

Letter from Jackie Robinson on Civil Rights



Time and Setting of the Letter

[Jackie] Robinson responded to Presidential civil rights comments amid continuing controversy over school desegregation efforts in Little Rock, AR, and the South. In September 1957, Governor Orval Faubus had ordered the Arkansas National Guard to prevent entry of nine African American students into that city's Central High School. President Eisenhower reluctantly sent U.S. troops to enforce the school's integration. (National Archives and Records Administration, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas)

Copy of the Jackie Robinson Letter

May 13, 1958

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

My dear Mr. President:

I was sitting in the audience at the Summit Meeting of Negro Leaders yesterday when you said we must have patience. On hearing you say this, I felt like standing up and saying, "Oh no! Not again."

I respectfully remind you sir, that we have been the most patient of all people. When you said we must have self-respect, I wondered how we could have self-respect and remain patient considering the treatment accorded us through the years.

17 million Negroes cannot do as you suggest and wait for the hearts of men to change. We want to enjoy now the rights that we feel we are entitled to as Americans. This we cannot do unless we pursue aggressively goals which all other Americans achieved over 150 years ago.

As the chief of executive of our nation, I respectfully suggest that you unwittingly crush the spirit of freedom in Negroes by constantly urging forbearance and give hope to those pro-segregation leaders like Governor Faubus who would take from us even those freedoms we now enjoy. Your own experience with Governor Faubus is proof enough that forbearance and not eventual integration is the goal the pro-segregation leaders seek.

In my view, an unequivocal statement backed up by action such as you demonstrated you could take last fall in dealing with Governor Faubus if it became necessary, would let it be known that America is determined to provide – in the near future – for Negroes – the freedoms we are entitled to under the constitution.

Respectfully yours,
Jackie Robinson

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. To whom is Jackie Robinson writing?

- A Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus
- B the Summit Meeting of Negro Leaders
- C the people of the United States
- D U.S. President Eisenhower

2. What does Jackie Robinson try to persuade the reader of his letter of?

- A The president needs to support African-American civil rights through his words and actions.
- B The president needs to send U.S. troops to schools across the South to enforce the desegregation of schools.
- C Pro-segregation leaders like Governor Faubus will continue to resist the integration of schools.
- D President Eisenhower's speech at the Summit Meeting of Negro Leaders offended many people.

3. The effort to desegregate schools in the South was met with resistance. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A President Eisenhower reluctantly sent U.S. troops to enforce school integration in Arkansas.
- B At the Summit Meeting of Negro Leaders, President Eisenhower told the assembled African Americans that they must have patience.
- C Governor Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to prevent African Americans from entering a school.
- D Jackie Robinson wrote a letter to President Eisenhower about his civil rights comments.

4. How did Jackie Robinson likely feel when writing this letter?

- A relieved and happy
- B upset and impatient
- C jealous and angry
- D tired and satisfied

5. What is the main message of Jackie Robinson’s letter?

- A African Americans should have the right to attend integrated schools.
- B President Eisenhower took the wrong action when dealing with Governor Faubus.
- C African Americans cannot be patient and wait for their civil rights.
- D African Americans have been the most patient of people.

6. How does the paragraph “Time and Setting of the Letter” relate to Jackie Robinson’s letter?

- A It provides historical background for the letter.
- B It describes how President Eisenhower responded to the letter.
- C It explains how other African Americans felt about the letter.
- D It describes how the letter affected the civil rights movement.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

According to Jackie Robinson, African Americans have been very patient while waiting for their civil rights; _____, they can no longer wait for things to change.

- A meanwhile
- B for example
- C in the end
- D however

8. In Jackie Robinson’s letter, what do African Americans want to receive?

9. According to Jackie Robinson, how did President Eisenhower unknowingly crush the spirit of freedom in African Americans?

10. Explain how Jackie Robinson supports his argument that African Americans can no longer “wait for the hearts of men to change” in order to receive their civil rights.
