

# WEST MIDWOOD NEWS

## Special Viral Edition



Volume 1

Number 9

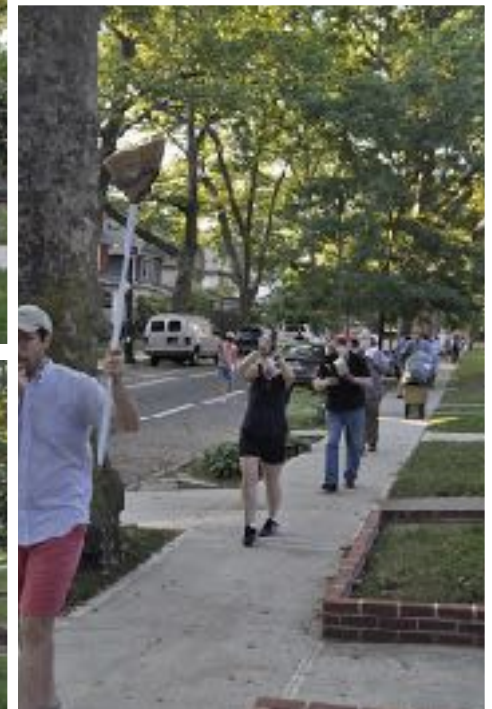
July 25, 2020



### We Love A Parade!

On July 4th, the 7 o'clock noise makers on Argyle between Avenue H and Glenwood decided to celebrate by turning their evening pot banging into a parade. Masked and appropriately distanced, and led by Argyle's own Nate Rogers, the merry band marched down to Avenue H and back up the other side of the street. Other West Midwood neighbors joined in or cheered from their porches. Great fun!

*(Photos by Allidah Muller and Marilyn Cuff)*



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## Summer Garden Pictures!



### **Note from the Editor:**

This is the ninth and final issue of the special viral edition of *West Midwood News*, but it is certainly not the end of the newsletter! We will return to our regular quarterly publication with the September issue of *West Midwood News*. It's not clear yet whether that version will be printed and distributed to your doorsteps or, like the Viral Edition, will be published only in electronic form. Whatever its format, it is *your* newsletter, so please send in your news, photos, ideas for articles, etc. The deadline for the September issue is August 15.

When the coronavirus pandemic hit, it seemed more important than ever for us to recognize what a great neighborhood we have, and to find ways to support each other and keep ourselves (relatively) sane through this crisis. The Special Viral Edition was designed to help do that, and it has proven to be not only a fun project for those of us working on it, but a good way to strengthen our connections to each other, our neighborhood and our city.

I would like to thank all of you who helped make this newsletter possible by writing articles, sending pictures, proofreading pages, suggesting improvements and generally being a loud and appreciative audience. It has been fun, and a good distraction during these days of lockdown, terrible news, and stress.

Be smart, be kind, stay healthy, wear masks, and take care of each other.

See you on the flip side,

**Tori Rosen**

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## Florence Manglani — Pastel Paintings of Birds



### PUZZLE

We repeatedly hear adages, aphorisms, catchphrases, clichés, idioms, proverbs, sayings, and slogans bellowed by elected officials, advertisements, and protestors. They may actually be quoting individuals who came long before them and originated the phrases they are mouthing. Do you know who first said each entry in the first list and when? To help you, a second list containing the originators of the items in the first list follows. How many items can you match with their originators? To add to the challenge, and to discourage using process of elimination, there are some items in the second list that do not correspond to any item in the first list.

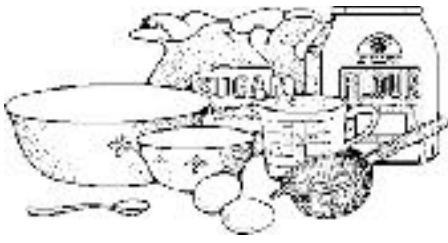
**Rating: 4=good; 7=excellent; 10=genius**

### List of Slogans

1. A chicken in every pot.
2. America first.
3. Arbeit macht frei. (Work will set you free.)
4. Give me liberty or give me death.
5. I can't breathe.
6. Let's make America great again.
7. Read my lips: no new taxes.
8. This too shall pass.
9. When the looting starts, the shooting starts.
10. Where's the beef?

### List of Originators

- a. B.C.E, ancient Persian poet
- b. 1775, Patrick Henry
- c. 1861, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- d. 1915, Woodrow Wilson
- e. 1928, Herbert Hoover
- f. 1933, gates of Nazi concentration camps
- g. 1967, Walter E. Headley, Miami, Fla.
- h. 1972, Alka-Seltzer ad
- i. 1980, Ronald Reagan
- j. 1984, spoken by actress Clara Peller
- k. 1988, Peggy Noonan
- l. 2014, Eric Garner



## West Midwood Cooks (and Bakes!) by Allidah Muller

Sam Sifton of the *New York Times* began a recent “What to Cook This Week” email with an ode to peaches. He writes, “I’m firmly of the opinion that you get one really good peach a year, if you’re lucky, if you don’t live in the South or next to a peach orchard. One peach, soft and juicy and sweet. That’s something to treasure. When I get one, I eat it slowly, with joy.”

