

African-American Holidays, Festivals, and Celebrations

*The History, Customs, and Symbols Associated
with Both Traditional and Contemporary
Religious and Secular Events Observed by
Americans of African Descent*

By Kathlyn Gay

Foreword by Jean Currie Church
Introduction by Jessie Carney Smith

Omnigraphics

615 Griswold • Detroit, MI 48226



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African World Festival in Detroit, Michigan

Date Observed: Third weekend in August

Location: Detroit, Michigan

The African World Festival celebrates the richness, diversity and worldwide influence of African cultures through music, art, and food. The festival is produced by the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History and is held in downtown Detroit on the third weekend of August each year.

Historical Background

The city of Detroit has a rich African-American history spanning as far back as the 1800s. Although it is unknown exactly when the first African Americans came to Detroit, the U.S. census of 1820 reported that African Americans made up 4.7 percent of the city's population. By 1837, Detroit had become an important stop along the Underground Railroad, with city residents helping multitudes of slaves escape across the Detroit River to Canada. Black Bottom, Detroit's first African-American community, was established in the mid-1800s on the banks of the Detroit River. Black Bottom soon became an African-American cultural center with the founding of social and political organizations, educational and recreational societies, churches and schools. During the Civil War years many southerners moved north, and by 1870 the city's African-American population had increased dramatically.

To meet the military demands of World War I, the industrial manufacturing factories in Detroit recruited southern African Americans by advertising high-paying jobs for able-bodied workers. This triggered a massive migration of African Americans to Detroit that continued through the 1930s. A second influx of African Americans occurred during World War II as southerners again moved north looking for work. Detroit's African-American population doubled during the 1950s and 1960s, and the city again became an important cultural center. The Motown Record Corporation launched the careers of



A dancer instructs a festivalgoer at the 1999 African World Festival.

many popular African-American superstars such as Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross and the Supremes, and the Jackson Five. During these years Detroit also became a focal point of the civil rights movement, making national news when violence erupted throughout the city in the 1967 riots. After this period of extreme racial tension, African Americans in Detroit focused on political activism and worked to elect African Americans to public office. By 1975, African Americans made up the majority of Detroit's population, and by 1990 Detroit was among the 10 U.S. cities with the largest percentage of African Americans. The 2000 U.S. census reported Detroit's population as 83% African American.

Creation of the Festival

The Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History (formerly known as the Afro-American Museum of Detroit) has produced the African World Festival since 1983. The African World Festival is modeled after the Festival of African Culture, an interna-

tional event that was last held in Nigeria in 1977. More than a celebration of African-American culture, the African World Festival honors all of the cultures that have evolved in the African diaspora — the descendants of African people who are now scattered all over the world. The festival promotes the ideals of the Pan-African movement that began in the 1920s. Championed by Jamaican civil rights pioneer Marcus Garvey, the Pan-African movement encourages the descendants of African nations to learn about the customs and cultures of their homeland (*see also* **Marcus Garvey's Birthday**). The African World Festival provides opportunities for people to see the connections between African people all over the world.

Observance

The African World Festival has grown to be Detroit's largest ethnic festival and one of the largest festivals of its kind in the U.S. More than one million visitors attend this free outdoor event each year.

The festival celebrates the music, art, and food of Africans and those of African descent, featuring arts and crafts, film screenings, poetry readings, lectures, and storytelling in African traditions. Local musicians as well as performers from around the world provide live entertainment focusing on African and African-influenced music from various eras, including blues, jazz, gospel, reggae, soul, and folk. African-American fraternities and sororities perform elaborately choreographed step shows, and African touring groups showcase traditional dances of Africa. Like the busy open-air markets found throughout Africa, the marketplace area gives visitors a chance to explore the wares of hundreds of vendors, many of whom travel to Detroit from Africa to participate in the three-day festival each year.

Contact and Web Site

Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History
315 E. Warren
Detroit, MI 48201
313-494-5800
<http://www.maah-detroit.org/>

Further Reading

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African World Festival in Detroit, Michigan

