JACK JOHNSON: PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE

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A Thesis

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Abstract

of

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On December 26 1908, to the disdain of white Americans, an African American pugilist captured the laurels of the heavyweight championship of the world. Becoming the seventh heavyweight champion in modern history and more significantly setting the precedent as the first black heavyweight champion, John Arthur Johnson, shattered the glass ceiling of a segregated sport within a segregated nation. What ensued next was a desperate search to find a white boxer to defeat Johnson and recapture the championship back into the possession of the white race, an endeavor labeled as the search for the ‘Great White Hope.’ Once the greatest of white hopes, James Jeffries, was defeated by Johnson, a war was waged against Johnson, leading to anti-Johnson sentiments and race rioting. This anti-Johnson crusade was burning across the nation while mainstream newspapers were fanning flames to their respective demographics.

This thesis investigates through the diverse lens between leading mainstream newspapers and Afro-American newspapers, within three metropolitan cities: New York, Washington D.C., and Chicago, the elements used within articles to propagate fear, racial discord, anti-Jack Johnson sentiments among other ill natured acts, while observing the rebuttal of Afro-American newspapers.
This study will examine and conclude why the nation invested such a keen interest in the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries battle, that it was hailed as the ‘Fight of the Century.’ As well as document, why race rioting broke out among numerous cities across the nation, and the roles played by each respective media, mainstream newspapers and Afro American newspapers.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Dr. Joseph Palermo

_______________________
Date
DEDICATION

For my Family:
my Father Se Young Chung,
my Mother Koom Ok Chung,
my Sister Sora Chung,
and my Auntie Chang Suk Clark,
who taught me how to open my heart and
Love.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On December 26 1908, to the disdain of white Americans, an African American boxer had captured the laurels of the heavyweight championship of the world. Becoming the seventh champion in modern history and more significantly setting a precedent as the first black world heavyweight champion, John Arthur Johnson, shattered the glass ceiling of a segregated sport in a segregated nation. What ensued next was a nationwide panic to find a white man that could defeat Johnson and recapture the title back into the possession of the white race. The endeavor was labeled as the search for the ‘Great White Hope.’

Jack Johnson would have his way with the ‘white hopes’ and on July 4 1910 defeated the greatest of the white hopes, James J. Jeffries. White Americans realized that Johnson could not be beaten in the ring and being set off by emotions with the defeat of their hero, Jim Jeffries, white Americans took to the streets in what became the first national race riot. White Americans went a step further taking the battle to the courts of the United State’s judicial system to find a way to defeat Johnson. Their efforts led to banning fight films that depicted Johnson dismantling Jeffries as well as drafting a law aimed at imprisoning Johnson, revealed as the Mann Act, or White-Slave Traffic Act of 1910.

The Mann Act was drafted by Illinois legislature James Robert Mann. Mann’s principle aim was to ban interstate transport of females for ‘immoral purposes,’ addressing prostitution and human trafficking. The Mann Act was a witch-hunt against Jack Johnson who was the first to be persecuted under the act. In Johnson’s autobiography, *In the Ring and Out*, Johnson addressed his reasoning behind the concoction of the Mann Act:

The search for the “white hope” not having been successful, prejudices were being piled up against me, and certain unfair persons, piqued because I was
champion, decided that if they could not get me one way they would another, and all sorts of efforts were set in motion to brand me as an undesirable character and to relegate me to obscurity.¹

Many witnesses were brought in to build a case against Jack Johnson. Many of whom were women in Johnson’s past. The prime witness was former love interest Lucille Cameron, brought in to testify against Johnson by the wishes of her mother. On October 18 1912, Johnson was arrested for violating the Mann Act, but Cameron refused to cooperate and the case fell apart. However, the witch-hunt continued and within a month’s time, prosecutors hit on an old trail and learned of Johnson’s association with Belle Schrieber, which ultimately led to his conviction on June 1913.

The nature of Jack Johnson’s conviction was a rank frame-up. The charges were based upon a law that was not in effect at the time Johnson and Belle Schrieber were together and legally should not have been operative. Johnson was sentenced to one year and a day in penitentiary and fined $1,000.² However, Johnson did not feel compelled to serve time in which he had not committed a crime. Rather than serving his sentence Johnson fled to Canada where his now wife, Lucille Cameron, was waiting for him. For the next seven years, Johnson lived in exile mainly in Europe and Mexico. Johnson sorely missed his home and finally surrendered himself on July 20 1920, where he served his sentence in Leavenworth Kansas federal prison.³

The question is not how Jack Johnson rose to become the first black heavyweight champion of the world, but how a nation rose together to run Johnson out of the country. What was Johnson’s crime? How did Johnson’s two greatest boxing matches capture the interest of so

¹  Jack Johnson, In the Ring and Out, (Chicago: 3141 Press, 1977), 82.
²  IBID
many Americans? In what manner did Americans invest so many emotions in Johnson’s boxing matches? What part did the media play to influence these events and the race riot that followed?

