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# **The Jackie Robinson Story vs. The Court-Martial of Jackie Robinson vs. 42**

*Hollywood's Representations of Jackie Robinson's Legacy*

LISA DORIS ALEXANDER

According to the late baseball historian Jules Tygiel, “The Jackie Robinson story is to Americans what the Passover story is to the Jews: it must be told to every generation so that we must never forget.”<sup>1</sup> What is it about Robinson’s story that we should not forget? Since his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, there have been three cinematic accounts of Robinson’s story. The first generation told Robinson’s story in the form of the 1950 film *The Jackie Robinson Story*, which followed Robinson from childhood through his first few years with the Dodgers. The next generation retold the story in the form of the 1990 made-for-TV film *The Court-Martial of Jackie Robinson*, which, despite the title, spanned from Robinson’s college career to the beginnings of his professional baseball career. The current generation told Robinson’s story in the form of the 2013 Hollywood film *42*, which focused solely on Robinson’s time with the minor league Montreal Royals and his first season in Brooklyn. Like any other art form, film is a product of the environment and times in which it was produced. These three films span over sixty years and can provide insight into how race and racism in the United States were framed at the time of each film’s release and help answer the critical question Tygiel asks in his assessment of the importance of Robinson’s story: “what is it [about Robinson’s story] that we should not forget?”<sup>2</sup>

Much has already been written about how *The Jackie Robinson Story* (*Story*) fits into the framing of race relations in the 1950s, as well as Robinson’s overall narrative. Rob Edelman makes the argument that *Story* is very much a product of its era in that “as it highlights Robinson’s struggle, the film acknowledges the reality of racism in America. But the scenario stresses that, in due course, fairness will prevail.”<sup>3</sup> This ideal comes through at the end of the film as the omnipotent voiceover maintains that “yes this is the Jackie Robinson story but it is not his story alone, not his victory alone, it is one that each of us shares. A story, a victory that can only happen in a country that is truly free. A coun-

try where every child has the opportunity to become president or play baseball for the Brooklyn Dodgers.”<sup>4</sup> The film acknowledges the fact that Robinson, though a superior athlete, was denied the opportunity to coach and play at the highest levels because of his race; however, as the voiceover reminds us, Robinson was eventually given the opportunity to prove himself because America is a free country where equal opportunities are available to all. In retrospect, the voiceover is ironic due to the fact that we know it took more than fifty years after the film was released for the United States to elect a non-white president, and, as of this writing, there still has not been a female president. Equal opportunity, even in a country that is free, is still slower for some.

Alessandra Raengo argues that both the constraints of the biopic genre and Cold War considerations led the film to “showcase America’s fulfillment of its democratic ideals [as the] film contains a number of strategic omissions deliberately concealing systemic racism.”<sup>5</sup> The Cold War rhetoric is highlighted in the fact that the film chooses to end with Robinson’s testimony in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). With an instrumental version of “America the Beautiful” playing in the background, Robinson states, “I do know that democracy works for those who are willing to fight for it and I’m sure it’s worth defending. I can’t speak for any 50 million people no one person can but I’m certain that I and other Americans of many races and faiths have too much invested in our country’s welfare to throw it away or let it be taken from us.”<sup>6</sup> HUAC testimony and the associated protocol of black-listing are certainly recognizable symbols of Cold War politics and hysteria, so the inclusion of Robinson’s statement helps substantiate Raengo’s analysis. The fact that the film severely edited Robinson’s remarks suggests that systemic racism had no place in *Story’s* narrative. As Aaron Baker notes, the film “individualizes Robinson’s experience of racism to imply the appropriateness of his unique opportunity and self-sufficient responses to its roadblocks.”<sup>7</sup> The film focuses on the portion of Robinson’s testimony that reassures the powers that be that blacks would fight for the United States, a sentiment challenged by remarks made by activist/artist Paul Robeson, and underscores the fact that black people believed in democracy even when the tenets of democracy were being denied them. What the film neglected to include was the portion of Robinson’s testimony that rebukes systemic racism: “white people must realize that the more a Negro hates communism because it opposes democracy, the more he is going to hate any other influence that kills off democracy in this country—and that goes for racial discrimination in the Army, and segregation on trains and buses, and job discrimination because of religious beliefs or color or place of birth . . . . 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 these charges.”<sup>8</sup> Highlighting this portion of Robinson’s testimony, which reads as quite frustrated and angry, would not have been in line with the stoic version of Robinson portrayed in the film; it would have complicated the us vs. them Cold War rhetoric that was prevalent at the time and would run counter to the “individual acts of discrimination” definition of racism the film projects. The minimization of systemic racism and the emphasis on democratic ideals and individual achievement overcoming prejudice that *The Jackie Robinson Story* highlights are right in line with 1950s mainstream white popular culture thinking. Can the same be said for the more recent cinematic representations of Robinson’s story?