I grew up in South Carolina and our summers were filled with weekly trips to the peach orchard. My mom also “put up” peaches so we could have them over the winter as well. When I moved north 20 years ago, that all changed. And while I usually get more than one good peach a season, I get far fewer than I did in my youth. So, when I stumble upon a good peach recipe, I get really excited. I find that if your peaches are not quite as good as they could be (which often happens when southern orchards pick the fruit early and ship it north), cooking with them helps improve their flavor.

I’ve also been trying to diversify my cookbook shelf lately. This recipe from Jerelle Guy, author of *Black Girl Baking*, is delicious. I just got her cookbook and am excited to try a lot more of the recipes when it’s cool enough to justify turning on the oven more frequently.

### Peach Poundcake by Jerelle Guy

This recipe proves that the perfect summer pound cake takes no special equipment or skill to pull off. Once you’ve prepared the peaches, this is essentially a dump-and-whisk cake. Pureed peaches (plus an extra egg yolk) keep the cake from drying out. Diced peaches add bursts of fresh fruit, and a peach glaze lends another layer of flavor. Use sweet, ripe peaches for best results, but frozen work fine here, too. If you’re looking for a spin on classic peaches and cream, serve a slice with lightly sweetened whipped cream.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted and cooled to room temperature, plus more for greasing the pan
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting the pan
- 3 medium, ripe, red-hued peaches (about 1 pound)

(Use the boldest-colored peaches you can find, as their skins will lend blush to the glaze.

However, you can also peel the peaches, if you mind the specks of skin.)

- 1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 3 large eggs plus 1 large egg yolk, beaten
- 1½ tsp vanilla extract
- 1 cup unsifted confectioners sugar, plus more as needed
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 2½ tsp baking powder

¾ tsp kosher salt

1. Heat oven to 325 degrees. Lightly butter and flour a 9x5-inch loaf pan, and set aside.
2. Dice 1 peach into 1/2-inch pieces. Pat the pieces dry with a paper towel and set aside.
3. Add the remaining 2 peaches and lemon juice to a food processor or blender, and blend on high until completely pureed. Measure out 1 level cup of the puree and transfer it to a mixing bowl along with the melted butter, eggs, egg

yolk and vanilla. Whisk to combine and set aside.

4. Completely scrape down the sides of the food processor, and make the icing using the small amount of pureed peaches still remaining: Add 1 cup of the confectioners’ sugar to the remaining peach puree in the food processor and blend on high until combined. The icing should be thick but thin enough to drizzle. Add more confectioners’ sugar to thicken or a splash of water to thin, as needed. Cover and set aside until it’s time to ice the cake.

5. In a large bowl, add the flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt, and whisk to combine. Pour the peach mixture into the flour mixture, and whisk well until the batter is thoroughly combined, then fold in the diced peaches. Transfer the batter to the loaf pan, spread evenly to the edges and back until crusty and golden brown on the top and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, 75 to 80 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for 10 minutes before transferring to a wire rack.

6. Stir the icing a final time and spread it on top of the warm cake, allowing the extra icing to drop down the



sides. Cool the cake to room temperature. Slice and serve, or wrap tightly with plastic wrap and store on the counter for up to 3 days.

### **Fresh Peach Cobbler from *Cook's Illustrated***

My family is always on the hunt for a better cobbler recipe. My dad may have found it this year in *Cook's Illustrated*. One note from my dad and sister: "We found that the peaches to cobbler ratio was a little out of balance. You might want to either double the peach recipe by half or reduce the "cobbler" a bit.

If your peaches are firm, you should be able to peel them with a sharp vegetable peeler. If they are too soft and ripe to withstand the pressure of a peeler, you'll need to blanch and shock them before peeling. In the biscuit topping, low-fat or nonfat plain yogurt can be used in place of whole milk yogurt, but the biscuits will be a little less rich. If you live in an arid climate, the biscuit dough may require up to an additional tablespoon of yogurt for it to form a cohesive dough. Do not prepare the biscuit dough any sooner than the recipe indicates; if the unbaked dough is left to stand too long, the leaven will expire and the biscuits will not rise properly in the oven. This recipe can be doubled to serve a crowd. Use a 13 x 9-inch baking dish and increase the baking times in steps 2 and 4 by about 5 minutes. Serve the cobbler warm with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream. Leftovers can be reheated in a 350 degree oven until warmed through.

#### Filling

- 2½ pounds ripe but firm peaches (6 to 7 medium)
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tsp cornstarch
- 1 Tbsp juice from 1 lemon
- Pinch salt

#### Biscuit Topping

- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 3 Tbsp plus 1 tsp sugar
- ¾ tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 5 Tbsp cold unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch cubes
- ½ cup plain whole milk yogurt



1. Adjust the oven rack to the lower-middle position and heat the oven to 425 degrees.

2. For the filling: Peel peaches (see note) then halve and pit each. Using a small spoon, scoop out and discard dark flesh from the pit area. Cut each half into 4 wedges. Gently toss peaches and sugar together in a large bowl; let stand for 30 minutes, tossing several times. Drain peaches in a colander set over a large

bowl. Whisk ¼ cup of the drained juice, cornstarch, lemon juice, and salt together in a small bowl. Toss peach juice mixture with peach slices and transfer to an 8-inch square glass baking dish. Bake until peaches begin to bubble around the edges, about 10 minutes.