Jack Johnson’s two greatest victories were against Tommy Burns on December 26 1908 to capture the world’s heavyweight championship and defeating Jim Jeffries on July 4 1910 in a showdown that was hailed as the ‘Fight of the Century.’ By examining Jack Johnson’s career, highlighted by his two greatest matches through the diverse lens of mainstream and Afro-American newspapers from three major metropolitan cities: New York, the epicenter of the world, Chicago, the adopted hometown of Jack Johnson, and Washington D.C., the nation’s capital, one can begin to answer the aforementioned questions. The investigated mainstream daily newspapers are the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Washington Post* and will be juxtaposed against Afro-American weekly newspapers of the same cities. Presented are the *New York Age*, *Chicago Defender*, and the *Baltimore Afro American Ledger*. All of which are leading newspapers of each conglomerate: mainstream and Afro-American press.
Chapter 2

BACKGROUND

The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery on December 18, 1865, freeing Henry and Tina Johnson, both having been born into slavery. The couple soon thereafter married and brought six children into a world where de facto slavery existed. The color of skin bluntly determined social status and limited the quantity and quality of opportunities factoring into the level of success one would experience. Tipping the scale against African Americans, in 1896 the United States Supreme Court issued racial segregation constitutional in the landmark case of Plessy v. Ferguson under the doctrine of ‘separate but equal.’ Segregation so became the way of life.

The second child and the first male offspring of Henry and Tina Johnson was born March 31, 1878 in Galveston Texas. His name was John Arthur Johnson. The world would recognize him as Jack Johnson. Jack Johnson was born fresh off the heels of slavery and would live his entire life under segregation, never seeing the day of the landmark ruling of Brown v. Board of Education, reversing the doctrine of segregation in 1954. Yet he did not abide by the rules of segregation. He did not live his life in fear. In his eyes he was on par with any man in the world regardless of color.

* * *

A BAD NEGRO

Jack Johnson was a child born from poverty who became a man of mind-blowing wealth. Johnson represented the American Dream for African Americans and on the same token represented a nightmare for white Americans. Public opinion regarding Johnson is much more defined than race. It would be too simplistic to argue that white Americans despised Johnson
because he was black. Johnson perpetuated much of the angst drawn to him, as he was a very arrogant figure. He ridiculed his opponents in the ring. Uninterested with his less than threatening opponents, Johnson would hold conversations with his opponent’s seconds, fans in attendance, judges sitting at ringside, and anyone else that captured his attention. Johnson was so confident during his fights that he regularly made suggestions to newspaper reporters about what to write in their articles.

Jack Johnson’s economic success through vaudeville engagements and his illustrious boxing career had netted him financial security that allowed Johnson to blow money like cigarette smoke. In an era when blacks were held beneath the status quo, Johnson played by his own rules and blew smoke in the face of white Americans. Johnson did so by testing the temperament of police chiefs, politicians, the press, and the public with presentations of his personal and professional personas on vaudeville stages, the boxing ring, and in the streets navigating the most expensive make of automobiles, dressed in designer suits, smoking expensive cigars, and worse, caroused with white women.

* * *

JACK JOHNSON AND WHITE WOMEN

Jack Johnson had acquired a taste for white women after numerous failed relationships, including a marriage, with black women. After breakups with his first wife, Mary Austin, whom he married when he was twenty years old in 1898, along with a disaster relationship with Clara Kerr, whom had burglarized Johnson’s prized possessions twice and ran off with another man, Johnson recalls in his autobiography, *In the Ring and Out*, these relationships “led me to forswear colored women and to determine that my lot henceforth would be cast only with white women.”

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4 Johnson, 76.
Dating white women at a time that predated the Emmett Till slaying by nearly a half century exemplified the racial hostilities that swirled around Jack Johnson’s relationships with white women. In an era that witnessed lynching of black men for simply glancing at white women did little to steer Johnson away from his desires. Johnson never opted to play a secondary role to the white man, even if that meant contending for the affection of white women.

Jack Johnson’s first white wife was Hattie McLay, a New York Irish lady, who accompanied Johnson when he was on his chase after world heavyweight champion Tommy Burns, all throughout Europe and finally in Australia. McLay sat at ringside for Johnson’s match against then champion Burns. McLay was not a visible target for the media prior to the bout. However, she became tangible in the eyes of the media, as she was the best-dressed woman in attendance. This would become a theme with Johnson and the white women that accompanied Johnson to his fights, which was much to the disfavor of whites. The relationship ended in Chicago after a series of arguments in regards to McLay’s drinking habits.

As one relationship ended, another was budding. Belle Schreiber, a Milwaukee woman of German descent immediately drew the attention of Jack Johnson. They quickly became good friends then later dated. The couple would later break up in New York. Schreiber would become the ghost that would come back to haunt Johnson’s life and career in the years to come.

While in New York, Jack Johnson continued his theatrical engagements in which he dazzled the audience in vaudeville shows testing his strength, displaying his boxing training regiment, along with a little acting to go along with the ticket. It was during these times that he met Etta Duryea, a Brooklyn woman of French extraction. In 1909, Johnson and Duryea wed in Pittsburg, marking the third marriage for Johnson. The marriage was perceived to be blissful in

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public but in private, it was a different matter. After the death of Duryea’s father, to which she was extremely close, she committed suicide.⁶

The next white woman to enter Jack Johnson’s love life was Lucille Cameron, a college student from Minnesota attending school in Chicago. Johnson feeling the pressures of operating his business affairs employed Cameron as his business secretary. They would later become married.

