwest
- C) In the Negro Leagues
- D) They were not allowed to play professional sports at all

3. Why did activists + the Black press heavily push to integrate baseball in the 1940s?

- A) To help Major League teams save money on travel
- B) Because they saw it as an essential battleground for wider civil rights + equality
- C) To eliminate the sport of baseball entirely
- D) Because the Negro Leagues were running out of players



REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

4. The Negro Leagues were culturally + historically important because?

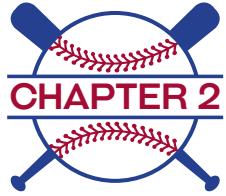
- A) Were funded entirely by Major League owners
- B) Served as a source of community pride, talent showcase, + economic impact for Black communities
- C) Discouraged players from participating in social activism
- D) Only allowed white players to participate in games

5. Segregation in baseball was deeply tied to which broader American reality?

- A) The invention of radio broadcasting
- B) "Jim Crow" laws that separated people in schools, transportation, + public spaces
- C) The economic effects of the gold standard
- D) Technological advancements in manufacturing sports equipment

ANSWER KEY

- 1. B
- 2. C
- 3. B
- 4. B
- 5. B



MEET BRANCH RICKEY + JACKIE ROBINSON

TOPIC STATEMENT

This chapter introduces Branch Rickey + Jackie Robinson as individuals, exploring what shaped them + why they were central to changing baseball.

COURSE OF LEARNING

Integrating baseball required a precise partnership between an insider with the power to open doors + an athlete with the historic strength to walk through them



BRANCH RICKEY

- Brooklyn Dodgers President + General Manager
- Baseball Innovator
- Driven by Morality + Business

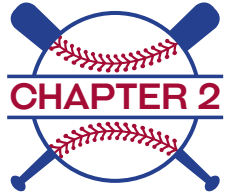
Branch Rickey was the innovative president + general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He understood integration was a moral imperative; he also possessed the sharp business acumen to see that signing talented Black players was a competitive advantage that would improve the game + attract new fans.



JACKIE ROBINSON

- Elite multi-sport athlete
- U.S. Military Veteran
- Known for Character + Discipline

Jackie Robinson was an exceptional, multi-sport athlete who starred at the collegiate level + played for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro Leagues. Robinson was also a U.S. Army veteran whose personal experiences fighting discrimination in the military deeply shaped his dedication to racial justice

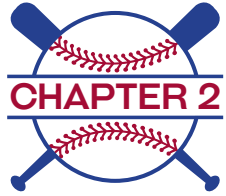


FOR DEEPER LEARNING

Branch Rickey's conviction was partially rooted in his youth, having witnessed the painful humiliation of a Black teammate at Ohio Wesleyan University who was denied a hotel room due to his race.

For Jackie Robinson, his courage was well-documented before MLB; as a military lieutenant, he faced a court-martial for courageously refusing to move to the back of a segregated military bus, a trial in which he was ultimately acquitted.

The path to integrating baseball relied on two distinct figures: an executive working within the system + a player strong enough to carry the immense psychological burden of breaking the color barrier. Branch Rickey brought the systemic opportunity + a strategic business case for fairness. Jackie Robinson brought world-class athletic talent + an unparalleled capacity for disciplined restraint under intense pressure.

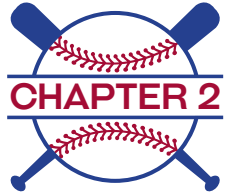


REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

1. **What executive role did Branch Rickey hold during this historic era?**
 - A) Commissioner of Major League Baseball
 - B) General Manager + President of the Brooklyn Dodgers
 - C) Manager of the Kansas City Monarchs
 - D) Owner of the New York Yankees

2. **Branch Rickey believed that integrating professional baseball was:?**
 - A) A financial risk that would likely bankrupt his franchise
 - B) Both a moral duty + a smart business decision that would improve the sport
 - C) Something that should be delayed for several decades
 - D) Unpopular with Black baseball fans

3. **Before being selected by the Brooklyn Dodgers organization, Jackie Robinson played for which team?**
 - A) The New York Black Yankees
 - B) The Chicago Cubs farm team
 - C) The Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues
 - D) The Boston Red Sox



REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

4. **Beyond statistical talent, what vital personal quality did Rickey insist his first signed player must have?**

