

From the Vault

B'nai B'rith Honored Jackie Robinson at Interfaith Baseball Game in 1957

By Cheryl Kempler

During a week of great significance in American civil rights history in Washington, D.C., B'nai B'rith made its own contribution to the cause, joining with other organizations to honor the legendary Jackie Robinson in the year that he retired from baseball.

On May 14, 1957, 9,000 fans came to Washington's Griffith Park Stadium to cheer the city's first Interfaith Baseball Game, organized and sponsored by three fraternal organizations, B'nai B'rith, the Almas Temple Shrine (the Shriners) and the Catholic Knights of Columbus.

Following a festive parade, plaques were presented to Robinson and President Dwight D. Eisenhower, accepted by Cabinet Secretary and Anti-Defamation League leader Maxwell Rabb. Also honored was Robinson's friend, comedian and baseball fanatic Joe E. Brown, the father of two adopted German Jewish children and one of only two civilians to earn the Bronze Star for selling war bonds and entertaining the troops. A special award was presented to D.C. Judge Milton S. Kronheim, B'nai B'rith's event chairman. The game was rained out in the second inning.

Now adulated, Robinson would shortly take on a new career as an executive at the Chock full o'Nuts Corporation. In the coming months, he would also raise more than \$1 million for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He later launched a number of successful entrepreneurial ventures.

Born into poverty in rural Georgia, Robinson was the first UCLA athlete to win varsity letters in baseball, basketball, football and track. After wartime military service, he was recruited in 1947 by the




In 2013, Robinson's widow Rachel and daughter Sharon joined B'nai B'rith in honoring Major League Baseball (MLB) Commissioner Bud Selig. Left to right: Allan J. Jacobs, president, B'nai B'rith International; Sharon Robinson; Bud Selig; Rachel Robinson; MLB executive Joe Torre; and Daniel S. Mariaschin, executive vice president, B'nai B'rith International.

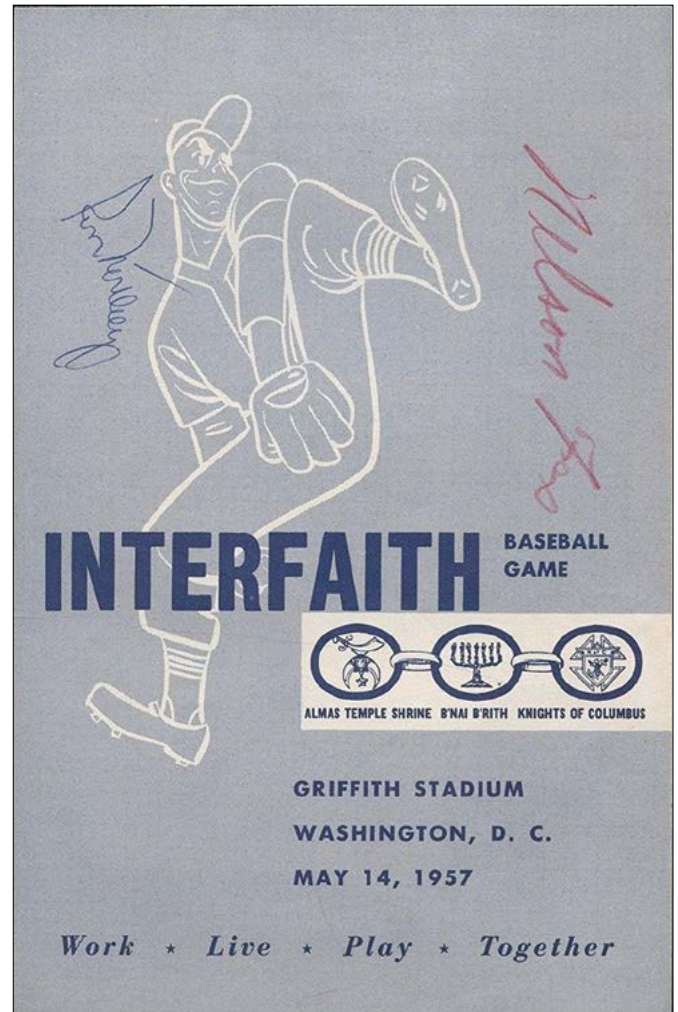


Interfaith award recipients at the White House in May 1957. Left to right: Jackie Robinson, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Joe E. Brown.

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Brooklyn Dodgers, as the first major league player in modern times to break the color barrier. Named Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player, Robinson was idealized by many who believed that his strength of character and prodigious talent became integral to the successful integration of baseball. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

On May 17, 1957, three days after the rained-out game, Robinson was among prominent athletes, performers and others lending their support to the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom at the Lincoln Memorial, held on the third anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision desegregating the nation's schools. As many as 37,000 people took part, intending to send Eisenhower a message to end the delay in implementing the ruling. The event also featured a speech by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., calling for full and unfettered voting rights. 



Program from the Interfaith Baseball Game, held at Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C. on May 14, 1957.



Podcast Hosted by B'nai B'rith International CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin

Jews in Baseball – the Podcast

Just as baseball season heats up this fall, the B'nai B'rith International podcast turns to The Jewish Baseball Card Book. We spoke with author Bob Wechsler, who uses baseball cards to tell the story of Jews in the sport. The book features 698 cards and focuses on Jewish Major Leaguers from 1871 right up to today.

 [Click here to listen in as Weschler talks with B'nai B'rith CEO and avid baseball fan Daniel S. Mariaschin.](#)