In August 1925, in the twilight of Jack Johnson’s career, he married his fourth white wife, Irene Pineau. The couple stayed together until Johnson’s untimely death. In the time span between his budding career to his latest marriage, Johnson was romantically linked with the era’s most desired women, most of them white, including Moulin Rouge star Mistinguette, German spy Mata Hari, and sex symbols Lupe Velez and Mae West.⁷

* * *

FROM GLORIFIED STREET FIGHTS TO THE SWEET SCIENCE

Before rules were implemented in the sport of fisticuffs, the events were brutal and eerily similar to brawls found spilling onto the streets from neighboring pubs. The first widely implemented sanctions to the sport of fisticuffs had the fighter’s safety in mind, banning hitting under the waist and more importantly hitting your opponent when he is down. A list of twenty-nine rules regarded as London Prize Ring rules were drafted by Britain’s Jack Broughton in 1743. Broughton’s rules governed the conduct of the sport for over 100 years. London Prize Ring rules were later superseded by the Marquis of Queensbury rules in 1867. The twenty-four new rules codified by Britain’s John Chambers stood the test of time, as they remain the rules upon which modern-day boxing is based.

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⁶ Johnson, 78.
The Marquis of Queensbury rules were implemented to further address safety concerns of the boxers and in doing so gave the sport structure with the introduction of three-minute rounds and one-minute rests between rounds. The main change that the Marquis of Queensbury rules had implemented was the use of padded gloves, the London Prize Ring rules fought bare knuckle. Among other rule changes were the outlawing of wrestling and hugging. When boxers came together they had to box their way out of the clinched position or otherwise heed a warning from the referee who is at liberty to deduct a point. A ten-second limit was also administered to boxers who had been knocked down to get back on their feet; failure to stand on both feet within ten seconds would result in the end of the bout by way of knockout. The ten second count out was a far reduction to that of London Prize Ring rules which allowed the knocked down boxer thirty seconds to regain his senses. A tactic widely exploited to take additional time of rest or in many cases time to recover only to take further unnecessary damage.

The implementation of the Marquis of Queensbury rules has been heavily regarded as the evolution of boxing becoming a sport. Matches before the new set of rules were administered, in hindsight, became regarded as nothing more than glorified street fights. The Marquis of Queensbury rules transitioned the sport of fisticuffs known for its brawling and fighting into the sport of boxing, where adapting to your opponent’s style and tendencies gave the sport its adopted name, the sweet science.

* * *

STRONGEST MAN ALIVE

The late nineteenth century witnessed a changing of the guard in the realm of professional boxing. A sport in which white boxers held every championship title at every weight class was beginning to unravel as black boxers began their march into title contention and
ultimately titleholders. In 1895, Charles A. Dana, editor of the *New York Sun*, saw the growing trend and warned his readers that:

> We are in the midst of a growing menace. The black man is rapidly forging to the front ranks in athletics, especially in the field of fistacuffs. We are in the midst of a black rise against white supremacy. If the Negro is capable of developing such prowess in those [lighter] divisions of boxing, what is going to stop him from making the same progress in the heavyweight ranks?8

Dana’s comments were made the same year of Jack Johnson’s first professional bout. Dana’s views became a precursor to what would later come to pass in the early 20th century.

Possessing the world heavyweight championship belt bestowed the beholder not only the title of world champion but also the moniker, ‘Strongest Man Alive,’ made famous by the first champion, John L. Sullivan. In the sport of boxing, no weight class is more coveted or renowned by boxing aficionados than the heavyweight class. It was by this means that the first black world champion, George Dixon, being a bantamweight, did not create the fervor to that of the first black heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson. Johnson, however, had to swallow a larger pill than black champions before him simply due to the fact that Johnson was a heavyweight and therefore played on a grander stage.

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HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP CHRONOLOGY

John L. Sullivan is widely recognized as the first heavyweight champion of gloved boxing when Sullivan knocked out Paddy Ryan in Mississippi on February 7 1882 under the Marquis of Queensbury rules. Sullivan was also the last heavyweight champion of bare knuckle boxing.
boxing under the London Prize Ring rules when he defeated Jake Kilrain in Richburg Mississippi on July 8 1889, marking the last bare knuckle championship fight.\(^9\)

As heavyweight champion, John Sullivan set the precedent of establishing a color line when he declared in 1892, “I will not fight a Negro. I never have and never shall.”\(^10\) The act of Sullivan drawing the color line was followed suit by subsequent heavyweight champions. By eluding black boxers, white champions avoided the risk of the title switching hands to a black man. Sullivan’s statement at the time was essentially directed to the formidable black Australian heavyweight champion, Peter Jackson, who had vocalized challenges to the world title on many occasions, but to no avail.

That same year on September 7 1892 at the Olympic Club in New Orleans Louisiana, John Sullivan faced off against James J. Corbett. Both boxers brought to the squared circle undefeated records. Sullivan having won thirty-eight contests, while Corbett winning all thirteen of his own. Corbett in the twenty-first round knocked out Sullivan to obtain the world’s heavyweight championship.

James Corbett was not a busy champion. He had been absorbed by the celebrity culture and lifestyle attributed to being the ‘World’s Strongest Man.’ In the process Corbett developed a drinking problem to the point where promoters organized a vacant heavyweight championship to fill in for the inactive Corbett. After winning the title from John Sullivan, Corbett was inactive for nearly sixteen months before finally placing his title on the line. Corbett welcomed Charley Mitchell at the Duvall Athletic Club in Jacksonville Florida where Corbett promptly took care of

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business. In the third round, Corbett knocked Mitchell out cold with a picturesque right hand to the chin.

Over three years later after his successful title defense against Charley Mitchell, James Corbett, an Irish-American, defended his title again, this time against England’s Bob Fitzsimmons on Saint Patrick’s Day, March 17 1897 in Carson City Nevada. Wyatt Earp and four other men who were equipped with six-shooters accompanied Corbett to the ring. Even with the intimidating presence of Wyatt Earp backed with armed men; Corbett failed to deliver on his ancestors’ national holiday, having been knocked out in the fourteenth round.