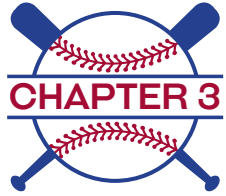
- A) The ability to play every single position on the field
- B) Flawless self-control + the strength to endure hostility without retaliating
- C) A background in public relations + marketing
- D) Wealthy personal background connections

5. **Why were both Branch Rickey + Jackie Robinson essential to integrating the game?**

- A) They were the two fastest base runners in professional baseball
- B) It required an executive to open the institutional doors + a resilient player to handle the immense burden of being first
- C) They both played on the field together during the 1947 season
- D) They invented the rules of the modern minor league system

ANSWER KEY

- 1. B
- 2. C
- 3. C
- 4. B
- 5. B



THE MEETING + DEAL: FROM MONTREAL TO BROOKLYN

TOPIC STATEMENT

This chapter covers how Robinson was signed + promoted—from the first intense meeting, through Montreal, to joining the Brooklyn Dodgers.

COURSE OF LEARNING

In August 1945, Branch Rickey + Jackie Robinson met in the Brooklyn Dodgers' front office. During this famous, emotionally charged encounter, Rickey challenged Robinson, role-playing the brutal insults + racial slurs the ballplayer would inevitably face. Rickey famously asked if Robinson had "the guts not to fight back," explaining that answering hatred with restraint was the only way to succeed. Robinson agreed to the challenge.

This signing was not an instantaneous leap into Major League Baseball; it was a highly calculated, multi-stage process.

STEP 1

THE SIGNING - 1945

Jackie Robinson signs with the Brooklyn Dodgers organization

STEP 2

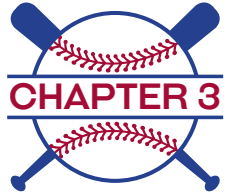
MINOR LEAGUES - 1946

Jackie Robinson plays with the Montreal Royals minor league team

STEP 3

MLB DEBUT - 1947

Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier by starting at first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers

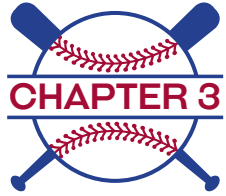


FOR DEEPER LEARNING

In 1946, Robinson was assigned to the Montreal Royals, the Dodgers' primary minor league affiliate. In Canada, Robinson encountered intense hostility on road trips, but his brilliant play + professionalism won over local Montreal fans. Finally, on April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson took the field at Ebbets Field for the Brooklyn Dodgers, officially breaking the modern Major League Baseball color line.

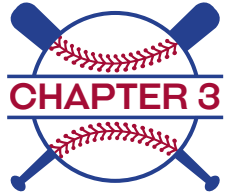
Integrating professional baseball was a multi-year process requiring careful planning, a trial run in the minor leagues, + profound emotional discipline. Beginning with an intense foundational meeting in 1945, the strategy moved Robinson through Montreal before his official history-making debut in Brooklyn on April 15, 1947. This methodical approach helped insulate the experiment against the intense backlash meant to break it.

Take a moment to imagine stepping into a brand-new workspace, school, or community where thousands of people are loudly screaming that you do not belong there, simply because of how you look. Consider the immense focus + emotional energy required to ignore the noise + perform your job at a world-class level under those conditions.



REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

1. **What was the primary purpose of Jackie Robinson playing the 1946 season with the Montreal Royals?**
 - A) To allow him to play in a country without any racial prejudice
 - B) To hide his signing from the rest of the baseball world
 - C) To help Montreal build a brand-new stadium
 - D) To serve as a minor league testing ground + preparation period before entering Major League Baseball (MLB)
2. **Which date is celebrated as the historic moment Jackie Robinson officially "broke the color line" in MLB?**
 - A) August 28, 1945
 - B) October 4, 1950
 - C) April 15, 1947
 - D) June 19, 1944
3. **Why did Branch Rickey insist that Jackie Robinson refrain from fighting back against racist insults?**
 - A) He wanted to prove that Robinson was quiet and timid
 - B) He knew that public retaliation would be used by critics to ruin the integration experiment
 - C) He was worried about the team paying expensive fines to the league
 - D) He thought it would make the games end faster



REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

4. How did the fan base in Montreal respond to Robinson's presence over time?

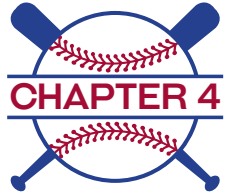
- A) They initially doubted him but grew to fiercely support and cheer for him
- B) They completely boycotted every single home game
- C) They demanded he be sent back to the Negro Leagues immediately
- D) They remained entirely indifferent to his performance

