

I never got the hype. All the boys in my elementary school class would trip over themselves to get to report on Jackie Robinson, but I never got why. Before this week, I still didn't. Integrating Major League Baseball was definitely no easy feat, but I didn't understand why his name was up there with Martin Luther King Jr., with Malcolm X, with Rosa Parks. After all, most people didn't know who integrated the NBA or NFL.

In my research for this, I realized how violently I'd been tricked. We're taught about civil rights and Black history in caricatures: pictures and ideas, not stories. Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus. Malcolm X was vengeful. Martin Luther King Jr. was peaceful. He "did it right." Harriet Tubman lived and die on the underground railroad. Jackie Robinson integrated Major League Baseball.

History has stripped these people of their personhood. They are now black-and-white, two-dimensional tales about a fight for justice.

I never knew Jackie Robinson was an activist. He was fighting against racism long before the big leagues. He was fighting in the press and on the pitch. He was fighting brutality in his battalion. He was a Black Panther.

But the most important thing that he did was more than the sum of his parts. It was more than a single occasion or a big change that he made in the world. The most important thing that Jackie Robinson did, beyond being himself, was fight sanitization of black legacies.

He was never quiet, even when it would've been best for him to be. He could've coasted off of being simply the man who integrated baseball. He could've earned a seat in the hall of fame simply for that. And in a way, he did. But he still pressed against slumlords. He raged in interviews. He fought for Black people even when they thought he should've been.

The media is most important point. The weaponization of intellect is the most lethal form of warfare there is. Control where a Black man can live, he will live elsewhere. Control what business a Black man may enter, he will shop elsewhere. Control who a Black man may marry, he will seek marriage elsewhere. Control what a Black man can think, and he will not escape.

The form of media sanitization from Robinson's time is present even now. In 2020, with the rise of the Black Lives Matter riots, many people took that opportunity to have an

excuse to denounce the cause. They upheld Martin Luther King Jr., declaring peace had to be the way. Even many Black Americans sided with them, using an example of retaliation to justify oppression.

This is how the Black Panther Party was viewed. Robinson spoke out for them. He offered a variation of thought that fought the media's narrative. He offered dimension to a point that racists wanted to keep flat.

Robinson was anything but a caricature. And he would not be confined to a single bullet point in history. He did not do only one great thing in his life but several. He let the media know that Black people can be plural. Baseball and activism. Violent and justified.

Rejecting Blackness's capability to be plural is a removal of personhood. It pushes Black people into black and white comic panels. There's no movement. There's only one message. They are not living.

And aside from his effect on baseball, Robinson taught the world, even in death, Black people are live and in color.