

# The Jackie Robinson Legacy: Rising Above the Sport

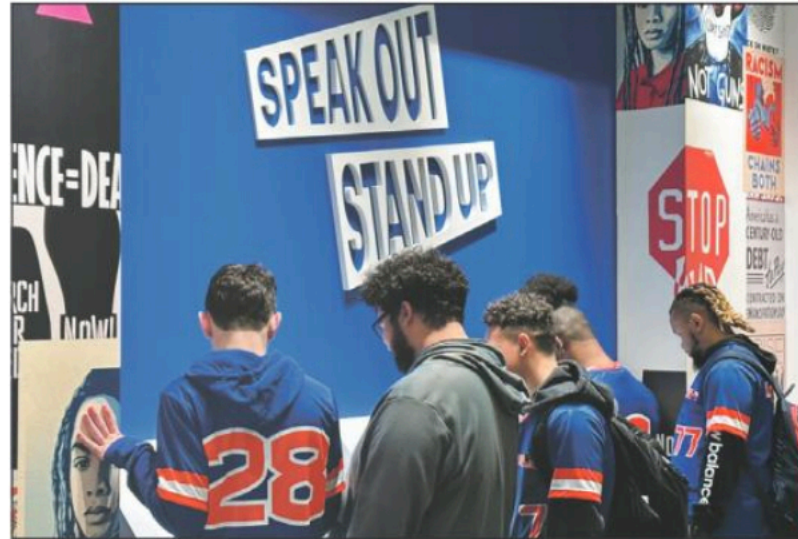
BY DR. CLAUDIA SCHRADER

Across the street from Medgar Evers College, Ebbets field, a Major League Baseball (MLB) stadium, once stood. And it was there in 1947 that Jackie Robinson as a player for the Brooklyn Dodgers, would break the sports color barrier and become the first African American to play modern MLB. We have all heard the story of his life both on and off the field. He was one of five children raised by sharecroppers in Georgia, and as a child, Robinson's mother moved with her children to an affluent community in California. As the only Black family living on his block, he encountered prejudice and racism.

Jackie was a gifted athlete in high school, junior college and at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Financial hardship resulted in him leaving college and working as an athletic director in a government youth program. Not long after, he tried to pursue a career in football but was drafted in the Army. When he called out the racial discrimi-

nation he experienced, he was court-martialed and acquitted, serving out his time as a coach in army athletics and receiving an honorable discharge.

Before playing for MLB, Robinson played for the Negro leagues. The year he broke the color barrier, Robinson was named Rookie of the Year, and two years later, the League's Most Valuable Player and batting champ. He would win many awards and accolades, but his fight for racial justice would continue. Throughout his career, he faced significant racial discrimination, from the Jim Crow South to the stadiums in the North. Positioned at first base, a barrage of death threats were hurled at him from baseball fans in the stands and players in the dugout. It is said that even his teammates treated him poorly and wanted him out of the League. But not everyone. Other teammates would become his allies. When a rival team harassed Robinson, Eddie Stanky, who did not even like being an integrated team, stood up for him. And when



Members of Kingsborough Community College's baseball team are inspired by photos and memorabilia of iconic ballplayer Jackie Robinson during a visit to the Manhattan museum that bears his name.

Robinson was being heckled during a practice game, Pee Wee Reese in a gesture of support, put his arm around Robinson's shoulder, and the crowd went silent.

The story of Robinson's life on and off the field speaks volumes about the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

I do not doubt that Robinson's experience as an athlete throughout his life, played a critical part in developing his character. He understood that working with others toward a common goal was his only way to win. This understanding, which his teammates, baseball fans and others grew to

embrace, partially helped to dismantle walls of intolerance.

There are still more walls that need to be destroyed. I am grateful that the students I accompanied on a recent trip to the Jackie Robinson Museum in Manhattan will be part of the work to destroy the walls. This diverse group of students, members of the Kingsborough Community College (KCC) Baseball Team, all share a love of baseball, the goal of earning a college degree and, from what I observed, a true brotherhood. Like Jackie Robinson, they also understand that they, too, have a role in both building bridges of understanding and tolerance and leaving the world a much better place than they found it.

*Dr. Claudia Schrader is the president of Kingsborough Community College (KCC), the borough's only community college. To find out about the baseball team's upcoming games and other team schedules go to [www.kccathletics.com](http://www.kccathletics.com). To learn more about the Jackie Robinson Museum go to [www.jackierobinsonmuseum.org](http://www.jackierobinsonmuseum.org).*