5. Why is the integration of baseball best described as a "process" rather than a single moment?

- A) It required changing baseball rules regarding how many players could be on a team
- B) It involved extensive strategic planning, front-office negotiations, + trial run on a minor-league baseball team
- C) It took over fifty years for Robinson to get a contract
- D) It was an accidental event that nobody saw coming

ANSWER KEY

- 1. D
- 2. C
- 3. B
- 4. A
- 5. B



COURAGE UNDER FIRE: LIFE AS THE FIRST

TOPIC STATEMENT

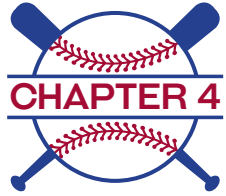
This chapter explores the intense emotional + social challenges Robinson faced, alongside the courage required to be the first Black player in modern Major League Baseball.

COURSE OF LEARNING

Stepping onto the field as the lone Black player in the Major Leagues exposed Robinson to an onslaught of hostility. He endured vicious racist taunts from fans, received explicit threats against his safety, faced open rebellion from opposing players, + was initially met with cold rejection by several of his own Dodgers teammates.

To uphold his agreement with Rickey, Robinson had to internalize his anger, choosing to channel his responses into his play. This deliberate strategy dismantled negative stereotypes, proving that a Black athlete possessed elite discipline + poise. However, this restraint carried a heavy internal toll, placing an immense psychological burden on Robinson + causing constant stress for his family.

Ultimately, Robinson let his athletic performance speak for itself. He put together a spectacular 1947 season, earning the Major League Baseball's very first Rookie of the Year award. His brilliant execution on the diamond won over teammates, altered public opinion, and definitively proved that integrating the sport made baseball better and more competitive.

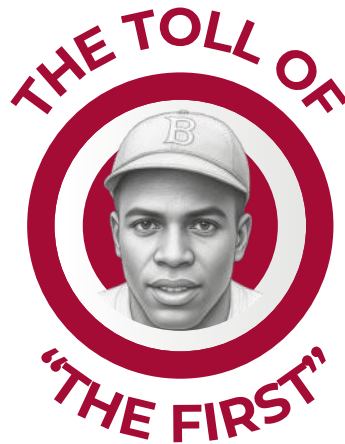


FOR DEEPER LEARNING

Breaking the color line required profound emotional resilience alongside elite athletic skill. Robinson faced severe abuse from fans + competitors, yet kept his promise to Rickey by answering hostility with disciplined restraint. By winning Rookie of the Year, he demonstrated that excellence is the ultimate answer to prejudice, paving a clearer path for the generations of players who followed.

VICIOUS INSULTS
FROM THE STANDS

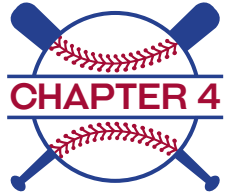
DEATH THREATS +
SAFETY CONCERNS



ISOLATION FROM
HOSTILE TEAMMATES

EXTREME EMOTIONAL /
FAMILY STRAIN

Consider a time when you were treated unfairly or faced hostile words from others. How difficult was it to stay calm? If you were in Jackie Robinson's position, knowing the future of integration rested on your shoulders, how do you think you would have responded?

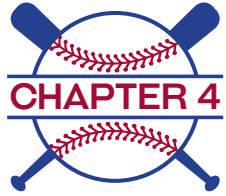


REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

1. **What types of hostility did Jackie Robinson face during his historic first season in MLB?**
 - A) Harsh weather conditions and poor travel accommodations
 - B) Racist insults from fans, opposing teams, and resistance from some teammates
 - C) Being forced to play positions he had never practiced
 - D) Constant changes to the official rulebook

2. **What was the core strategy behind Robinson's agreement not to retaliate against abuse?**
 - A) To show he agreed with his critics
 - B) To avoid getting suspended by the umpires
 - C) To demonstrate immense discipline and actively undermine racist stereotypes
 - D) To keep games quiet so radio broadcasts were clearer

3. **How did Robinson's spectacular on-field performance affect public opinion?**
 - A) It made fans lose interest in the Brooklyn Dodgers
 - B) It proved that integration elevated the game, winning over critics and teammates
 - C) It convinced owners to return to complete segregation
 - D) It had no measurable impact on anyone outside of Brooklyn



REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

4. Why was Robinson's role as the integration pioneer so emotionally demanding?

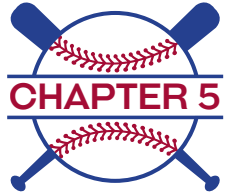
- A) He was forced to manage the team's travel finances
- B) He was not allowed to speak to the media at any point
- C) He did not know how to play baseball at a professional level
- D) He had to internalize immense anger and carry the pressure of an entire movement

5. In what major way did Robinson's courage reshape the future of American sports?

- A) It broke down racial barriers, opening doors for generations of non-white athletes
- B) It led to the elimination of minor league baseball teams
- C) It made baseball the only integrated sport in America
- D) It forced all teams to move their stadiums to larger cities

ANSWER KEY

- 1. B
- 2. C
- 3. B
- 4. D
- 5. A



HISTORY TO DRAMA: *MR. RICKEY CALLS A MEETING*

TOPIC STATEMENT

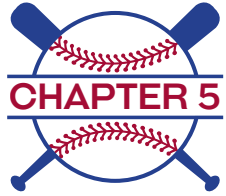
This chapter connects historical events to the play ***Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting***, written by Ed Schmidt, explaining what is real, what is imagined, + how theatre helps us process history.

COURSE OF LEARNING

The play ***Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*** is set in a New York hotel room in 1947. In this drama, Branch Rickey calls a secret meeting with Jackie Robinson + three legendary Black figures: heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis, actor + activist Paul Robeson, + entertainment icon Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.

In actual history, this meeting never took place. The playwright intentionally invented this scenario as a creative vehicle to explore the complex, real-world viewpoints held within the Black community during the integration era.

The play highlights a critical historical tension: while integration was a victory for civil rights, it also threatened Black-owned institutions. Some characters worry that moving star players into white-owned Major League teams will destroy the Negro Leagues, causing Black communities to lose their hard-earned economic power and independent institutions. Others question whether Rickey is motivated by true morality or simply looking to profit off Black talent.



FOR DEEPER LEARNING

Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting uses an imagined historical scenario to dive into real, complex debates surrounding racial progress. Live theatre at Karamu House allows us to step behind the simplified narratives of history books, showing that integration was a multi-faceted issue involving power, economics, + community identity. By watching these icons debate, we see that structural change is often accompanied by challenging trade-offs; we are able to keep history relevant by talking about it + performing it on our stages.



BRANCH RICKEY

- Brooklyn Dodgers President + General Manager
- Driven by a mix of moral conviction and franchise profit.



JACKIE ROBINSON

- Pioneer MLB Player
- Ready to carry the personal burden to break barriers.



JOE LOUIS

- Heavyweight Boxing Champion
- Represents the quiet dignity and athletic excellence of Black pioneers.



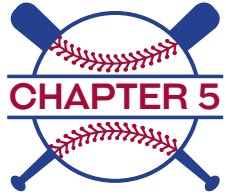
PAUL ROBESON

- Actor, Singer, and Political Activist
- Worried that integration into white institutions might harm Black independence.



BILL "BOJANGLES" ROBINSON

- Famous Tap Dancer and Actor
- Represents the older generation of entertainers navigating white spaces.



REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

1. Which element of the play *Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting* is entirely fictional?

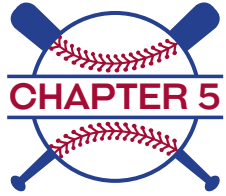
- A) The actual hotel room meeting between Rickey, Robinson, Louis, Robeson, and Bojangles
- B) The existence of the Brooklyn Dodgers
- C) Jackie Robinson's background in the Negro Leagues
- D) Branch Rickey's role as a baseball executive

2. Why did the playwright, Ed Schmidt, bring these specific Black cultural icons together with Branch Rickey?

- A) To show they were all planning to buy a baseball team together
- B) To represent a wide range of real historical perspectives and debates on integration
- C) Because they were all childhood friends from the same town
- D) To write a musical performance about professional sports

3. What central concern does the character of Paul Robeson raise in the play?

- A) That the baseball uniforms are not comfortable enough
- B) That baseball is a less interesting sport than boxing
- C) That integration into white-owned leagues could destroy Black-owned businesses + institutions
- D) That Jackie Robinson is not talented enough to play in MLB



