

Sports and the American Civil Rights Movement

PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

Every year, April 15th is the deadline for all Americans to file their tax returns. But April 15th has another, more joyful significance—for American sports and for America in general. On April 15th, 1947, Jackie Robinson stepped up to bat for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He was the first African American to play baseball for the major leagues.

It's April 15th, and The Sports Network is going to air a documentary special called *Sports and the American Civil Rights Movement*. It will begin with a definition of and some background information on civil rights, continue with an account of that famous day in 1947, then jump to the 1960s—the decade most known for its civil rights activism. As Managing Director of The Sports Network, you will put together a documentary that shows viewers the impact that civil rights activism has had on American sports.

Research Question:

In what ways did important events in the Civil Rights movement affect professional sports in America?

Your project must include:



Written Piece: TSN documentary script, “Sports and the American Civil Rights Movement.”

You will research and write the script for this prime-time documentary. Your script should:

- begin at the beginning: In 1791, the Bill of Rights secured civil rights for American citizens. Yet it wasn't until 156 years later that Jackie Robinson integrated American baseball.
- jump past Jackie Robinson's time to identify and thoroughly discuss the key events of the Civil Rights movement, particularly during the 1960s.
- clearly demonstrate cause-and-effect relationships between key civil rights events and their impact on professional sports in the U.S.
- reflect an understanding of civil rights issues and their evolution over time.
- use an engaging yet formal tone, appropriate to a TV documentary.



Graphic Representation: Storyboard for documentary. You will put together a storyboard consisting of pictures that illustrate your documentary script. Your storyboard should:

- be presented in chronological order, following the order of events covered in your script.
- present interesting images from a variety of sources that directly relates to or adds to the information in your script.
- include creative (and accurate) descriptions for each picture.



Oral Presentation: “Spotlight on ___.” You will fill in the blank by choosing an event covered in your documentary script to present to your classmates. Your presentation will:

- put the event in historical context (the point at which it occurred within the Civil Rights movement).
- make a case for why the event was important—both on its own terms and in the context of civil rights for all Americans.
- support key ideas with facts and examples.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Some students might be interested in going to the library to learn more about Earl Lloyd and other players who changed basketball from a sport that discriminated against African Americans to a thriving one that is today dominated by black players. One book, *A Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African-American Athlete: Basketball* by Arthur Ashe, Jr. (Amistad), covers the sport from its beginning in 1918 to the present time.

For more information on Earl Lloyd, students can click “Hall of Famers” at: <http://www.hoophall.com> (the Basketball Hall of Fame) or enter his name in a search at: <http://www.aaregistry.com> (African American Registry).



From NBL to NBA



In 1942, the National Basketball League (NBL) formed, and it included teams with both white and African American players. Why was this league integrated when baseball was not? Basketball was a younger sport than baseball. In 1942, many young men were being called to military service overseas because of World War II (1941–1945). The demand for basketball players was great, but the wartime supply of white players couldn’t meet the demand.

Players from the all-black teams, like the popular New York Renaissance (Rens) and the Harlem Globetrotters, began to play for NBL teams. You’ve probably never heard of the NBL’s Rochester Royals, Youngstown Bears, Detroit Gems, and Buffalo Bison. During the 1940s, each of these teams recruited players from the Rens or Globetrotters. One of the most famous, William “Pop” Gates, went from the Rens to the Buffalo Bison.

During the 1948–1949 season, the Detroit Gems went under, and the New York Renaissance took its place. For the first time, a black team played against white teams in the same league. The Rens won the first NBL World Championships.

Formed in 1946, the BAA (Basketball Association of America), merged with the NBL during the 1949–1950 season to become today’s NBA (National Basketball Association). Since the NBL was integrated, so was the NBA. On October 31, 1950, Earl Lloyd of the Washington Capitols became the first African American to play in an NBA game. Comparing his experience to Jackie Robinson’s in baseball, Lloyd said, “In basketball, folks were used to seeing integrated college teams. There was a different mentality.”

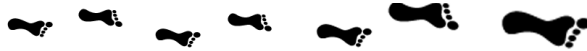


GRAPHIC Refer back to page 4, “Jackie Robinson Scores.” Use the information on that page to complete the chart below, comparing and contrasting key events in the racial integration of baseball and basketball. (Fill every date with an event or events from at least one sport.)