Bob Fitzsimmons thus became the world’s third heavyweight champion and the first non-Irish-American champion. Fitzsimmons was also the sports first man to win world titles in three different weight classes. Fitzsimmons started his career as a middleweight, 160 lbs maximum, and on January 14 1891 won his first world title in that weight class. By defeating James Corbett, Fitzsimmons earned his second title in a separate weight class. Later in his career Fitzsimmons transitioned himself to the newly sanctioned light heavyweight division, finding it better suited for him as he was an undersized heavyweight having beaten Corbett weighing in at just 167 lbs to Corbett’s 184 lbs.

Bob Fitzsimmons first heavyweight title defense came on June 5 1899, when he squared off against powerful Jim Jeffries in Coney Island. Fitzsimmons lone heavyweight title defense was however a failed endeavor. Jeffries knocked out Fitzsimmons in the eleventh round to become the newly crowned heavyweight champion.

Jim Jeffries held the longest tenure as the world’s heavyweight champion at the time. He successfully defended his title seven times and was running out of possible challengers; having

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cleaned out the heavyweight division, there remained no more bankable names among white boxers. After knocking out Jack Munroe on August 26 1904, thereafter, there was no one who could lay the slightest claim to his title. Jeffries disposed of all legitimate competitors including past champions James Corbett and Bob Fitzsimmons twice apiece.

Jim Jeffries fought numerous black boxers before becoming champion, however, after winning the title from Bob Fitzsimmons on June 9 1899, Jeffries reversed field and followed suit with John L. Sullivan’s ideal to draw the color line. Jeffries like Sullivan before him, intended to protect the racial exclusivity of the heavyweight title stating, “When there are no white men left to fight, I will quit the business . . . . I am determined not to take a chance of losing the championship to a Negro.” The greatest threats to Jeffries’ title were three black boxers: Sam Langford, Joe Jeanette, and Jack Johnson.

On May 13 1905, Jeffries stood by his statement and announced his retirement from the sport of boxing to attend to his alfalfa farm in Burbank California. He left the squared circle having never lost a fight.

It was during Jim Jeffries’ title reign that Jack Johnson emerged onto the heavyweight scene. Johnson fought his way up the ladder of heavyweight contenders defeating prominent black boxers in order to obtain a name for him. After years of mixing it up with sub par competition, Johnson stepped up in competition to box for the Negro Heavyweight Championship, a title created through segregation and won by Johnson in 1903.

In Jim Jeffries’ vacancy of the title, the new heavyweight champion was to be decided by the winner of two white boxers, Marvin Hart and Jack Root, and was refereed by Jeffries himself. The bout took place on July 3 1905 in Reno Nevada. Hart captured the title defeating Root with a

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knock out body punch in the twelfth round. After capturing the title, an excited Hart proclaimed he would meet any man in the world in a fair fight, but quickly reiterated that the challenge did not apply to colored people.

Marvin Hart’s title reign was short lived and expired seven months later on his first title defense. On February 23 1906, Hart met French-Canadian Tommy Burns in Los Angeles California. Burns won the twenty-round bout decision to become the sixth heavyweight champion of the world.

Tommy Burns became the first heavyweight champion to lift the color line, allowing him to be matched against colored boxers with the championship on the line.

I will defend my title as heavyweight champion of the world against all comers, none barred. By this I mean black, Mexican, Indian or any other nationality without regard to color, size or nativity. I propose to be the champion of the world, not the white or the Canadian or the American or any other limited degree of champion14.

The door of opportunity had finally swung open for Jack Johnson. However, Tommy Burns’ aforementioned comments did not come to fruition until nearly three years after the fact. Burns had dodged boxing Johnson by entertaining thirteen title defenses to ten different opponents,15 before finally agreeing to stage a match with Johnson in Sydney Australia on December 26 1908. Promoter Hugh “Huge Deal” McIntosh who also made history by being the first promoter to referee a championship bout staged the match up.

Jack Johnson had defeated Tommy Burns in the fourteenth round when police jumped into the ring to prevent Johnson from knocking out Burns. The fight film also stopped recording the final moments of the bout to save the white race the embarrassment of being knocked down

14  Ward, 78-79.
by a member of the black race. Jack Johnson thus became the first black to ever hold the claim of heavyweight champion.
Chapter 3

WORLD’S FIRST BLACK HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

Following Jack Johnson’s victory over Tommy Burns, the tactics employed by Afro-American and mainstream newspapers offered a stark contrast in direction. Both conglomerate publications shared in their respective boxers triumph or demise. For Afro-American newspapers, Johnson’s victory symbolized a victory for the entire race, a topic in which Johnson tried best to steer clear. Tommy Burns on the other hand held no qualms on the race dynamic proposed in their battle, which was reflected by mainstream newspapers rebuttal to Johnson’s grasp on the world’s heavyweight championship. Mainstream newspapers countered by introducing a search for a white contender that could snatch the laurels of champion off the brows of Jack Johnson, an endeavor that became known as the search for the ‘Great White Hope.’