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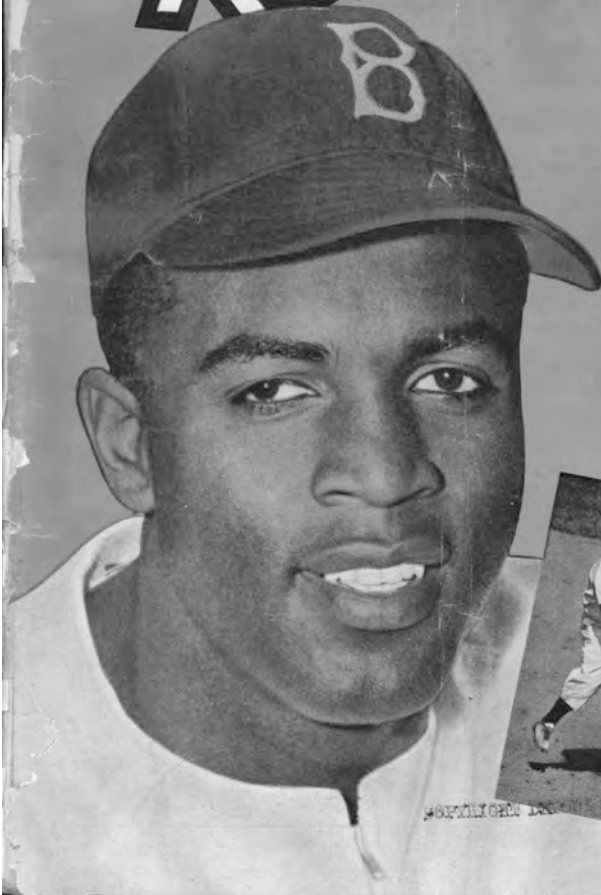
A Fawcett Publication JUN 19 1951

Jackie Robinson

NO. 5



10¢



Special!

INSIDE THE
DODGER TRAINING
CAMP!

READ

**ROOKIE
ON TRIAL!**



Cover of a 1951 Jackie Robinson comic book.



Jackie Robinson Day

Date Observed: On or around April 15
Location: Major league ballparks in the U.S.

Jackie Robinson Day pays tribute to the first African-American man to break the color barrier in America's national pastime, the game of professional baseball. In recognition of the date on which Jackie Robinson played his first major league game, on or around April 15 each year, commemorative celebrations are held at professional baseball stadiums across the country.

Historical Background

Born in Cairo, Georgia, in 1919, Jack Roosevelt Robinson, called "Jackie," was the son of Jerry Robinson, a plantation farm worker, and Mallie McGriff, a domestic worker. Jackie was one of five children in the family. Robinson's father left his family not long after Jackie's birth, and his mother sought a better life and income in California. Urged by his mother to "turn the other cheek" to incidents of racial intolerance, Jackie experienced discrimination of the 1920s and 1930s first-hand and sometimes failed to heed her words of restraint when rocks were thrown his way or crosses burned nearby.

Robinson began his sports career in college at the University of California at Los Angeles, demonstrating broad athletic abilities by lettering in baseball, basketball, football, and track and field. He left school in his senior year, joining the army to serve in World War II. Robinson successfully pushed for admittance to Officer Training School and was a first lieutenant when honorably discharged in 1944. He had risked court-martial for refusing to move to the back of a military bus and later was cleared of insubordination.

Upon his return to civilian life, Robinson tried out for the Kansas City Monarchs, a black baseball club. Scouts working for Brooklyn Dodgers President Branch Rickey spotted Robinson and soon he was on Rickey's short list of African Americans slated to be the first to transition to the big leagues. Although Major League Baseball Commissioner "Happy" Chandler had set up a Committee on Baseball Integration, many of Rickey's fellow managers were not supportive. So, initially, Rickey allowed everyone to believe that,

Early Baseball Segregation

The Weeksville of New York beat the Colored Union Club 11-0 on September 28, 1860, at the first black versus black baseball game, held at Elysian Fields in Brooklyn, New York. After the Civil War, the first professional baseball team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, was organized in 1869. In 1871 the National Association of Professional Baseball Players was chartered (this would one day evolve into today's National League). Throughout the decade additional leagues formed, one being the Western League, which became the American League.

Up until the mid-to-late 1870s, around the end of the Reconstruction period and the institution of Jim Crow laws, some blacks did play baseball with minor league clubs and even a rare few with major league teams. But they were commonly subjected to verbal and physical abuse from teammates, competitors, and spectators. In 1868, white-run baseball took the official stance of prohibiting the hiring of blacks. That same year, the National Association of Baseball Players voted unanimously to bar "any club which may be composed of one or more colored persons." In 1887 the Chicago White Stockings threatened to boycott a game against the integrated Newark Giants.

With such segregationist attitudes working against them, blacks began decades of struggle to develop and maintain various leagues that would allow them to take part in America's national pastime. Today, these endeavors are collectively referred to as "The Negro Leagues."

The first professional black baseball team was formed in 1885 by a white businessman of Trenton, New Jersey, Walter Cook, who came across a group of Argyle Hotel waiters and porters playing for fun in Babylon, New York. Cook was successful in attracting more white fans to games by naming his team the Cuban Giants.