Though many scholars have discussed *The Jackie Robinson Story* from a multitude of different angles, the same cannot be said for *The Court-Martial of Jackie Robinson* (*Court-Martial*). The 1990 made-for-TV film aired on TNT and starred Andre Braugher as Jackie Robinson. Many things had changed between 1950 and 1990: the Cold War was officially over, instances of *de jure* Jim and Jane Crow were less overt, and professional baseball had a multitude of black and brown players. While *The Jackie Robinson Story* primarily focuses on individual acts of discrimination, *Court-Martial* moved in a very different direction. The opening credits scroll amid a backdrop of photographs that highlight Jim and Jane Crow. One photo is of a black man walking past a movie theater that has a “Colored Balcony” sign while another photograph features several white police officers beating and restraining a black man. The final image of the opening credits is the infamous photograph of Thom Shepard and Abram Smith’s lynching—an image that provided the inspiration for the poem/song “Strange Fruit.” Even before a single line of dialogue is spoken, it is clear that *Court-Martial* will be a more visceral film than *The Jackie Robinson Story*.

While self-sufficiency was key to *The Jackie Robinson Story*, the Jackie Robinson in *Court-Martial* continuously relies on outside advice and support. Toward the beginning of the film we see *Pittsburgh Courier* journalist Wendell Smith, played by J.A. Preston, discussing black players with two scouts. It is clear that Smith knows the scouts and they know him, and Smith makes it clear that everyone knows that the reintegration of professional baseball is coming. The story of baseball’s reintegration presented in *Court-Martial* is more in line with actual historical events than *Story’s* version. While Dodgers General Manager Branch Rickey signed Robinson, sportswriters such as Smith, Sam Lacy, and Lester Rodney had been publically advocating for the dissolution of baseball’s color line for quite some time before Robinson was signed. *Court Martial* advocates the idea that racial progress was not just the result of top-down edicts, it was also the product of bottom-up grass roots agitating.

In *Court-Martial*, Robinson turns to Smith when he is court-martialed, and the film shows the journalist writing columns on Robinson's behalf. In his autobiography *I Never Had it Made*, Robinson recounts that it was not him who reached out to Smith, it was "some of my black brother officers [who] were determined to help me beat the attempted injustice in my case. They wrote letters to the black press. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, then one of the country's most powerful weeklies, gave the matter important publicity. The Army, sensitive to this kind of spotlight, knew that if I was unfairly treated, it would not be a secret."<sup>9</sup> Though there is no byline attached, there is an article from the *Pittsburgh Courier* dated August 5, 1944, with the headline "Lt. Jackie Robinson Faces Court-Martial." It is likely that Smith wrote the piece. In reality, instead of writing to Smith, Robinson asked the NAACP for assistance by writing, "I feel I am being unfairly punished because I wouldn't be pushed around by the driver of the bus."<sup>10</sup> Though he did not hear back from the NAACP until the day after the trial began, it is telling that Robinson went outside military channels for assistance.<sup>11</sup> Again, this film does not embrace the "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" method of empowerment; Robinson received support from his fellow black soldiers, Smith, and boxer Joe Louis, who is featured prominently in the film advising Robinson on how to navigate the Army's racist environment.

