



3 West 35th Street | 11th Floor | New York, NY 10001-2204 | 212.290.8600 phone | 212.290.8081 fax  
550 South Hope Street | Suite 2300 | Los Angeles, CA 90071 | 213.330.7726 phone | 213.330.7526 fax

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[www.jackierobinson.org](http://www.jackierobinson.org)

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**Media Contacts:**

**Allison Davis** (212) 290-8600, ext. 12

**Gary Schueller** (212) 290-8600, ext. 30

**Gary Caloroso**, Porter Novelli Los Angeles (310) 444-7098

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***The Jackie Robinson Foundation Honors Don Newcombe, Suzanne de Passe  
at  
Second Celebrating Excellence Gala***

**Surprise Appearance by Kareem Abdul Jabbar Helps Kick Off 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign**

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May 12, 2006, Los Angeles, California – More than forty years after he received a letter from Jackie Robinson urging him to attend UCLA and realize the importance of an excellent college education, Kareem Abdul Jabbar took the stage last night at The Beverly Hilton to introduce Jackie's wife Rachel Robinson, a woman who has carried Jackie's torch and commitment to access to higher education through The Jackie Robinson Foundation, which provides four-year college scholarships and a comprehensive set of support services to minority students with records of academic distinction, leadership capacity and community service.

The May 11, 2006 "Celebrating Excellence Gala" was the second the Foundation has held in Los Angeles and paid tribute to Jackie's former teammate Don Newcombe and pioneering recording executive Suzanne de Passe, both of whom were saluted for their commitment to public service and carrying on Jackie's philosophy that, "A life is not important except in its impact on other lives." Co-chaired by acclaimed actress **Jasmine Guy** and NASDAQ executive **John Vitale**, the event attracted some 500 attendees and represented a major success. The event raised funds and support for the Foundation, including, in part, its Education and Leadership Development Program.

The evening was remarkable not only for the poignant tribute to Don Newcombe, Jackie's former teammate and Suzanne de Passe, the pioneering recording industry executive, but also because it served as the kick off of the 60th anniversary of Jackie's valiant barrier-breaking heroics. April 15, 2007 will be the 60th anniversary of a day that not only changed the complexion of baseball but also one that would irrevocably alter the social landscape of our country. Starting last night and continuing throughout the year, The Jackie Robinson Foundation will commemorate this defining moment with a series of special events and outreach efforts.

The Jackie Robinson Foundation established a Los Angeles office in 2004 to ensure that its programs and reach were truly national in scope. Since its inception in 1973, the Foundation had distributed more than 1,100 scholarships. Currently, there are 266 Jackie Robinson Foundation scholars attending 93 colleges and universities across the country. Thanks to the Foundation's innovative combination of financial assistance, mentoring and leadership development training, Jackie Robinson Foundation scholarship recipients have maintained a 97% graduation rate—more than twice the national average. The success of the Los Angeles office has helped the Foundation cement its role as the premiere scholarship and student support services organization in the country and also as a significant institution in the quest for equal opportunity.

“We are thrilled by the generous support of the Los Angeles community,” Della Britton Baeza, President and CEO of The Jackie Robinson Foundation said. “The resounding success of tonight's event energizes us to continue our mission of expanding access to higher education and keeps us mindful of the important work still ahead of us.”

Brian McKnight, who recently released his eighth studio album *Gemini* on the Motown Label, capped the gala with an electrifying performance. McKnight, however, was just one of the highlights of the historic evening.

Sharon Robinson, Vice Chairwoman of The Jackie Robinson Foundation and Roy Campanella II, a member of the Foundation's Los Angeles Advisory Committee, the descendants of two of the greatest names in Dodger history presented their father's teammate Don Newcombe with his award in one of the evening's most poignant moments.

As Newcombe accepted the award, he told the crowd of one of the defining moments in his life when he met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King, Newcombe recalled, told him that he would never understand just how easy Newcome, Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella had made Dr. King's work. Newcombe's vivid recollection of the moment captivated the audience who responded with a hearty applause.

From his playing days, when he would travel the country advocating on behalf of the civil rights agenda to his current work dedicated to expanding opportunities for young people as Director of Community Relations for the Dodgers, Don Newcombe epitomizes Jackie Robinson's guiding tenet, “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.” Jackie Robinson and Don Newcombe became teammates in 1949 after Newcombe spent three seasons in the Dodgers minor league system. In his first year in the big leagues, Don Newcombe posted an 18-7 record, en route to winning the “Rookie of the Year Award.” He went on to guide the team to a 1955 World Series Championship. One of the most beloved players in Dodgers history, Newcombe is the only pitcher to ever win the Rookie of the Year Award, Cy Young Award, and MVP Award.

Like Jackie Robinson, Suzanne de Passe altered the landscape of the country, changing the face of corporate America. Having assembled one of the most successful careers of any executive in the music and entertainment business, de Passe opened the door for generations of talented minority leaders to assume senior roles in the industry. She earned two Emmy and NAACP Image Awards for her work as executive producer of *Motown 25: Yesterday, Today and Forever* and *Motown Returns to the Apollo*. de Passe also served as executive producer of ["Lonesome Dove: The Outlaw Years."](#) In 2002, she was named Time Warner Visiting Professor to the Department of Radio, Television and Film at Howard University's John H. Johnson School of Communications, a post she held for three years. “*Grey's Anatomy*” star Isaiah Washington, a member of the Foundation's Los Angeles advisory committee, presented the award to de Passe, who although not able to attend the gala, did present a videotaped acceptance speech.

The event served as the kick-off for the second round of the Foundation's *Stars Pitch for Education* auction live at [www.ebay.com/jackierobinson](http://www.ebay.com/jackierobinson) from May 8<sup>th</sup> to May 18<sup>th</sup>. Prizes include separate Hank Aaron and Sean "Diddy" Combs signed replica Mitchell & Ness Jackie Robinson jerseys, an opportunity to have lunch with *Grey's Anatomy* co-star Isaiah Washington and a stunning museum quality ring from Bvlgari.

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The Jackie Robinson Foundation (JRF) is a public, not-for-profit national organization founded by Rachel Robinson in 1973 as a vehicle to perpetuate the memory of Jackie Robinson and his achievements. It provides four year college scholarships as well as educational and leadership development opportunities for students of color with strong capabilities, but limited financial resources. The Foundation strives to assure that the legacy of Jackie Robinson's activism and commitment to social justice will be carried forth in the personal, community and institutional lives of these individuals as they assume leadership roles throughout society.

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