

Module 08: Jackie Robinson, Civil Rights Leader?

Evidence 3: Letter to President Kennedy, 1961

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Introduction

Reproduced below is a letter Jackie Robinson wrote to President Kennedy in 1961 concerning public policy.

Document

[Stamped Received at White House]

Chock Full O'Nuts
425 Lexington Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

February 9, 1961

The President
The White House

My dear Mr. President:

I believe I know understand and appreciate better your role in the continuing struggle to fulfill the American promise of equal opportunity for all.

While I am very happy over your obviously fine start as our President, my concern over Civil Rights and my vigorous opposition to your election is one of sincerity. The direction you seem to be going indicates America is in for great leadership, and I will be most happy if my fears continue to be proven wrong. We are naturally keeping a wondering eye on what will happen, and while any opposition or criticism may not be the most popular thing when you are leading so well, you must know that as an individual I am interested because what you do or do not do in the next 4 years could have a serious effect upon my children's future.

In your letter to me of July 7, 1960, you indicated you would use the influence of the White House in cases where moral issues are involved. You

have reiterated your stand, and we are very happy. Still, we are going to use whatever voice we have to awaken our people. With the new emerging African nations, Negro Americans must assert themselves more, not for what we can get as individuals, but for the good of the Negro masses.

I thank you for what you have done so far, but it is not how much has been done but how much more there is to do. I would like to be patient Mr. President, but patience has caused us years in our struggle for human dignity. I will continue to hope and pray for your aggressive leadership but will not refuse to criticize if the feeling persist that Civil Rights is not an agenda for months to come.

May God give you strength and the energy to accomplish your most difficult task.

Respectfully yours,
Jackie Robinson (signature)
JR:cbc