In addition to moving from self-sufficiency to collective action, *Court-Martial* moved the entire Robinson family from passive characters to people actively engaged with each other and the world around them. Two characters in particular, Rachel Robinson and Mallie Robinson, were significantly more forceful in the second film. When *The Jackie Robinson Story* was released in 1950, the second wave of the feminist movement was still ten years away, and female characters in films were usually not strong protagonists. Forty years later, though the roles were small, both Rachel and Mallie Robinson had significantly changed. Both films include a scene where Robinson contemplates leaving UCLA. In *Story*, Mallie Robinson, played by Louise Beavers, is somber and resigned. Film scholar Donald Bogle described Beaver's portrayal as "moon-faced, still mellow, and marvelously meek."<sup>12</sup> Robinson questions the utility of a college degree arguing that his brother Mack graduated from college and the only job Mack could find was as a street sweeper. Mack appears resigned to his fate and simply states that at least it is a steady job.<sup>13</sup> In *Court-Martial*, Robinson's mother, played by Ruby Dee, is livid at the idea that Jackie would leave school. This time it is Mack who reminds everyone that his college degree and his Olympic medal were not enough to secure him a coaching job. Mallie Robinson reads them the riot act, and the only thing that ends her monologue is a radio newscast announcing the attack on Pearl Harbor. *Court-*

*Martial* also portrays Rachel Robinson as having a more active role. Ruby Dee, who played Rachel Robinson in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, remarked that “The moment I talked with [Rachel] I had the feeling I wasn’t doing her justice . . . She was a stronger woman than I portrayed.”<sup>14</sup> In *Court-Martial*, Kasi Lemmons plays Rachel as a strong, outgoing woman. In a scene not included in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, Rachel informs Jackie that she has joined the Cadet Corps. Jackie did not agree with her decision and demands that she quit. Instead of agreeing to leave the Corps, Rachel returns his ring and promptly ends their engagement. It is clear that Rachel intends to chart her own path with or without Jackie, a fact that Robinson eventually respects.

Just as Mallie and Rachel Robinson are more forceful in *Court-Martial* than they were in *Story*, Robinson himself undergoes a similar transformation. In *Story*, while “Robinson’s dialogue was minimal [and] the basic narrative tended to emphasize the need for passive composure,”<sup>15</sup> *Court-Martial* portrays Robinson as more self-assured and confrontational. When a Colonel refuses to advance his application to Officer Candidate School, Robinson first requests to go over his head and then enlists Joe Louis’s help to attain his goal. When a white officer defends segregated seating in the commissary during a phone conversation, Robinson meets with the officer in person to express his displeasure with the seating arrangements and to make sure that the officer knew that Robinson was a black man. Robinson is framed as a man who knew his rights, knew military policy, knew segregation was wrong, and actively worked to make things better for the black soldiers under his command. Robinson demanded the respect his humanity and rank deserved, and, because of that, he was labeled a trouble-maker and shipped to Texas, a move that led to his eventual court-martial. When Robinson refused to move to the back of the bus, a request which Robinson knew was in violation of military policy, he forcefully argued his case even as the Military Police continuously referred to him as “the nigger lieutenant.” After enduring the barrage of racial epithets, Robinson makes it clear that there will be consequences if the MP calls him out of his name again. At that point, the camera moves to a close-up of Robinson’s face that conveys the emotional toll the language has had on him in such a short period of time but, the close-up also conveys a substantial amount of rage. For Hollywood in the 1950s, the primary response blacks could have to racism was disappointment and resignation. By 1990, black characters were allowed to show anger about their status as second-class citizens.