REINFORCEMENT QUESTIONS

4. How does Karamu House and live theatre help audiences process historical events differently than a standard textbook?

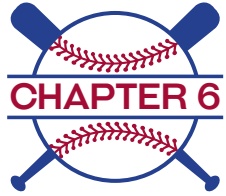
- A) It replaces all real historical facts with completely made-up stories
- B) It brings history to life through dialogue, emotion, and debate, letting us feel the human conflict
- C) It forces audiences to memorize specific dates and statistics
- D) It is designed strictly for younger children to understand

5. Which overarching theme connects the play directly back to the history of the Negro Leagues?

- A) The evolution of stadium design
- B) The rules regarding player trades between different teams
- C) The invention of modern sports media broadcasting
- D) The tension between achieving integration and preserving Black economic independence

ANSWER KEY

- 1. A
- 2. B
- 3. C
- 4. B
- 5. D



CONCLUSION: CARRYING THE STORY FORWARD

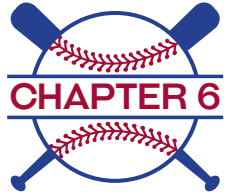
TOPIC STATEMENT

Thinking about ***Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting***, this final chapter helps us reflect on what the signing of Jackie Robinson and the Karamu House production mean for modern conversations around progress, justice, and community.

COURSE OF LEARNING

As you watch + reflect on ***Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting***, remember this was a turning point in history re-examined through a dramatic lens. The integration of baseball was an undeniable milestone for civil rights, but ***Mr. Rickey Calls a Meeting*** reminds us that progress is often complicated. True inclusion involves challenging questions about power, equity, and who benefits most when barriers fall.

- Consider the Viewpoints: Reflect on how each character defines "progress".
- Observe the Dynamics: Take note on who holds the power in the room + how they use it.
- Think About the Absence: Consider whose perspectives or voices might be missing from the conversation by not being included in the meeting.



FINAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do we balance breaking into existing spaces with building and supporting our own community institutions?
2. Branch Rickey acted out of both morality and a desire for profit. Can true social progress be achieved when the people in power are motivated by business interests?
3. What does courage look like today in your own school, workplace, or neighborhood?

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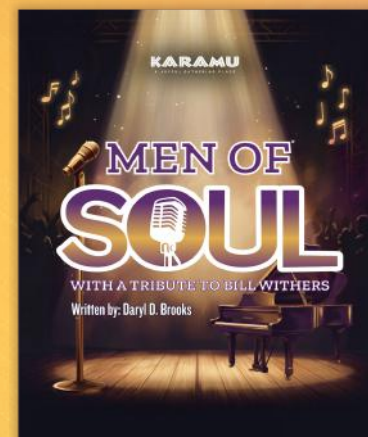
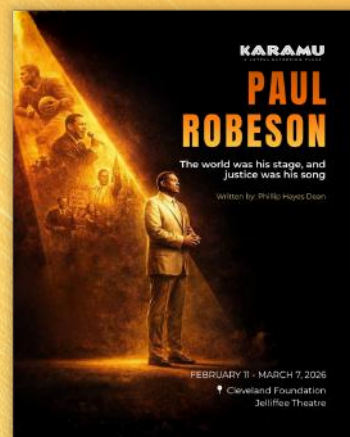
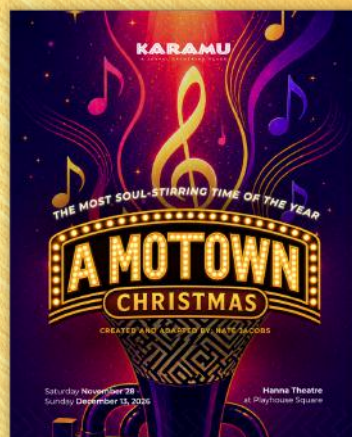
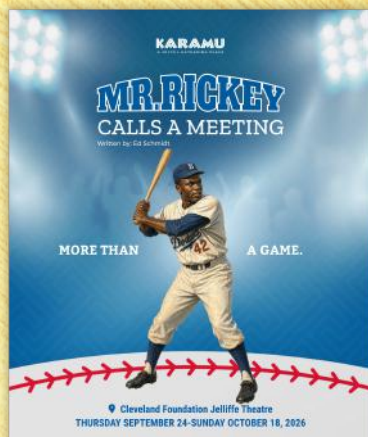
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