3. For the topping: While peaches are baking, in a food processor, pulse flour, 3 Tbsp sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt to combine.

Scatter butter over and pulse until mixture resembles coarse meal, about 10 1-second pulses. Transfer to a medium bowl; add yogurt and toss with rubber spatula until cohesive dough is formed. (Don't overmix or the biscuits will be tough.) Break dough into 6 evenly sized but roughly shaped mounds and set aside.

4. To assemble and bake: After peaches have baked for 10 minutes, remove peaches from the oven and place dough mounds on top, spacing them at least ½ inch apart (they should not touch). Sprinkle each mound with a portion of remaining 1 tsp sugar. Bake until the topping is golden brown and fruit is bubbling, 16 to 18 minutes. Cool cobbler on a wire rack until warm, about 20 minutes, and serve.

To balance out all of this dessert, here is a fairly virtuous green smoothie recipe from my dear friend Mollie who probably got it from somewhere else, but I'm not sure where at this point. What I like about this recipe is that it's very flexible. You can use oat, almond or even coconut milk depending on your preference or what's in your pantry. You can also throw in more fresh or frozen fruit (I've tried both frozen mango chunks and a ½ cup of frozen blueberries). If you do add more fruit, you might need to thin out the

mixture with a little bit of water, as it does get thick. There's also a nice balance between sweet things, sources of protein, and green things.

### Green Smoothie

- 1 cup almond milk (or whatever milk you want)
- 1 Tbsp chia seeds
- 2 Tbsp hemp seeds
- 2 Tbsp almond butter
- 2 dates
- 1 frozen banana
- [insert any other fruit you want to add]
- 2 cups spinach (I've been using a heaping cup of frozen spinach)

Load the ingredients in the order listed into your blender (milk on the bottom, working your way up). Start blending on low, then increase speed to high when things are starting to come together. If your blender is a little temperamental, like mine, you might need to stop and poke around a bit to make sure everything is being evenly blended. Blend until smooth and serve. I find this makes about 2 smaller (adult-sized) smoothies.

### From Harriet Rhine One Bowl Apple Cake

(recently given to me by Dottie, who was 102 in June)

- 1/2 cup butter (1 stick)
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- 1 cup flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 large apple peeled and cubed or sliced

Add blueberries, or peaches or plums or a little of each (No bananas or strawberries)

1. Using a large bowl, cream butter and sugar
2. Add other ingredients and mix
3. Butter pan
4. Add mixture to the pan
5. Bake @ 350 degrees about 45 minutes, or until browned on top
6. Whipped cream on top is optional



## Neighborhood News *What's Happening in Your Life? Let Us Know!*

### *The Fourth on DeKoven*

Three Brennan lads born and raised on DeKoven Court returned for a "4th on the Front Porch" visit: PJ, (Lindsay), Tommy, Liam. Third generation, Sophia, along with best friend Corduroy, led the Brennan parade down the driveway.



## A Budding Artist *by Florence Manglani*

One Sunday morning in late June, the Morning Walking Group, Aggie, Madi, Merrie and I, met at our usual spot on the southwest corner of Glenwood and Rugby. That day, we were celebrating two events: Aggie's recent knee surgery and my retirement from Brooklyn College (after almost 30 years). Madi and Merrie went to Newkirk Plaza for coffee and donuts from Dunkin Donuts, and Aggie and I continued our slow walk round the Glenwood Mall—slow walk because Aggie had had knee surgery about 3 weeks before.

We sat on Aggie's front porch, observing social distancing and wearing our masks, except when we were enjoying the treats. Aggie said, "I have something to show you. I think you all will like it." We were quite intrigued and could not wait to see Aggie's surprise. Aggie went inside and brought out a picture of her house. It was not a photograph, it was a pen and ink plus watercolor sketch of her house. It was beautifully done and captured many of the architectural details of her house.

"The other day, a young girl, maybe in her early twenties, knocked on my door and offered to sell me the picture," Aggie said. "She said she was going around our neighborhood sketching houses that caught her eye, and offering to sell the sketch to the owners. I loved the way she had captured the details and so, after some back and forth, I bought it. I don't know who she is. But if you are interested, I will tell her if I see her." Of course, we were very interested and wanted sketches done of our respective houses.

The next morning, I heard my door bell ring. I was not expecting anyone. I opened the door and lo and behold, there was this young girl, showing me a sketch of my house and asking me if I would be interested in purchasing it. I was somewhat surprised as well as pleased to see the sketch of my house. It was really done quite well and of course I bought it.