In 1920 Andrew "Rube" Foster, known as the Father of Black Baseball, founded the first Negro professional league — the National Negro Baseball League. In the following years other black leagues were formed. All the while, a parallel all-white baseball system was in operation. These two segregated sporting systems continued through the early 20th century.

up until the last possible moment, he was scouting black players to field his own Negro League. But, when he met with Robinson on August 28, 1945, he made certain that Jackie knew otherwise. Reports of that meeting are legendary, having Rickey hurling vile racial invectives at Robinson to see if the athlete had the fortitude to weather the verbal abuse to which he would be subjected as a black man in the world of white baseball. As recounted in historian Jules Tygiel's book, Robinson eventually responded, "Do you want a ballplayer who's afraid to fight back?" Rickey replied, "I want a player with guts enough not to fight back."

By 1947, Robinson had made it to the big leagues and his name had been added to the Brooklyn Dodgers roster. The announcement prompted death threats against Robinson and his family. At odds with the naysayers, however, was Robinson's sheer ability to play ball. In his first year in the majors, he was named Rookie of the Year, and his contributions undeniably helped lead the Dodgers to win the pennant.

Although Robinson never did completely shy away from speaking up for himself when he believed the occasion warranted it, he also became a great role model in the school of "letting talent speak for itself." Not long after Robinson was signed to the Dodgers, other teams began to look to the Negro Leagues to supplement their traditional talent pools. Before long, Major League Baseball was designating those it had previously denied admittance as some of its "greats."

Robinson accomplished much on the field of baseball. Highlights during his 1947-1956 career with the Dodgers include stealing home base 19 times; being named National League All Star six times; earning the 1949 National League batting title with a .342 average and being awarded the League's Most Valuable Player title that same year. Robinson chose to retire in 1957 upon learning that he was to be traded to the Dodgers' archrival, the New York Giants.

But as much as Robinson racked up impressive statistics, his actions and presence—both on and off the playing field—contributed just as much to his legacy. During his playing career and after, Robinson advocated for integration and cooperation between the races. He was a strong proponent of greater minority hiring in baseball, additionally pressing for representation in management and ownership.

Robinson had many detractors during his day, but he also had supporters. In 1962 Robinson became the first African American admitted into the Cooperstown, New York, Baseball Hall of Fame. He died of a heart attack in 1972.

In 1997, to honor the 50th anniversary of Robinson's first game with the Dodgers (the team has since moved to Los Angeles) Major League Baseball permanently retired his

“42” uniform number—it would never be given to another player on any team. In March of 2005, Robinson was awarded a Congressional Gold Medal.

Creation of the Observance

In 2004, organized baseball took steps to honor Robinson’s memory and achievements in an annual fashion by designating every April 15 Jackie Robinson Day. In an MLB press release, Commissioner Alan H. “Bud” Selig noted:

By establishing April 15 as “Jackie Robinson Day” throughout Major League Baseball, we are further ensuring that the incredible contributions and sacrifices he made—for baseball and society—will not be forgotten.

April 15, 2004, marked the first of what continues to be seen as a celebration of a truly remarkable man, John “Jackie” Roosevelt Robinson, honored as much for his baseball prowess as for his betterment of the human condition in his quest for the equal treatment of minorities.

Observance

Each year, on or about April 15 (depending upon scheduled game days), Major League Baseball teams across the nation collectively celebrate the memory and accomplishments—both on and off the field—of Jackie Robinson.

There are some consistencies in the ways that the 14 American and 16 National League teams honor Robinson each year. The ceremonies are coordinated by whichever team is at home on Jackie Robinson Day. The majority of ceremonies are typically conducted pre-game, although some events may run concurrently with the actual game (for example, trivia quizzes run on electronic scoreboards).

Often, Jackie Robinson Foundation scholarship recipients are invited to participate in some manner, for example, throwing out a ceremonial first pitch. Major League Baseball provides the home teams with commemorative bases to use at the games, as well as ceremonial first pitch home plates. Special line-up cards are typically issued, and memorabilia, such as photos of Robinson, old team photos, and Negro League-related items, may be offered as special crowd giveaways.

Prominent people associated with Major League Baseball, the Jackie Robinson Foundation, other charitable youth organizations and many accomplished, inspirational African Americans have taken part in the event. Throughout the American and National Leagues, teams have become quite creative in the ways that they recognize Robinson’s

In His Big League Debut

JACKIE SCORES WINNING RUN



Here are some of the fans who crowded Ebbets Field to see Jackie Robinson as he made his debut with the Dodgers.



Jackie Robinson looks to the future.