In addition to displaying more emotive characters, *Court-Martial* gives the audience a slightly better understanding of systemic racism than *Story* provided. The more recent film shows that there was legislation in place that prevented Robinson’s integrated sports teams from playing all-white sports teams.

The segregated buses, which instigated Robinson's court-martial, were not a policy put in place by a single individual; these were company policies and city and/or state laws that demanded the separation of the races. *Court-Martial* also makes it clear that the Armed Forces as an institution was racist and that the racism was not only based upon discriminatory acts by individuals: the racially segregated units and facilities were not solely due to the prerogative of racist individuals. A coda at the end of the film reassures the audience that the systemic racism illustrated in the film is no longer a problem since "President Harry S. Truman signed an Executive Order on July 26, 1948 prohibiting racial segregation in the Armed Forces. Today, the Army is considered one of the most integrated organizations in the United States."<sup>16</sup> While *Court-Martial* acknowledges that systemic racism existed, it presents it only in forms that have been successfully eradicated. Much of this shift can be attributed to the general change in attitudes regarding race and racism in the years between *Story* and *Court-Martial*; however, another possible explanation may have to do with the increased discussions on race and racism that were occurring at the time the film was being written and produced. In June 1989, Spike Lee's controversial opus on race relations, *Do the Right Thing*, opened in theaters and sparked a national conversation on race relations. The film that deals with "police profiling and brutality; urban, ethnic conflict; the crisis in black families and relationships"<sup>17</sup> and challenges the audience "to grapple with the dynamics of race, class, power, mobility and privilege in ways too few films have done since."<sup>18</sup> The racial conversation was intensified two months later when a group of white teenagers attacked and killed 16-year-old Yusef Hawkins in Bensonhurst, New York.<sup>19</sup> *Court-Martial* can be read as not just a tribute to Jackie Robinson but as a contribution to a public discussion of racism that was already in progress.

Finally, *Court-Martial* shifts the importance of Robinson's legacy away from the baseball diamond. The film ends with Robinson playing for the Kansas City Monarchs and the Brooklyn Dodgers scout, who spoke with Wendell Smith earlier in the film, assuring him that the offer to sign him was not a joke. Aside from some brief clips of Robinson playing baseball, basketball, and football in college, the film spends very little time engaging with Robinson as an athlete. Instead, the film chooses to portray him as an outspoken advocate for civil rights. In fact, the film's coda reads in part: "In 1947 Jack Roosevelt Robinson became the first black man to play major league baseball, and in 1962 was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. He devoted the rest of his life to the civil rights movement and the quality of all men."<sup>20</sup> The statement highlights the idea that Robinson was a baseball player who was clearly talented enough

to earn induction into the Hall of Fame; however, the statement also underscores that Robinson's contributions to society were not limited to his role as an athlete. If the forty years between *Story* and *Court-Martial* resulted in a sea-change in how Robinson and racism were framed, what would the twenty years between *Court-Martial* and *42* produce?

When *42* opened in the summer of 2013, critics responded favorably to it; however, a lot of the critical praise was full of caveats. *The Guardian's* Mark Kermode wrote that *42* was "inspirational fare, although such a remarkable story perhaps deserves a more remarkable movie."<sup>21</sup> Richard Roper of the *Chicago Sun-Times* wrote that the film "is competent, occasionally rousing and historically respectful—but it rarely rises above standard, old-fashioned biography fare. It's a mostly unexceptional film about an exceptional man,"<sup>22</sup> and Scott Foundas of *Variety* wrote that *42* "is a relentlessly formulaic biopic [whose] cumulative effect is to render its subject markedly smaller and more ordinary than he actually was."<sup>23</sup> *The New York Times* called the film "a hero-worshiping fable suitable for fourth-grade classrooms,"<sup>24</sup> and Wesley Morris from *Grantland* remarked that the film "has been made with such reverence for Robinson's importance that Robinson is barely there."<sup>25</sup>