"OMG, you are the person who did the sketch of my friend Aggie's house, aren't you?" I asked. She was very surprised and said, "Yes. How did you know?" "And were you sitting across my house yesterday afternoon making this sketch?" "Yes, that was me.

But how do you know all this?" she asked. I introduced myself and asked her for her name. I told her about the walking group and that we were all discussing getting our houses sketched, and told her that if she was willing to do some more work, my walking friends were very interested. I mentioned writing an article about her. She exclaimed, "You would do that for me? Really!?" I replied, "Yes. My friends and I want to help you and encourage you."

Her name is Esther Maxwell, and she grew up in Brooklyn. Here are some of the drawings she has done in West Midwood. If you are interested in contacting her, you can email her at [esthermaxwelo@gmail.com](mailto:esthermaxwelo@gmail.com). You can see more of her work on her Instagram page: [Esthers\\_portfolio](#)



## ***Here is Esther's story, in her own words:***

I've spent my whole life drawing. My school notes were decorated with princesses and castles, English essays were accompanied by illustrations, and when I finished a test early I would while away the extra time by drawing on the back of the test. When I was in second grade, my teacher called me over to discuss a provoking picture I had drawn on the back of a test. "Where did you come across this?" I was asked, as my test with the teenagers smoking on the back was presented to me. I don't know if I had drawn the image to purposely tick off my very orthodox school, but that image got me in a lot of trouble. Smoking teenagers were not supposed to be in the subconscious mind of the good Jewish school girl.



I also kept a separate notebook on my desk to sketch in. Most teachers understood that the drawing notebook helped me concentrate on the lesson, but a lot got very touchy about it. They felt it was disrespectful when I distracted myself. I argued that the drawing kept me focused and my mind attentive. If I wasn't able to keep my hands busy, my mind would soon wander. This battle ended only with the school year.

After high school, I continued learning more about art. I took a course on the principles of design last summer and had a job as an art assistant. During this time, I came across a book called *Daily Painting*, which described the concept of consistently improving your painting skills by completing a small painting every day. I took on this challenge and since then I have tried my best to keep to it. This went on for a year. I got an office job with graphic design opportunities and life started to settle down. Then Coronavirus hit. My job no longer had hours for me and I was faced with a lot of down time. I painted twice as much as I used to, but I still had a lot of free time. I started taking walks.

I really liked walking through West Midwood. You could easily tell that the people living here had a lot of pride in their homes. The gardens were detailed and beautiful, the architecture was carefully maintained, and each home was full of charm. Little gables jutted from the rooftops, shutters manned the windows, and hanging flower pots graced the porches. I knew I would have to come back and draw these houses. Their charm had to be captured.

And so it was. I came by with a sketchbook and drew my first house. When I was done, I knocked on the owner's door to show her the sketch. I had a faint idea that she might like to keep the sketch, but my confidence in my art was fairly low and my expectations even lower. However, when the owner came out and saw what I had done she was so encouraging. She loved seeing her dear home on paper. Her praise gave me the confidence to offer the drawing to her and so began weeks of similar drawings. I drew another house and another house, and was pleasantly surprised to find drawing after drawing gratefully accepted by their owners. I really feel like I'm living in a dream! My love for drawing made the time sketching a pleasure, and the fact that I got to pass on these drawings to people who appreciated them made it all ten times as special. I had a mission now. A commitment to capturing as much of the inherent personality of the houses as I can. I would not exchange this mission for anything. Thank you West Midwood for your encouragement and support. I loved getting to know this neighborhood better, and look forward to getting to know it better still.

### ***WMN: Tell us a little more about your background:***

I grew up my whole life in Brooklyn. I was raised Orthodox and went to an Orthodox Jewish school. My father is from England and I have visited there often. The architecture there is similarly charming to the houses in West Midwood. Perhaps this is why I've devoted so much time drawing the houses here. They remind me of my time in England. I firmly believe that every drawing I make is only because of G-d's help. All my drawings have my signature on the bottom, and G-d's "signature" on the top. I put the acronym bs"d on the top of my drawings. This stands for 'besiyata dishmaya', or, 'with the help of G-d'. That is how I make all my drawings. I am from a family of eight siblings. I love my family and they are my biggest supporters. Every time I come home from drawing the West Midwood houses they ask me "Did anybody like your drawings? Did you sell any?" They believe in me and that belief has formed my confidence in myself. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. It's been a pleasure.







## Brooklyn Sports

By Argyle Art Rhine

*What do Sportswriters Write About When There Are No Sports to Write About?*

## Robeson and Robinson

### *Dramatis Personae*

**Paul Robeson:** With the possible exception of Muhammad Ali, Paul Robeson was the most charismatic human being ever to grace our splendid shores. His father was born a slave but escaped via the Underground Railroad and became a Presbyterian minister in Princeton. His mother died when he was six. Paul excelled in sports, drama and academics in high school and won a scholarship to Rutgers. He was the only African American at Rutgers during his four years. He won varsity letters in four sports and in his Junior and Senior years, he played end and tackle on the football team and became the first African American to be selected for the All-American team. Walter Camp called him “the greatest End ever.” Oh, in addition to his athletic achievements, he was also Phi Beta Kappa and class valedictorian. In his valedictory address, he implored his classmates to fight for equality for all Americans. He attended Columbia Law School and I believe (but cannot find a citation) that he was the first African American graduate. While attending law school, he supported himself by playing pro (NFL) football for the Akron Pros and the Milwaukee Badgers. He was selected to the Pro Bowl and was a First Team All-Pro. He practiced law briefly but racism was a bar.