Robbie's Bunt Turns Tide

By WENDELL SMITH, Courier Sports Editor

FRESH BIV, Ebbets Field, Brooklyn, N. Y.—Play- ing his first big league game of the 1947 National League season, Jackie Robinson drove home two runs from second base on a bunt which turned the tide in the Brooklyn Dodgers' winning run while EBBETS has reached shutout, and the Brooklyn Braves were down to defeat, 3 to 2.

The big play came in the seventh inning. At that point, the "brow" was trailing the Braves, 3 to 2. Ed Stanky started the bunt by walking. Robinson then slid into the plate and the applause from his local fans here had hardly died when he laid down a bunt which sent along the first base line. Stanky was off like a flash but second base charged in to get the ball. Robinson was in high gear, bounding down the first base line. The freight train crashed the ball and Stanky.

Robinson and the ball arrived at first approximately the same time. First baseman Thompson was apparently confident as Robinson came storming in his direction. In confusion, Thompson missed the throw and the ball rolled into left territory along the right field line. Stanky kept right on to third and Robinson high-tailed it to second. First base Fred Bell got the game on its feet by slipping one of Matt's feet back high up on the right field corner, starting slowly with the third run and Robinson with the fourth and the winning run. Stanky eventually scored on his own bunting run on the far as the Braves were concerned was that one carried across the plate by Robinson's bunt—robbed first baseman.

Police Halt Flareup at Chapel Hill

By LEO GRAYSON, Pittsburgh Courier Staff Writer
CHAPEL HILL, N. C.—Police reported that with the "chick of democracy" in the South, a riot broke out at the University of North Carolina, because of a number of students' actions. Police late Sunday afternoon on campus officers and young hoodlums scuffled or attempted to bring young soldiers in the Chapel Hill, N. C. town and their intended to force down the banner of a liberal state. Pennsylvania's... (text continues with details of the riot and police response)

WASHINGTON Edition of Pittsburgh Courier

VOL. XXXVIII—No. 18 PITTSBURGH, PA., SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 1947 PRICE TWELVE CENTS

Big Day for Dodgers

Table with columns for 'Pitchers', 'Batters', and 'Fielders'. It lists names and statistics for the game between the Dodgers and Braves.

Wears Big '42 Robinson Mobb'd by Cameramen and Fans At Historic Opener

By WENDELL SMITH, Courier Sports Editor
BROOKLYN—History was made here Tuesday afternoon as Brooklyn's first Negro player, one named Jackie Robinson, wearing a big '42, was mobbed by cameramen and fans at his historic debut in the opening game of the 1947 National League season between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Brooklyn Braves.

Jackie Roms Home From Second Base As 26,000 Cheer

By WENDELL SMITH, Courier Sports Editor
BROOKLYN—Jackie Robinson, N. Y.—Here in the play he after moment of the Brooklyn Braves hit, Jackie Roms home as played first Tuesday afternoon when a crowd of 26,000...

Conductor Exonerated Slain Man's Family May Sue Railroad

By A. D. BRYAN, D. C.—The U.S. District Court in Washington, D. C., today exonerated a railroad conductor whose train was involved in a fatal collision with a passenger train. The family of the slain man is expected to sue the railroad.

AKA's Pledge White Student

LEWIS AND CLARK, Mo.—A white student at the University of Missouri has pledged to join the A. K. A. (Alpha Kappa Alpha) organization.

Dining Car Suit Dismissed

By WENDELL SMITH, Courier Sports Editor
A lawsuit filed by a woman who claimed she was injured while dining in a train car has been dismissed by a court.

Nashville Lawyer Seeks City Post

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—A lawyer is seeking a position in the city government.

Wesley Won't Be Forced Out

SEATTLE, Wash.—Despite an attempt by a white student to force Wesley out of a dormitory, Wesley will remain in the building.

Primaries Open to Negroes in Miss., Ga.

MEMPHIS, Tenn.—The state of Mississippi and Georgia have opened their primary elections to Negroes.

Your Public Conduct

If you have a grip, leave it at home.

How The Courier Covered The Jackie Robinson Story

How the Pittsburgh Courier covered the Jackie Robinson story.

Early into his rookie year with the Dodgers, Jackie Robinson's talents attracted attention. Such feats as those documented on this front page of the Pittsburgh Courier from April 19, 1947, led to Robinson being named Rookie of the Year.

legacy. Most employ a significant amount of community outreach in their planning for the annual event, involving numerous facets of the community, often on both the local and state levels. Similarly, many teams use the opportunity to draw attention not only to the athletic component of Robinson's achievements, but also to focus on a broad spectrum of African-American culture and accomplishments in their communities.

