Jackie Robinson was an American professional second basemen, but more notably the first African American to play in Major League Baseball. During this time, society looked at people of color as barbaric and did not support them in their endeavors within American culture. The entire community viewed Robinson’s race very negatively during the 1940s and 50s. He was not supported in his professional baseball career at all when he first started playing for the Dodgers, despite his sheer athleticism. Robinson broke the baseball color line when the Brooklyn Dodgers started him for the first time. By signing Robinson, the Dodgers broadcasted the end of racial segregation in professional baseball that had organized black players to the “Negro leagues” for years. In this photograph, Jackie Robinson is shown with his 1950 Brooklyn Dodgers team in the dugout of a baseball field. He is the only black member of the team, drawing all attention to him and his distinct difference. When this photograph was taken, society
looked at black people as inhuman and did not support them in their endeavors within any aspect of American culture.

Through the vectors of this picture, one can tell that the entire team has eyes on Robinson. The sight lines of all the teammates are directed into Robinson’s eyes, regardless if he is looking back. This establishes a relationship between all of the teammates to Robinson. Due to this, Jackie Robinson is the focal point of this picture. Everyone is varying distances away from Robinson, but their bodies and eyes all face him. The line of sight between every teammate draws all attention to Robinson and his different skin color to the other teammates. Because Robinson is the center of attention, one can implicitly believe that it is due to his different skin color. The photograph is in black and white, implying that it was taken in the mid-1900s, a time marked by racial differences and the Civil Rights Movement. This photograph also amplifies this due to its’ repetition. Every member of the team is wearing a baseball cap with a “B” on it (for the Brooklyn Dodgers), wearing the team uniform, and besides Robinson, everyone is white. African Americans were viewed as “animals” during this time because they had much darker skin. This is magnified since Robinson is the only person of color in the photograph.

Ever since the birth of the United States, minorities have been disadvantaged through racial discrimination. Jeffrey Cohen, author of “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” helps to clarify a key aspect of this photograph—Robinson’s skin color. He explains how monsters are formed at the crossroads of a culture and how they are the embodiment of differences (Cohen 7). The Civil Rights Movement, aiming to end racial segregation based on differences in skin color, overshadowed this time period. According to Cohen, a monster was created in the midst of difference in American culture. As all vectors point to him, one is drawn to Robinson. However, more prominently, one is drawn to Robinson because he is the only one different from his white
majority teammates. Cohen clarifies his difference and one could believe Robinson is a monster while Cohen states, “[d]ark skin was associated with the fires of hell” (Cohen 10). This claim transfers to the negative view of Robinson’s race during the time. African Americans were often seen as barbaric, and this difference caused Robinson to be widely disliked in the baseball community. Because of this, one can assume that Robinson is looked at as a monster within society. Although Robinson was viewed as a monster by white people, Neal Gabler, author of “Our Celebrities, Ourselves,” notes that Robinson was a celebrity in the eyes of other members of the black community. He says that celebrities can be seen as a fantasy in which the audience lives vicariously through to lift them out of the daily grind (Gabler, par. 2). For a member of the black community who is seen as a monster, Robinson’s entrance into professional baseball was a dream come true and the perfect person to live through vicariously. While Robinson was overwhelmingly rejected within the white community, regardless of his notable contributions to society as well as baseball, the black community still grew together and stronger every step towards equality.

The support of middle class black people as athletes in minor league “Negro” baseball teams proved to be one of the powerful forces for integration. Michael Klarman, in his article “Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement,” starts by describing the implications that were caused due to the addition of Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers. However, he adds that at the major league level, the inclusion of Robinson “produced throngs of black fans at Dodgers’ games, as blacks throughout the nation flocked to watch Robinson ‘represent’ his race” (Klarman 58). People of color were gaining power in different positions within all aspects of American culture, and with the support of each other, the fight for racial change was set deeply into motion. This backing was not only for Robinson, but the rest of the black community in
their undertakings within the culture, as they continued to pave the way to racial equality.