DATE	BASEBALL	BASKETBALL
1942	<i>Blanch Rickey becomes president and general manager of Brooklyn Dodgers</i>	<i>NBL forms; young men drafted into WWII</i>
1945	<i>Rickey searches for first African American player to break the color barrier</i>	<i>WW II ends; more white players available</i>
1947	<i>Jackie Robinson joins Dodgers, becoming the first African American pro baseball player. Wins two awards</i>	
1948–49	<i>1949, Robinson wins second MVP award</i>	<i>For first time, black teams play white teams in same league</i>
1950		<i>NBA forms; Earl Lloyd integrates pro basketball when he joins the Washington Capitols</i>

WORK IT THROUGH

To help students organize their thoughts about the people in these articles, you might want to draw a two-column chart on the board. Label the left column "Person" and the right column "Accomplishment." Fill in the left column with the following names: Blanch Rickey, Jackie Robinson, Rosa Parks, A. Philip Randolph, Martin Luther King, Jr., Lyndon B. Johnson, Earl Lloyd, Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, Billie Jean King. Then work with students to fill in the right-hand column with at least one accomplishment per person.



One Small Step for Woman, One Giant Step for Womankind

September 20, 1973, Houston, Texas It all started with a dare. Bobby Riggs, the 55-year-old former tennis champ and self-professed male chauvinist pig,¹ challenged any young female tennis player to take him on in a battle of the sexes. Billie Jean King, a current champion still struggling for equal pay and recognition on the U.S. tennis circuit, accepted the dare.

The press had worked the American public into a frenzy in anticipation of today's event, billed as "The Battle of the Sexes." We've heard Riggs say "women belong in the kitchen, not on the tennis court." We've heard King call herself "Forward Mama," referring both to her powerful forehand and her progressive politics. At the beginning of the match, Billie Jean King was carried onto the court on an Egyptian litter held in the air by four muscular men. Riggs rode out in a rickshaw² pulled by six show girls. The two exchanged presents. Riggs gave King a giant candy Sugar Daddy,³ and King gave Riggs a live baby pig. But amusing as these antics were to spectators, Riggs and King were dead serious about the coming game.

The match had been set up as three games won out of five—the number of games played in men's professional tennis. The purse had been set at \$100,000. Much was at stake. Most women were relying on King to raise their standing in sports and in the eyes of men who belittled their athletic capabilities, while most men were counting on Riggs to give them reason to brag about the defeat of a young female player at the height of her career.

Today, in front of 30,000 spectators in the Houston Astrodome and 50 million network television viewers, womankind prevailed. Billie Jean King trounced Bobby Riggs 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. Women are still battling to equal the status of men in many arenas of society, but this is one battle of the sexes that has been chalked up to the women's side. It's one that won't be quickly forgotten—in sports, or in the minds of all who saw it.

¹ associated with feminism, a 1970s term for a man who believes in and boasts of male superiority

² commonly seen in parts of Asia, a small, covered, two-wheeled carriage pulled by one or two men

³ refers to an older man who financially supports a younger woman



WRITING Will you cover the tennis Battle of the Sexes in your documentary script, "Sports and the American Civil Rights Movement"? Why or why, not? Answers will vary. Samples: I'd include it because although it wasn't a protest march or an important piece of legislation, it was a high-profile event arising out of feminism. Women's rights was part of the Civil Rights movement. OR I wouldn't include it because I don't think the outcome of the event really affected U.S. professional sports. It was just a publicity stunt.



PREPARING YOUR STORYBOARD

A storyboard is a sequential (in time order of the events) series of sketches illustrating stages or scenes in a production. Your storyboard will be a variation on the traditional one, because you will create yours using photocopies of images such as magazine or newspaper photos, printouts from the Web, or a computer slide show program. (If you are unable to use outside resources to collect pictures, you may either sketch or describe pictures for your storyboard.)

After you've collected your pictures, line them up in the order you will use them to accompany the events described in your documentary script. Use the spaces below to describe each image in the order it will be used. You may end up including your description in the documentary script, so make it accurate, informative, and engaging.

Picture descriptions and order will vary.

Picture 1 Picture 2 Picture 3

Picture 4 Picture 5 Picture 6

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Students with Learning Difficulties

Non-visual learners may have difficulty selecting their pictures as well as giving them appropriate descriptions. Pair these students with more visual learners, or artistic classmates, to select pictures and create their storyboards together.