As part of the Harlem Renaissance, he began acting professionally and achieved immediate renown as the lead in Eugene O’Neill’s *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* and then absolute stardom as the lead (Brutus) in O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*. He was soon acting in silent movies, including *Body and Soul*, and then was recruited by pianist Lawrence Brown, who became his accompanist, and with whom he toured America singing African American folk songs and spirituals for two years. He was signed to a recording contract by Victor Records. In 1928, he landed the role of “Joe” in the musical *Show Boat*, which played 350 performances in London (the Royal Theater’s “most profitable venture” of the 20th century) before continuing the success with a Broadway run in 1932. In *Show Boat*,

Robeson sang “Ol’ Man River.” Listen to this song. It has been performed thousands of times by scores of performers, but never has there been a rendition like Robeson’s. In between *Show Boat* in London and Broadway, Robeson also appeared as Othello in London in 1930.

His film career flourished, including *The Emperor Jones*, *King Solomon’s Mines*, *Show Boat*, and *Sanders of the River*. During the 1930’s, Robeson firmly embraced his African heritage, studying Swahili and other African languages, among other things, and also embraced the cause of the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War against the Fascists – visiting the battlefield – despite the pleas of his business manager. He also appeared in the Welsh coal-mining film,

*Proud Valley*, and declared while in Wales, “An artist must take sides. I must elect to fight for freedom or slavery. I have made my choice. I have no alternative.” Upon his return to the United States in 1940, he became the “Number 1 entertainer” in the country with his radio broadcast of *Ballad for Americans*. However, he was denied accommodations in any Los



Three Robeson Roles: *The Emperor Jones*, “Joe” in *Show Boat*, and *All-American at Rutgers*”

Angeles hotel because of his race, until the Beverly Wilshire Hotel granted him a room at an exorbitant rate under an assumed name.

In 1943, Robeson met with baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis and the baseball owners of both major leagues and explicitly exhorted them to sign Black players. In his speech at New York’s Roosevelt Hotel he recalled playing baseball while at Rutgers against future (white) Hall of Famer Frankie Frisch and, while at Columbia, coaching the Columbia baseball team and its young but potentially great first baseman named Lou Gehrig. Robeson appealed to the patriotism of baseball’s owners and argued that breaking the color line was truly important because of the World War. “We live in times,” he stated, “when you might be able to make a great contribution to not only the advance of our own country, but of the whole world, because . . . Negro ball players becoming part of the great American national pastime could make a great difference in what peoples all over the world would feel toward us as a country

in a time when we need their help.” What a sophisticated argument! Integrating baseball was the right thing to do not only because it was the right thing to do but also because it was what we should be showing the world.

Robeson fought for freedom everywhere. In addition to England, Spain, Wales and the United States, he met with Jawaharlal Nehru and supported India’s efforts to gain independence from Great Britain. Oh, in addition to his efforts to end segregation and racism, Robeson was also playing Othello on Broadway, with Uta Hagen as Desdemona. Despite (or maybe because of) interracial kissing and Othello’s rough treatment of his wife, Othello ran for 296 performances in 1943-1944 and remains the longest running Shakespeare play in the history of Broadway. Listen to a recording of Robeson in *Othello*. And while you’re at it, listen to him singing Ma Curly Headed Baby and other lullabies and spirituals. There has never been anyone like Paul Robeson.

**Jackie Robinson:** Jackie Robinson was the greatest athlete the world has ever known. Please do not talk to me about Michael Jordan who batted .202 in the minor leagues and could not hit a curveball. There are a few who might be mentioned in the same breath: Jim Brown was beyond great in football and lacrosse; Bo Jackson was on a path to the Hall of Fame in football and baseball before an injury cut his



*Jackie Steals Home in '55 Series with Gil and Yogi as interested parties*

career short; Jim Thorpe won the Olympic decathlon in 1912 and then played professional football. Babe Didrikson Zaharias perhaps comes closest: She won two gold and one silver medal in track & field in the 1932 Olympics; she toured with quality basketball teams; and she was one of the greatest golfers in history, winning 82 golf tournaments including five Majors on the LPGA circuit. I have a personal prejudice towards her because she was also [reputed to be] a great bowler. However, even Babe pales by comparison with Jackie Robinson. Baseball, in which he made the Hall of Fame, was probably his fourth best sport. He was the best

broad jumper in the United States, winning the national championship, but was denied an Olympic championship because the Olympics were canceled in 1940. He was the starting guard and high scorer for the UCLA Bruins – that’s UCLA, folks, the best team in the country. He was the undefeated football team’s running back and led the nation in runback yardage. Oh, and during spring break in his college schedule, he entered the NCAA tennis tournament and, despite never having played competitive tennis before, won the national collegiate singles title. However, a career as an athlete was problematic; professional sports were segregated.