While many Afro-American newspapers celebrated with Jack Johnson, others celebrated at the expense of white Americans. They jeered Tommy Burns’ defeat, attributing his loss as a failure of the entire white race. The said articles had their minds made up that Burns’ defeat to Johnson established that blacks were superior to whites in the athletic realm, a transition of power they hoped would lead to a balanced social hierarchy. To support the argument, the New York Age brought to light the Zulu Tribe that once imposed their will in Africa. The article, “The Superiority of the Black,” explained that like the Zulu’s, the black’s closeness to nature aids in their quick responses between the senses connecting the brain to muscles as revealed in dodging attacks. Furthermore, the article contributes the footwork of the boxer to that of the easy grace and rhythmic perfection of the Zulu dancer. Then finally, concluding that black’s inherited strength and endurance, his ability to endure pain and punishment, his resource and ever presence
of mind, his confidence and courage, all combine to make the black man the physical superior of the white man.16

Following up the addressed notion of confidence and courage of the black race, the article was quick to point out Jack Johnson’s confident challenge that he would take on any challenger regardless of race. A challenge not withheld by former white champions, all of whom had drawn the color line outside of Tommy Burns. Drawing the color line was an act of discreet cowardice from the point of view of Afro-American newspapers, which called out the man who had set the precedent, by stating, “John L. Sullivan has cheated the race of the prize.”17

Through the lens of Afro-American newspapers, Jack Johnson not only captured the world’s heavyweight championship but also captured the mold of a premier African American role model. They applauded Johnson’s persistence and courage in chasing down Tommy Burns for the title, an example passed on to their reader base “that every other Negro should resolve to follow.” Then suggested to their race to follow Johnson’s steps to success, instructing, “Pursue your object to the end of the world, if necessary, in order to accomplish it.”18

Leading African American contemporaries, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. DuBois were held in higher esteem in regards to reforming and progressing race issues. Jack Johnson, however, had obtained a measure of success that was not only tangible but widely regarded and coveted by men all across the globe. There was not a tangible achievement that could be shown through the leadership of the aforementioned African American leaders that could make a dent in the social hierarchy than the belt worn around Johnson’s waist.

The impact of Jack Johnson’s victory was monumental and felt across the nation and not limited to black communities. Many white Americans were shocked that a black man could

17 IBID
possess the qualities to not only endure but come out victorious in such a contest. Anticipating the impact, it was shared and hoped upon by Afro-American newspapers that Johnson’s victory would pave the way for equality. Lester A. Walton, the lead sports writer for the New York Age spoke on the subject, contemplating, “Every time Johnson knocked down Burns a bunch of prejudice fell, and at the same time the white man’s respect for the Negro race went up a notch.”\(^\text{19}\) However, that was not to be the case. Although there were leading mainstream sports writers such as, William “Bat” Masterson and Thomas Aloysius Dorgan that found solace in that Johnson was at the very least, an American, opposed to Burns who was French-Canadian.\(^\text{20}\) Despite being an American champion, mainstream newspapers could not get over the fact that Johnson was black. They made it their agenda to counter respond to African American jubilations.

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**MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPERS RESPONSE TO JACK JOHNSON’S VICTORY**

The mainstream newspapers downgraded Jack Johnson’s victory, proposing that Tommy Burns merely inherited the heavyweight championship from a retired Jim Jeffries. Former champion turned sports journalist, James Corbett, expressed in his daily columns for the Chicago Tribune that, “we are going to have a black man for champion and not because he won the championship from Burns. He did not. Burns never was champion, even if James J. Jeffries gave the title to him.”\(^\text{21}\)

In truth, although Tommy Burns will never be mentioned within the same conversation with the upper echelon of champions in the annals of boxing history, he was nonetheless a heavyweight champion. For anyone, especially an ex-champion, to discredit the legitimacy of a

\[^{20}\] IBID
champion’s title reign is a slap in the face for the sport of pugilism. James Corbett’s statement was erroneous in that Jim Jeffries never gave the title to Burns. For the sake of argument, if Jeffries had given the title away, the recipient would have been Marvin Hart. Burns then defeated Hart to legitimize his claim as a true heavyweight champion. If Jack Johnson had defeated Hart to become champion, then and only then would Corbett’s insinuation of an interim champion become valid. However, Corbett branded Burns as an interim champion and expected his readers to extend their perception to view Johnson under the same light.

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JIM JEFFRIES REMAINS RETIRED

Mainstream newspapers response to Jack Johnson’s victory lacked a congratulatory tone. Rather than congratulating Johnson, a somber acknowledgment of Johnson’s victory was carried out amongst newspaper headlines. What dominated the print in newspaper editions the day after the fight was a frantic excavation for answers on how to solve the epidemic known as Jack Johnson. The quintessential question posed among leading sportswriters became, ‘Who will be Jack Johnson’s next opponent?’ Others were not so kind in their wording such as novelist Jack London who posed the question, “Who could wipe the smirk off Jack Johnson’s face?” The fighter on top of everyone’s list was none other than retired heavyweight champion Jim Jeffries.

Jim Jeffries had already placed himself on record as being determined never to reenter the ring, but it was the popular consensus of many sporting men including former champion turned sports journalist, John L. Sullivan, that Jeffries was the only heavyweight in the world capable of giving Jack Johnson a hard battle.22 When asked to entertain the thought of reentering the ring to take on Johnson, Jeffries adamantly reaffirmed his state of retirement. Despite Jeffries denial to white American’s wishes, his declination fell on deaf ears as pressure mounted as mainstream

newspapers attempted to coax their hero out of his alfalfa farm under the cozy heat of Burbank California.