Nonetheless, the black community’s momentous triumphs were destined to receive support from the white community, not just each other, sooner or later. Klarman reckons that with the countless other Civil Rights Movement actions during the time, the inclusion of Jackie Robinson within Major League Baseball was destined to happen eventually. As African Americans continued to excel in American culture, they were increasingly accepted and supported throughout the entire community.

Jackie Robinson was hated throughout the community at the start of his career, but he was arguably the best player on the Brooklyn Dodgers at the time, and as his career carried on he only continued to shine. As stated above, Robinson’s entrance into the league was eventually going to happen, and William Simons, author of “Jackie Robinson and the American Mind: Journalistic Perceptions of the Reintegration of Baseball,” notes this transition. He states that when Robinson had a great game, the team and spectators would “lose sight of his color” (Simons 52). Because of this, the photo could suggest that all eyes are on him because he played a spectacular game. Fans are not shown in the picture, but one could come to the conclusion that they would be cheering for Jackie Robinson because of his outstanding performance. Even early in his career, Robinson was a tremendous player who made important plays. Any fan, regardless of their skin color or the skin color of the player, was fated to approve. Black people were progressively more supported within the whole community, ultimately leading to forming a deeper connection.

Regardless of the racism Robinson faced during the start of his career, his behavior and unquestionable skill contested segregation, which finally sparked spectators to support and get to know him. Jeffrey Rosen, in his essay “Identity Crisis,” details about people today and how they
form relationships. He believes that “[i]t’s impossible to know someone on the basis of snippets of information” (Rosen 161). In contrast to Simons and Cohen’s articles, Rosen believes one should not be judged on skin color, that skin color could be overlooked and a deeper understanding could form. Simons and Cohen agree that because of Robinson’s skin color, he could not be a member of the Dodgers baseball team worthy of getting to know and making a connection. However, Rosen explains that in order to form an opinion of someone, one needs to go much farther than just scratching the surface to understand another’s complicated personality. Klarman believes that even with Robinson’s skin color, he was eventually going to be supported by the entire community, which based on Rosen’s article, one could conclude would subsequently lead to forming a relationship. Even though during the time period the view of Robinson’s race was negative, this photograph displays a different scenario. As the center of attention, the viewer’s look directly to Jackie Robinson smiling back at his teammates, who are all seen looking at him. This initial observation does not defy racial segregation, as one could assume they are all looking at Robinson because of his difference in skin color. But, with the addition of smiles and supportive gestures, the viewer can infer that the teammates liked and supported Robinson despite his differences to everyone else. Based on this, one could argue that the Brooklyn Dodgers loved and accepted Robinson regardless of his skin color because they had come to know him in a broader, more sincere way.

Jackie Robinson had an exceptional 10-year baseball career. He played in college, the “Negro league,” and the Minor League before finally breaking the color barrier into Major League Baseball. Although Robinson was subject to racism throughout his career, his character and unquestionable talent challenged segregation, which afterwards sparked its end in many other aspects of American culture. When Robinson’s teammates and spectators came to know a
deeper side of him, they found that he was an exceptional person and athlete, and his skin color could not change that. Often, people are judged solely on their outward appearance. The saying, “never judge a book by its cover,” explains that if someone is looking for a book to read, the first thing that might grab his or her attention is the cover. Based solely on the cover, one could come to the wrong conclusion on whether or not the book is for them. However, if one were to actually open the book, or get to know the person, one may be pleasantly surprised to find that the book (or person) is very complex and different compared to what they imagined. Looking deep into a person’s personality is the only way one can fully understand them. Pinning one detail as a person’s entirety can cause one to come to the wrong conclusion when an amazing relationship could have formed. Although Robinson started his career hated by baseball fans and players, he continued to develop with the backing of the black community. Eventually, he was accepted by the culture in its absoluteness—leading to him being loved and respected by all, in a way where we still celebrate his life and baseball career today.
Works Cited


Unknown. [*Film still from The Jackie Robinson Story showing Jackie Robinson (as Himself) with fellow Dodgers in the dugout]*. 1950. Film stills. Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recording Sound Division, Washington D.C.