Robinson’s selection by Branch Rickey to play for the Montreal Royals in 1946 and for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 began “The Great Experiment” – recognized as the greatest story in the history of American, if not all, sports. Rickey understood that the person who broke the color line needed the courage to refrain from fighting back when confronted with racial insults because the pressure to “break” him would be, to say the least, inhumane. Robinson might not be able to fulfill such a role. Second Lieutenant Robinson had been court-martialed when he refused a Captain’s order to move to the back of a bus in Texas in 1944. He was acquitted (segregation was forbidden in the service during the War), but the Army did not like what he did and he was almost immediately given an honorable discharge. Robinson promised Rickey he would not fight back. The concept that he needed to please his audience was a given. And it becomes very important in his conflict with Paul Robeson, which is the subject of this article. Even Robeson understood it, as we shall see. Robinson knew he must comply with the demand to control his fiery temper. Robinson knew, above all else, the importance of his place in history. He must succeed in his mission to integrate baseball. He knew he could change the world. It was a singular mission. He was carrying not only his own hopes and those of his family, but, without any question, the hopes of millions of African Americans and a quite considerable portion – including the heroic Pee Wee Reese and other Dodger teammates -- of the white American population as well.

### **Robeson and Robinson:**

Throughout the 1940’s, Robeson became even more active in his fight to end discrimination in the United States. He became the target of anti-Communist politicians like Richard Nixon and members of the House Un-American Committee. He was precisely “the kind of person that HUAC members lived to investigate.” He had supported the Soviet Union in its call for a second front against Hitler and had been a “premature anti-Fascist” in his support for the Spanish fighters against the Franco-led Fascists. He was also the most famous Black man in the land – even more well-known than Jackie Robinson. In 1949, Robeson attended the World Congress of Partisans for

Peace in Paris. It was not a function of the Communist Party, but it certainly was attended by delegates who were sympathetic to the Soviet Union. At the conference, Robeson sang for his adoring audience and made some impromptu remarks. Incredibly, even before he appeared at the conference, the Associated Press filed its report. The account was published in the morning papers. Robeson was quoted as saying, "It is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations against the Soviet Union which in one generation has lifted our people to full human dignity."

There is a problem with that quotation: Robeson never said those words. The New York Times – which sent its own reporter and did not rely on the AP – mentioned that Robeson had appeared but made no mention of a speech. Subsequent researchers, including Martin Duberman, who wrote a definitive Robeson biography, unearthed all the transcripts of the Paris World Conference – during which Robeson was followed by fans and reporters who wrote down his every word – and there were no words spoken remotely resembling those in the AP report. Of course it was the AP report which made the news. Who cared what Robeson really said! Civil rights groups, including the NAACP, quickly condemned him. And HUAC was immediately up in arms. Robeson would have us not go to war against our greatest enemy?! Somebody was needed to debunk this absurd idea. And who better than Jackie Robinson?

Before we deal with Jackie's response, let us contemplate whether the Associated Press would really ever do something as outrageous as file a false report. Hmmm. Did the Hearst Press practice "yellow journalism" with its reports that Spaniards were raping American women when the United States was coveting the Spanish colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines? Did the Spanish-American War battle cry of "Remember the Maine" blame the Spaniards for something the Americans had themselves done? Did Teddy Roosevelt rise to national prominence on the basis of a charge up San Juan Hill which never took place? Hmmm. Did the United States invade Vietnam based upon a phony Gulf of Tonkin incident? Hmmm. Did the United States declare war on Iraq based upon the discovery of weapons of mass destruction? Hmmm. Yes, I think we can accept that the AP filed a false report.

Robinson wrote in his autobiography that he was unsure about what to do about testifying against Robeson. "I did not want," he wrote, "to be pitted against another black man ... [who was] striking out against racial inequality



in the way that seemed best to him. However, in those days I had much more faith in the ultimate justice of the American white man than I have today." Robeson knew Robeson, of course. Robeson's breaking color barriers in the theater were similar to Robeson's role as a baseball player. Robeson was also a pioneer as an athlete! And Robeson knew that Robeson had spoken to the baseball owners in 1943 in support of integrating the Major Leagues. Yet Robeson, just two months after Robeson's alleged "remarks," appeared before HUAC on July 18, 1949, without being subpoenaed. Eric Nusbaum, in his beautiful new book, *Stealing Home*, which details the perfidious displacement of scores of multi-generational Hispanic homeowners by Walter O'Malley and the City of Los Angeles with the help of the Los Angeles Times in order to make room for the new Dodgers stadium in Chavez Ravine, reports that Robeson was not surprised and he was not bitter. He told his son that he expected Robeson would be called to denounce him. And he added, "if Jackie had refused and forced them to subpoena him, he would never have had a baseball career." And Robeson knew that the integration of baseball was, rightly, Jackie's goal – and a worthy goal. So now let's look at what Robeson said.