Though *Court-Martial* championed community efforts and grassroots advocacy in its narrative, *42* goes back to the narrative advanced by *Story*. *42* frames baseball's reintegration as a top-down endeavor that assumes that significant historical events are the results of the machinations of powerful men at the top of the political, social, or economic food chain. The audience sees this at the beginning of the film when Branch Rickey, played by Harrison Ford, casually lays out his intention to sign a black player to the Dodgers. While Rickey's underlings react in shock and horror, the audience is left with the impression that Rickey, being a moral and courageous man, sees an inequity and decides to correct it. This view is tempered somewhat throughout the film as Robinson, played by Chadwick Boseman, repeatedly asks Rickey why he signed him and Rickey gives no less than three different answers to that question—all of them true to a certain extent. Like *Story*, this narrative completely erases the massive efforts by Lester Rodney, Sam Lacy, and Wendell Smith to force MLB teams to desegregate in the early 1940s. The scene in which Smith and Robinson meet is highly problematic because as Howard Bryant points out, "Robinson, acts as though he's never heard of the *Pittsburgh Courier*. In black America at that time, the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Baltimore Afro-American* were the leading black newspapers, shipped across the country. An athlete of Robinson's stature, especially one raised amid the segregated and parallel structures of American life, would have known of

the *Courier* the way most people today have heard of *Time* magazine.”<sup>26</sup> As mentioned earlier, Robinson had not only heard of Smith and *The Courier*, but he credited their activism with assisting him with his court-martial.

42 also returns to a reliance on self-sufficient responses to racism. Though Smith is present at the games, Robinson must carry his burden alone: there is no mention of Dan Bankhead, who roomed with Robinson during the events of the film, and no mention of future Hall-of-Famer Larry Doby, who signed with Cleveland two months after Robinson arrived in Brooklyn. In many ways, 42 represents a step backward in popular culture’s imagining of racism and Robinson. The most recent incarnation of Robinson’s story is both more conservative, with a small *c*, than the previous films in that it spans a much shorter period of time than *Story* or *Court-Martial* and it is more Conservative, with a capital *C*, in its framing of racism than *Court-Martial*. After the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the mainstream white storyline that followed argued that the United States had finally become a post-racial society. Many understood that this was not the case. *The Atlantic’s* Ta-Nehisi Coates makes the argument that Obama’s election actually “demonstrated integration’s great limitation—that acceptance depends not just on being twice as good but on being half as black”<sup>27</sup> and the common meme that blacks must be “twice as good” to succeed “holds that African Americans—enslaved, tortured, raped, discriminated against, and subjected to the most lethal home-grown terrorist movement in American history—feel no anger toward their tormentors.”<sup>28</sup> 42 appears to embrace the thought process Coates describes as Robinson shows little to no anger about the racism he is subjected to or his inability to fight against it.

*Court-Martial* presents a Jackie Robinson who is angry about racism and segregation, is not afraid to express that anger, and knows how to use that anger to push back against white supremacy. 42 presents a more subdued Robinson and only presents two instances where Robinson either actively pushes back against white supremacy or expresses anger toward the racism he is experiencing. Early in the film there is a scene that shows Robinson barn-storming with the Kansas City Monarchs. The team pulls up to a gas station to fill up, and, when Robinson walks toward the bathroom, the attendant tells him “come on boy you know you can’t go in there.”<sup>29</sup> Robinson walks back toward the bus, and while looking annoyed, calmly tells the attendant, “Take that hose out of the tank . . . We’ll get our ninety-nine gallons of gas someplace else.”<sup>30</sup> The attendant, realizing the sheer amount of money he would lose by clinging to his racism, allows the players to use the facilities. Much later in the film when Robinson was with the Brooklyn Dodgers, Philadelphia Phillies manager Ben Chapman engaged in a three-minute long tirade of racist language