Fueled by speculation from an article found two days prior to the Jack Johnson – Tommy Burns championship bout, the Chicago Tribune printed “Jeff will Fight if Johnson Wins,” in their December 24 1908 edition. “Jeff will Fight if Johnson Wins” was symbolic of a tabloid article fueled by yellow journalism in that deception and loose interpretation carried the article. Contrary to what Jim Jeffries had been quoted on numerous occasions that he would not reenter the ring, the article proclaimed that he would. In an interview conducted by the Tribune, the editors mismanaged Jeffries’ quotes and veiled under the guise of ambiguity created an issue that did not exist. When asked what he would do if Jack Johnson whipped Tommy Burns and then came around asking him for a fight, Jeffries replied, “If that coon comes around here and challenges me to fight him if he wins from Burns I’ll grab him by the neck and run him out.”23 When asked to explain what he meant by that Jeffries declared he is not willing to see the championship go to a Negro.24 Jeffries never proclaimed that he would reenter the ring, yet that did not stop the Tribune from printing their headline, “Jeff will Fight if Johnson Wins.” Further narrating the Tribune’s white lie, the article adds, “in the event of the championship of the world going to the negro big Jim will get on his fighting togs, begin hard training, and will enter the ring for the honor of the Caucasian race and his native land.”25 American Jack Johnson defeating French-Canadian Tommy Burns according to the Tribune somehow did not qualify bringing honor back to the United States, Johnson’s native land.

There were many more attempts at luring the retired champion to redeem the white race by defeating Jack Johnson. An article printed and shared by the three mainstream newspaper

23  “Jeff” will Fight if Johnson Wins,” Chicago Tribune, December 24 1908, 3.
24  IBID
25  IBID

The *Chicago Tribune* did a follow up on the reports of McIntosh’s $50,000 purse offer by getting a response from Jim Jeffries on the matter. In the December 28 1908 edition of the *Tribune*, “No Fight for Me,” had Jeffries declaring that he had not heard of McIntosh’s $50,000 offer for him to fight Jack Johnson. Jeffries stood adamantly behind his retired status declaring that he would not fight even if offered $100,000, adding, “No amount of money will tempt me to fight with Johnson or anybody else.”

Upon nagging inquires regarding his prospective future in the ring to take on Jack Johnson, an annoyed and clearly enraged Jim Jeffries announced to the public in a statement addressed to all leading newspapers:

> I have stated and repeated five thousand times within the last ten days that I will not reenter the ring for any inducement. I am not going to fight Johnson or any other negro or any white man, big or little. When I retired, I retired… I am through with the fighting game for all time, and I would like to tell the public that there is not one chance in a million of my ever re-entering the ring.”

It was becoming clear that Jeffries was not making a come back to redeem the white race and take on Johnson. Mainstream newspapers never gave up on the notion, but shifted their focus to find a solution to the Jack Johnson problem.

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LIST OF WHITE HOPES

Although Jim Jeffries remained the public’s primary choice to box Jack Johnson, other options were explored in the case Jeffries would not come out of retirement. The pickings were slim as most shared the opinion of James Corbett, after Johnson manhandled Tommy Burns:

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26  “‘No Fight for Me,’ says ‘Jeff,’” *Chicago Tribune*, December 28 1908, 8.
“Who can beat Johnson?” Corbett’s conclusion was simple, “There’s no one in plain sight.”

Yet, the balance of pugilistic superiority was at stake and Corbett named an opponent that he felt could pose problems for Johnson. Corbett was not completely sold on his pick, “I am trying to figure out who we have good enough to get this championship, but outside of Al Kaufman I can’t see any one, and he will have to get much better to have a good lookin [sic] with Johnson. But he is young and might come through all right.”

The fact that Corbett addressed his pick by responding, “I am trying to figure out who we (emphasis added) have good enough to get this championship…” reaffirms the issue of race that was taking a life of its own.

Other contenders, some new some rehashed, that could fill into the shoes of the great white hope according to the Washington Post were former champions Bob Fitzsimmons and Marvin Hart, Tom Sharkey, and current middleweight champion Stanley Ketchel.

Bob Fitzsimmons was quoted as saying from his home in England that he would make a match with Jack Johnson. However, Fitzsimmons assertion was not taken seriously among boxing circles. He had two things going against him. First, Fitzsimmons’ was forty-five years old. Second, Fitzsimmons and Johnson had met in a one sided contest a year earlier. The match-up was still fresh in the minds of the boxing community that witnessed Johnson knocking out Fitzsimmons in the second round.

Marvin Hart, who once got a questionable decision over Jack Johnson in a twenty-round bout, stated his desire to meet Johnson again and that after his battle with Mike Schreck on New Year’s Eve he would issue a formal challenge. Although Hart carried a victory over Johnson, it was the opinion of many that the referee had raised the wrong hand in excitement and felt too

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29 IBID
embarrassed to rescind his decision.\textsuperscript{30} Hart was not high on anyone’s list seeing that he lost the championship to Tommy Burns, and that Johnson completely manhandled the French-Canadian.

Tom Sharkey, who predicted Jack Johnson’s success, was quoted that he would challenge Johnson to a finish fight. Once again similar to challengers before him, Sharkey’s chances were taken with a shrug by boxing circles, as Sharkey’s career never displayed signs of brilliance.

A ‘hail Mary’ thrown in desperation from mainstream newspapers was asking Stanley Ketchel, the middleweight champion of the world, his thoughts of taking on the challenge of stepping up in weight to take on Jack Johnson. Ketchel stated that if his manager consents he would agree to box Johnson some time next year.\textsuperscript{31} Ketchel would be a skilled adversary against Johnson, but due to his limited size and weight, being nearly four inches shorter and over fifty lbs lighter, the outcome looked gloom considering Tommy Burns possessed a similar body frame.