Robinson questioned whether Robeson had indeed made such statements: "If accurately reported, it sounded very silly to me." No one man, he continued, could speak for fifteen million people. And then Robinson proceeded to explain why this whole spectacle was beside the point. "The white public should start toward real understanding by appreciating that every single Negro who is worth his salt is going to resent any kind of



slurs and discrimination because of his race, and he is going to use every bit of intelligence such as he has to stop it." And Robinson continued, "This has got absolutely nothing to do with what Communists may or may not be trying to do. . . The fact that it is a Communist who denounces injustice in the courts, police brutality, and lynching when it happens doesn't change the truth of his charges. . . Negroes were stirred up long before there was a Communist Party, and they'll stay stirred up long after the party has disappeared unless Jim Crow has disappeared by then, as well."

It strikes me that Robinson's questioning whether Robeson had indeed made such statements is insightful beyond belief. It strikes me that Robinson's understanding of the plight of his brothers and sisters was truly prescient and belies his later statement that he then had "more faith in the ultimate justice of the American white man than I have

today.” But it does not surprise me in the least that the press reports followed the party line in lock step. Not a single article mentioned any part of Robinson’s referrals to slurs and discrimination, to racial discrimination in the Army, to segregation on trains and buses, to job discrimination, to police brutality, to injustice in the courts, to lynching or to Jim Crow. The *New York Times* front-page headline was “Jackie Robinson Terms Stand of Robeson on Negroes False.” The *Los Angeles Times* headline was “Jackie Robinson Brands Robeson Claims Silly.” There was no black and white to the press coverage; it was all one color.

Following Robinson’s testimony, Robeson was vilified and black-listed. A month after the hearing, violent riots sanctioned by law enforcement officers broke out in Peekskill, New York at a concert which Robeson was going to give on behalf of the Civil Rights Congress. I was there, but my parents had the foresight to leave me with a group babysitter in the hotel. My parents’ car was smashed. The blacklist prevented Robeson from appearing at any theaters and concert venues. He was the top grossing entertainer in the United States in the mid-1940’s; by 1950, his earnings were zero. The FBI confiscated his passport -- saying “his frequent criticism of the treatment of blacks in the United States should not be aired in foreign countries” -- so he could not tour and perform internationally. He was beloved but he was penniless and erased to the point of invisibility.

There’s so much more to say about his continuing fight for equal rights. In 1951, he presented the United Nations with an anti-lynching petition titled, “We Charge Genocide.” It stated that by its failure to act against lynching, the United States government was guilty of genocide under Article II of the UN Genocide Convention. Robeson performed two concerts at the International Peace Arch between Washington State and British Columbia in 1952 and managed to sing on several occasions for thousands of London listeners who gathered to hear him on the telephone. In 1958, his passport was restored by the Supreme Court. He performed in Moscow, Yalta and London in 1959. He was the first major artist to perform at the new construction site of the Sydney Opera House in 1960, when he demanded that the Australian government provide citizenship and equal rights to the Aborigines.

In 1961, his son said that three “doctors” in London who were likely CIA operatives got hold of him and plied him with “mind de-patterning” drugs. He recuperated, but on admission later in 1961 to another London hospital, he was given shock therapy and heavy drugs while hospitalized for two (!) years and his brain was permanently fried. His family and friends finally got him transferred to Berlin in 1963 where doctors condemned the London doctors for administering the shock therapy and barbiturates. In Berlin,

he partly recovered, but his health was precarious for the rest of his life. He lived in seclusion in Philadelphia for 13 years until his death in 1976. In 1973, at his 75th birthday tribute at Carnegie Hall, a taped message from him had been played in which he said he was the same Paul, dedicated to the worldwide cause of humanity for freedom, peace and brotherhood. However, his Philadelphia doctor said the tape could not have been made by him.

Robinson’s fate was certainly better, but I wouldn’t say Robinson found much happiness following his retirement from baseball in 1956. He was diagnosed with diabetes in 1957 and the medical knowledge of the time could not prevent his rapid deterioration. He was a conservative Republican who supported Nixon in 1960 and

Nelson Rockefeller in 1964. He was surprised when Republicans did not support the Civil Rights Act. After the Republicans nominated Goldwater in 1964, Robinson said that this is “how it must have felt to be a Jew in Hitler’s Germany.” He continued to support Rockefeller when he was re-elected New York’s governor in 1966. He broke with Martin Luther King, Jr. when King opposed the war in Vietnam. He fought with all the militant African-American leaders of the 1960’s. Malcolm X

***“An artist must take sides. I must elect to fight for freedom or slavery. I have made my choice. I have no alternative.” — Paul Robeson***