and insults, after which Robinson retreats to the hall between the dugout and locker room where he screams, cries, and beats his bat against the wall until it finally breaks. When Rickey comes up to him, Robinson yells, "No! The next white son of a bitch that opens his mouth I'll bash his goddamn teeth in."<sup>31</sup> Of course, Rickey reminds Robinson that he cannot respond to Chapman's racism. It is also telling that the most visceral expressions of racism in *42*, the gas station attendant and Chapman, are individual acts, not systemic. The only instance of systemic racism featured in the film was when Rachel Robinson, played by Nichole Behaire, uses a "white only" bathroom in the airport.

The most important departure of *42* from *Court-Martial* is that the more recent film lacks historical context, and, in doing so, it diminishes Robinson's impact. Early in the film when Robinson arrives in Sanford, Florida, for spring training, he meets Mr. Brock who houses Robinson and Smith until they are run out of town, and the two have the following conversation:

MR. BROCK: My wife asked me what do you serve when a hero's coming to dinner

ROBINSON: Mr. Brock, I'm just a ballplayer

MR. BROCK: Oh no, no you tell that to all the little colored boys playing baseball in Florida today, to them, you're a hero.<sup>32</sup>

Though the dialogue specifically rejects the notion that Robinson was just a ballplayer, the film itself portrays the opposite message. The reason Robinson is so revered by people is because his life and influence was about so much more than baseball, as evidenced by the coda at the end of *Court-Martial*. Since *42* only shows Robinson as a ballplayer, the audience does not get the sense that he accomplished anything significant outside of sports or that his actions, or restraint depending on the point of view, had any effect outside the baseball arena. Neither *The Jackie Robinson Story* nor *42* show Robinson's interaction with any of the larger Civil Rights forces at work during the time. In fact, unless the viewers are knowledgeable about history, they would have no idea that Robinson's actions took place several years before the *Brown v. the Board of Education* case that desegregated secondary schools. *42* ends by fast forwarding to the present day and providing the coda that reads "every year in April, all MLB players wear the number 42 as reminder of Jackie's accomplishments on and off the field." *Story* places Robinson within the context of the Cold War by ending with his HUAC testimony, and *Court-Martial* connects Robinson to World War II and the black press. Since *42* does not show any of Robinson's off-the field accomplishments or connect him to larger historical forces, the film limits Robinson's impact to the baseball diamond.

In assessing the importance of Robinson's story, Jules Tygiel asks the crit-

ical question, “what is it [about Robinson’s story] that we should not forget?” We should not forget that Robinson publically supported John Carlos and Tommy Smith’s 1968 Olympic protest<sup>33</sup> and was the only player, past or present, who testified in support of Curt Flood’s lawsuit against MLB,<sup>34</sup> but you wouldn’t know that by watching any of the screen adaptations of Robinson’s story. Also missing from the screen versions of Robinson’s story are the ways sportswriters turned against him when his ban on fighting back was lifted, the fact that MLB would not employ him after he retired as a player, and the choice words he had about baseball shortly before his passing. Of course there is nothing regarding his business dealings or his political machinations with Nelson Rockefeller and Richard Nixon. The two big-screen adaptations, *The Jackie Robinson Story* and *42*, fall into the trap that many Hollywood films fall into when it comes to telling America’s history of white supremacy: they frame racism as the words and actions of bad people. If racism were just about individual acts of discrimination, it would be eradicated by now. The message seems to be that if people of color just wait patiently, all of the bad people will either see the error of their ways or simply die off, and our problems will be solved. It’s not just about the racist language Robinson endured, it’s not even the hotels that wouldn’t house Robinson or the next generation of black and brown MLB players, it’s the fact that white supremacy is ingrained in our institutions, including MLB, which was segregated, integrated, and re-segregated over the course of its history prior to Robinson’s arrival. The voice-over at the very beginning of *42* states: “In 1946 there were 16 Major League Baseball teams with a total of 400 players on their rosters. Every one of the 400 players were white. But when opening day came in 1947 that number dropped to 399.” That opening makes it seem like it was a random anomaly that baseball was segregated in 1946 and not the result of deliberate and concerted efforts. In his detailed critique of the film Dave Zirin wrote:

*42* rests on the classical Hollywood formula of “Heroic individual sees obstacle. Obstacle is overcome. The End.” That works for *Die Hard* or *American Pie*. It doesn’t work for a story about an individual deeply immersed and affected by the grand social movements and events of his time . . . This is particularly ironic since Jackie Robinson spent the last years of his life in a grueling fight against his own myths. He hated that his tribulations from the 1940s were used to sell a story about an individualistic, Booker T. Washington approach to fighting racism. This was a man tortured by the fact that his own experience was used as a cudgel against building a public, fighting movement against racial injustice. He wanted to shift the discussion of his own narrative from one of individual achievement to the stubborn continuance of institutional-

ized racism in the United States. The film, however, is a celebration of the individual and if you know how that pained Mr. Robinson, that is indeed a bitter pill.<sup>35</sup>

Zirin's analysis of Robinson is correct. In 1969 Robinson was interested in writing a biography about his life. He contacted Random House about the project, and, according to the editor, future Pulitzer Prize winner Toni Morrison, Robinson "wanted his book to be about more than baseball. He wanted it to be about the larger picture, about society and the times he had lived through."<sup>36</sup> The biography, *I Never Had it Made*, was eventually published elsewhere, as Random House deemed the project to be too political. The biography devotes ninety-six pages to his baseball career and 164 pages to his life outside of baseball. In the biography's epilogue Robinson discusses the title and the world around him when he wrote:

This is why I have devoted and dedicated my life to service. I don't like to be in debt. I still owe. Some of my friends tell me I've paid the note a thousandfold. But I still feel I owe—till every man can rent and lease and buy according to his money and his desires; until every child can have an equal opportunity in youth and manhood; until hunger is not only immoral but illegal; until hatred is recognized as a disease, a scourge, and epidemic, and treated as such; until racism and sexism and narcotics are conquered and until every man can vote and any man can be elected if he qualifies—until that day Jackie Robinson and no one else can say that he has it made.<sup>37</sup>

It is safe to say that Robinson not only understood how he influenced the world around him but equally important how the world around him impacted his life. *42* and *The Jackie Robinson Story* disregards that Jackie Robinson while the made-for-TV film *The Court Martial of Jackie Robinson* comes the closest to portraying a full picture of Robinson.

Institutional racism within the film industry itself and *de jure* segregation within American society as a whole during the 1950s helps explain the limited view *The Jackie Robinson Story* had of Robinson's life. At the same time, because the film was made at the beginning of his career, many of the events he participated in and spoke out for and against had not taken place yet. By the 1990s a more complete picture of Robinson was available, and, given the conversations about race that were occurring at the time, *The Court-Martial of Jackie Robinson* could and did expand upon Robinson's life and present a more nuanced account of the kinds of racism Robinson endured and fought against. The "post-racial" ideology and the conservative backlash against President Obama and any discussions of systemic racism informed the safe version of Robinson and racism portrayed in *42*. No film can be everything to everyone, and no film can cover the entirety of an individual's life; however, it

is incumbent on filmmakers to fully understand the subject they are bringing to the screen. The problems with *The Jackie Robinson Story* and *42* seem to stem from the erroneous notion that Jackie Robinson's impact on history and culture is primarily due to his status as a ballplayer. It is certainly true that we know who Robinson was because he helped reintegrate professional baseball, but some filmmakers make the mistake of thinking Robinson's legacy ends there and that does a huge disservice to the audience and to Robinson himself. Unfortunately, the things we should not forget about Robinson's story have yet to be adequately portrayed in popular film.

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