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GENTLEMAN’S AGREEMENT AGAINST JACK JOHNSON

In the meantime, as finding an opponent for Jack Johnson was in the works, another sort of arrangement was being conducted behind closed doors against Johnson. Immediately after the championship match pitting Johnson versus Tommy Burns, there were talks regarding a gentleman’s agreement among white boxers and promoters against Johnson. The \textit{Chicago Tribune} wrote:

\begin{quote}
What appears to be a combination against Jack Johnson has been entered into by fighters and promoters in this section with the object of refusing a match to Johnson until he returns to America, and then keeping him on the waiting list until he allows a white man to dictate terms.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} Johnson, 50.
\textsuperscript{32} “Talk of Combine against Johnson,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, December 26 1908, 6.
The combine against Johnson went against conventional entitlements given to the champion. The champion is customarily given the rights to dictate how the purse is to be split, usually receiving the lion’s share. Other trivial matters that the champion’s input is taken into consideration is the size of the ring, weight of gloves, entering the ring last, and choosing which corner to rest between rounds.

“Promoters, managers, and fighters feel this way,” declared a friend of Billy Delaney, the promoter and manager for heavyweight contender Al Kaufmann. “If we go ahead and attempt to make matches now with Johnson, he will want most of the money and we would get little. By keeping him waiting, refusing to fight him in any place but America, we can bring him to terms, and Johnson’s most eligible opponent will be able to get his share of the purse.”

In a fervor, the boxing community and fans were increasing their efforts to defeat Jack Johnson in any manner possible.

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AFRO-AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS FIRE BACK

Afro-American newspapers response to the list of candidates mainstream newspapers have come up with was taken as comic relief. The Afro-American press essentially laughed off the chances of the white contenders as much as they laughed off mainstream newspapers efforts to promote such a list. The Baltimore Afro American Ledger stated, “Just because Jack Johnson went over to Australia and knocked Tommy Burns into a cocked hat, we have been hearing all sorts of rumors as to what the big fellows are going to do with Johnson.”

It became a foregone conclusion to the Afro-American press that if Jim Jeffries’ permanent state of retirement was to be believed, there would be no one in the foreseeable future that white Americans could hoist as

33  IBID
34  “‘Jack’ Johnson,” Baltimore Afro-American Ledger, January 9 1909, 2.
their avenger. “The best they can do is resurrect a bunch of “has beens,”” commented the *New York Age* on the list of white hopes.

A popular opinion shared by boxing experts alike, but ignored by mainstream newspapers was that the only boxer that could extend Jack Johnson to the end was another African American boxer, Sam Langford. However, it was framed the ‘Great White Hope,’ and in the segregated world, black need not apply. The likes of black heavyweights such as Langford were forced to watch from the sidelines even though another black boxer held the title. Jack Johnson, through the gentleman’s agreement held by promoters and others in power, essentially forced Johnson to draw the color line against blacks. Afro-American newspapers understood the game that was being played and resigned, “They cannot abide a Negro being the heavyweight champion of the world.”

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**YELLOW STREAK**

Before the Tommy Burns – Jack Johnson fight took place, Burns and the mainstream media blasted on Johnson’s supposed yellow streak, an idiom referenced towards those who were adept at harboring cowardice. Burns harped to mainstream newspapers that, “Johnson is just another lemon, and I will make him show his yellow streak in short order. He’s never licked anybody, and is a four-flusher. A few stiff punches in the stomach will make him double up and quit.” It was a common notion that black boxers and for that matter, blacks in general, all harbored an innate yellow streak. It was also common perception that a black boxer’s weakness was the inability to withstand punches to the stomach, hence Burns’ comments referring to “A

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36  “‘Jack’ Johnson,” *Baltimore Afro-American Ledger*, January 9 1909, 2
37  “Said Negro was Fourflusher,” *Washington Post*, December 26 1908, 8.
few stiff punches in the stomach will make him double up and quit.” Even before the result of the match, deciphering which boxer had a yellow streak should have been apparent.

Jack Johnson as a black boxer equated to possessing a yellow streak. Tommy Burns was a white boxer, which meant a yellow streak could not have been present. To mainstream newspapers and their audience, the matter of who had the yellow streak was that overly simplistic. However, if one examined events prior to the match, the verdict of who was ‘yellow’ would overwhelmingly point to Tommy Burns. After all, Burns dodged Johnson for nearly three years. In those three years, Burns had entertained thirteen title defenses to ten different opponents. Two of Burns’ title defenses were against boxers that had not won a single fight. Another title defense was against a man who had the experience of a single sanctioned fight. Burns hand selected his opponents with the discretion of fighting opponents that would pose little danger to his championship.

Tommy Burns also fought Bill Squire on three separate occasions. Squire proved to be an easy test for Burns who knocked out his inferior adversary on all three occasions. The public was getting restless with Burns’ unwillingness to step up to higher caliber opponents. It became apparent that Jack Johnson was not only the number one contender, but also the only contender that interested boxing fans who mostly faded away with Jim Jeffries’ retirement. Thus, the public started voicing their displeasure against Burns refusal to meet Johnson. Even King Edward of England, disgusted by Burns cowardice called Burns a “Yankee Bluffer.”