***“The fact that it is a Communist who denounces injustice in the courts, police brutality, and lynching when it happens doesn’t change the truth of [the] charges.” — Jackie Robinson***

said of Robinson, “Jackie never knew what was going on in Harlem until his white friends told him.” Yet he made some peace and tried to reach common ground with these other activists because he was always dedicated to achieving advancement for his Black brothers and sisters. However, he had no understanding that achieving a piece of the American dream required war in Vietnam and exploitation of people in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

He was honored by induction into the Hall of Fame in 1962 and he received a plaque in 1972 commemorating the 25th anniversary of his breaking the color line. At this ceremony, he expressed his displeasure that there had still never been a Black manager in the Major Leagues. On that score at least, he never vacillated from his demands for justice and equal opportunity. Shortly after this ceremony, he died at the age of 53. He has received some unbelievable honors within the baseball community, not the least of which is that his number “42” has been retired from Major League baseball and will never in the future be worn by another player. He also has our undying love for his dignity and grace, not to mention skill and fortitude, during his playing days when he made the most significant contribution to the world of sports we will ever see. And, toward the end of his life, it must be noted herein that he expressed regret for his testimony before HUAC: “I have grown wiser and closer to painful truths about America’s destructiveness. I have increased respect for Paul Robeson who sacrificed everything because, I believe, he was sincerely trying to help his people.”

## Who You Gonna Call?

When you need help, it's important to call the right number. Here's a list of useful phone numbers with an explanation of when to call which number. It's not a bad idea to cut out this list and stick in on your refrigerator or by your phone.

**911**— The number to call for emergencies, such as fire, medical emergencies, accidents of any type, a crime in progress, violent behavior, or a person in trouble. Remember to stay on the line until the operator tells you it is okay to hang up. The operator will also ask you your location, so note the nearest house number and street address.

**311**—Call this number for non-emergencies such as noise complaints, animal control, air quality, blocked driveway, dangerous tree situation, or to find out where to get other information. For a complete list, see [www.nyc.gov/311](http://www.nyc.gov/311).

If you're unsure, call 911. The operator will either take your information or redirect you to 311. Remember to get a complaint number and write it down.

### Our Neighborhood Coordination Officers (NCOs):

P.O. Konstantin Rakmonov, **929-294-5260** Email is: [konstantin.rakhmanov@nypd.org](mailto:konstantin.rakhmanov@nypd.org)

P.O. David Yegros, **929-284-0625** Email is: [david.yegros@nypd.org](mailto:david.yegros@nypd.org)

The NCOs are usually on duty Tuesdays to Saturdays from noon to 6:30 p.m. (Sometimes they are unavailable because they have been pulled for training or special duty.) Former West Midwood president Linda Howell reports that she relies on the NCOs for quality-of-life issues, especially situations "where I do not have complete details, only secondhand reports of events. I feel comfortable giving them as much information as I can and asking them to check into the potential problem." Examples include gatherings at the dead ends, abandoned cars, chronic parking violations, and patterns of package theft from porches. You can also contact them if you feel a 911 or 311 call was not handled correctly. Note that while they will make every effort to assist, they may also be handling other more time-critical issues.

### Community Board 14 (CB14), 718-859-6357

This office and its staff are a valuable resource that can be contacted for a myriad of situations. Call them to find out the status of a 311 complaint, why your recycling wasn't picked up, how you can get a tree planted in front of your home or a dead one removed, or what's going on with construction (or lack of it) at a specific location. They can also help you get in touch with the local representative for a specific city agency. This is by no means a complete list. If you're unsure of how to handle an issue, call them and ask. They are there to help.

### Coronavirus Symptoms

Here are the CDC recommendations for what to do if you are experiencing symptoms of Covid-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

Call your doctor first, who will advise you as to what to do next. Most cases are mild, and can be treated at home. Do not go into your doctor's office without calling first, so that they can assure you get appropriate care without putting yourself or others at risk. If your symptoms are severe or you have difficulty breathing, call 911.

## Some Signs of the Times in West Midwood



## How are you doing, West Midwood? What are you doing, West Midwood?

This is the last Viral Edition of WMN, but the newsletter lives on, and we want to hear what going on with you and yours. Send us your drawings, pictures, doodles, ideas, stories or poems. Let us know about new babies, great recipes you've tried, good video games, bad jokes, naughty puppies, or goldfish that jumped out of their bowl— whatever is happening at your house.

## What Is West Midwood Online?

Want to ask folks in the neighborhood whether they have any recommendations for a plumber or roofer or such? Or maybe what local eateries or merchants they like? Perhaps you'd like to be in the know about issues affecting our area? Then join the West Midwood Online email discussion group, aka the listserv.

Send an email to [joe@enright.com](mailto:joe@enright.com) with your street address, name, and the email address that you want to use to post and receive messages. He will add you to the group and send you the simple instructions. There are presently over 200 email subscribers representing about 125 households.

To join you must be a permanent resident of West Midwood and agree not to post messages of a religious, political, or spam nature. Insulting or crude language can also lead to revocation of the ability to post. Finally, new and existing members can also request a daily recap, containing all of the activity within the previous 24 hours, rather than receive messages as they occur.

## WEST MIDWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2018 - 2020

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