Contacts and Web Sites

"Baseball and Jackie Robinson"

Library of Congress

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/robinson/index.html>

Jackie Robinson Foundation

3 W. 35th St., 11th Fl.

New York, NY 10001-2204

212-290-8600; fax: 212-290-8081

<http://www.jackierobinson.org>

Jackie Robinson Information Archives

Major League Baseball

c/o MLB Advanced Media, L.P.

75 Ninth Ave., 5th Fl.

New York, NY 10011

<http://mlb.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/mlb/events/jrd/index.jsp>

Negro Leagues Baseball Museum

1616 E. 18th St.

Kansas City, MO 64102

816-221-1960 or 888-221-6526; fax: 816-221-8424

<http://www.nlbm.com>

Official Web Site of Jackie Robinson, presented by CMG Worldwide, agent of the Estate of Jackie Robinson

<http://www.jackierobinson.com>

Further Reading

Denberg, Barry. *Stealing Home: The Story of Jackie Robinson*. New York: Scholastic, 1990. (young adult)

Frommer, Harvey. *Rickey and Robinson: The Men Who Broke Baseball's Color Barrier*. Boulder, CO: Taylor Trade Publishing Company, 2003.

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- Tygiel, Jules. *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Writings by Jackie Robinson

- Baseball Has Done It*. Introduction by Spike Lee. Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2005.
- With Alfred Duckett. *I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003.



Appendix 1: Chronology

This appendix lists significant events in the history of the African-American holidays, festivals, and celebrations covered in this volume. It includes dates of the first observance of events as well as significant dates relating to the people and historical events that are memorialized during the holiday or festival. Although historical events are included, this chronology is not intended to serve as a comprehensive list of events in African-American history.

1624

Dutch immigrants bring enslaved Africans to New York. *See* **Pinkster**

1711

October 17—Poet Jupiter Hammon is born a slave on Long Island, New York. *See* **Black Poetry Day**

1760

February 14—Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, is born a slave in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *See* **Founder's Day/Richard Allen's Birthday**

December 25—Jupiter Hammon composes poem considered to be the first published by an African American. *See* **Black Poetry Day**

1767

September 29—Kunta Kinte, enslaved Gambian and ancestor of writer Alex Haley, arrives in Annapolis, Maryland. *See* **Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival**

1770

March 5—Crispus Attucks is the first American to die during the Boston Massacre, an event precipitating the Revolutionary War. *See* **Crispus Attucks Day**

1771

March 5—Boston Massacre and Crispus Attucks's death are commemorated in Boston, and each year thereafter. *See* **Crispus Attucks Day**

1775

First American abolitionist society is founded by Quakers in Pennsylvania. *See* **Emancipation Day**



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- Annual Report: Indiana Black Expo, Inc.: Continuing the Legacy, 2005*. <http://www.indiana-blackexpo.com/pdf/Annual%20Report%202005%20Final.pdf>.



Organizations — Contact Information and Web Sites

This section includes all web sites, including available contact information, listed in the entries in alphabetical order by the name of the sponsoring organization.

AFRAM Festival
P.O. Box 687
Seaford, DE 19973
302-628-1908

African-American Appalachian Arts, Inc.
Emporium Bldg.
100 S. Gay St., Ste. 106
Knoxville, TN 37920
<http://www.discoveret.org/aaaa>

African American Cultural Alliance
P.O. Box 22173
Nashville, TN 37202
615-251-0007
<http://www.africanamericanculturalalliance.com/>

African American Cultural Center
Official Kwanzaa Web Site
3018 W. 48th St.
Los Angeles, CA 90043-1335
323-299-6124; fax: 323-299-0261
<http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/index.shtml>

African American Day Parade Office
1969 Madison Ave.
New York, NY 10035-1549
212-348-3080

African American Research Library &
Cultural Center
Pan African Bookfest and Cultural Conference
East Broward County Florida Library
2650 Sistrunk Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33311
954-625-2800 (AARLCC)
954-357-7348 (Bookfest Hotline)
<http://www.broward.org/library/aarlcc.htm>
<http://www.broward.org/library/pabf.htm>

African American Student Services
Ohio State Multicultural Center
Ohio Union
1739 N. High St.
Columbus, OH 43210
614-688-8449
<http://www.osuheritagefestival.com/>

African American Women in Cinema
Organization, Inc.
545 Eighth Ave., Ste. 401
New York, NY 10018
212-769-7949; fax: 212-871-2074
<http://www.aawic.org>

African/Caribbean International Festival of
Life
c/o Martin's Inter-Culture, Ltd.



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