Tommy Burns did almost everything he could to avoid Jack Johnson. He answered to his critics that it would take a guaranteed $30,000 purse for him to meet Johnson. At the time Burns’ financial demands were so outrageous that they virtually removed every possible promoter to take a financial risk in staging the contest. Burns’ stipulations in the ring were on par with his

38 Johnson, 52.
ludicrous financial demands that Johnson recalled, “whenever he did show a willingness to meet me, it was under terms which denied me any possible advantage.”

Afro-American newspapers were perplexed why mainstream newspapers were spinning the much-mooted yellow streak question. They pondered possible reasons, then countered, “The majority of white writers said yes, regardless of whether they thought it,” and continued that the yellow streak “is generally attributed to all colored fighters until they prove otherwise in decisive fashion.” It was their hope that Jack Johnson had derailed all talks of having a yellow streak by giving Tommy Burns such a beating that it “took all the police in Australia who could be hastily summoned to the ringside to pull him off his white adversary before a tragedy was committed.” Johnson’s performance quelled yellow streak inquiries for the time being, but the stigma of possessing a yellow streak would never be put to rest by mainstream newspapers.

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JEFFRIES LURED BACK INTO THE RING

Jack Johnson’s victory over Tommy Burns to capture the world’s heavyweight title distressed and disturbed white Americans. In the years to come, vindication of the race would have to come in the form of any white man who weighed more than 175 lbs. that could fit in the shoes of the ‘white hope.’ Many white men entered boxing tournaments that were conducted to produce the next challenger for Johnson. The prospective men were many and willing, if not necessarily able. Johnson would have his way against these competitors, defeating white hope after another. White Americans increasingly turned their hopeful eyes to Jim Jeffries.

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39 Johnson, 155.
41 IBID
42 IBID
A relentless campaign by the mainstream press to convince Jim Jeffries to come out of retirement and reclaim the world’s heavyweight championship never ceased. Eventually, Jeffries relented to the immense public pressure as well as the lure of the $101,000 purse that was to be divided seventy-five percent for the winner’s share, while the remaining twenty-five percent went to the defeated.\textsuperscript{43}

The efforts of Jim Jeffries would not have been necessary had a ‘white hope’ succeeded. Six different ‘white hopes’ had tried and all six had failed.\textsuperscript{44} White American’s disdain for Jack Johnson was approaching its boiling point. Not only had Jack Johnson become the most famous black man in the world, his celebrity status arguably surpassed any man, regardless of color, as the most recognizable person in the world. Johnson kept busy and stayed in the news to the disfavor of white Americans. He was the nightmare that could not be eradicated from one’s dreams. Many Americans placed their trust in Jeffries to act as their antidote for their sleepless nights.

\textsuperscript{44} According to Boxrec.com four of the six ‘white hopes’ were for the belt. In the order Jack Johnson had defeated his opponents: Philadelphia Jack O’Brien, Tony Ross, Al Kaufmann, and Stanley Ketchel. The other two matches were regarded as exhibition matches. In those matches Jack Johnson defeated Victor McLaglen and Frank Moran.
Chapter 4

MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPERS FIGHT JIM JEFFRIES’ BATTLES

The battle between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries was set for Independence Day 1910 staged in Reno Nevada. Mainstream newspapers shared a similar theme in depicting each boxer. For Jack Johnson the mainstream media chose to continue to press the stereotype that all Negro boxers harbor an innate ‘yellow streak,’ concluding that Johnson was no different. Johnson’s dismantling of Tommy Burns to capture the championship laurels did little to dissolve the theory. Neither did Johnson’s demolition of white hope after white hope conjure any evidence to dispel the stereotype. Instead, mainstream newspapers to straighten the argument spun it.

Tommy Burns insisted that Jim Jeffries would win and that the Negro boxer would show his cowardice stating that Jack Johnson only fought the little guys. Jeffries would be a large step-up in competition for Johnson in terms of physical size, as Johnson who weighed a little over 200 lbs was paired to fight smaller men after obtaining the title from Burns. Most notably against Philadelphia Jack O’Brien, who weighed in at 162 ½ lbs, and middleweight champion Stanley Ketchel who weighed in at 170 ¼ lbs.45

In comparison, the official records showed that Jim Jeffries was larger than Jack Johnson in every aspect of the body with the exception of wrist and forearms. The vital boxing measurements listed that Jeffries stood 6 feet 1 1-4 inches, weighing in officially at 218 lbs with a reach of 75 inches. Johnson was listed at 6 feet 1-4 inches, weighing in officially at 209 lb, with a reach of 72 inches.46

The mainstream newspapers sold to their audience that Jack Johnson was a coward from the beginning and that he always had a ‘yellow streak.’ They brought up examples from Johnson’s past that illustrated their accusations. Two examples from Johnson’s career that have made the rounds to become common knowledge among Americans, were Johnson’s refusal to answer the bell early in his career and the other was a refusal to accept Jim Jeffries proposition to fight in a locked cellar when Jeffries was still champion.

The first example occurred early in Jack Johnson’s career in which many sources have deemed as Johnson’s first credited bout. Johnson squared off against another African American boxer that went by the singular name, Klondike. In the fifth round, Johnson gave up and quitted in the middle of the fight, refusing to answer the bell that signified the start of the sixth round. The incident branded Johnson as having a ‘yellow streak’ ever since.

The second example occurred during Jim Jeffries title reign. Jack Johnson became the Negro Heavyweight Champion in 1903; however, Johnson was not content and sought out to confront Jeffries to coax the champion into defending his world title. Johnson made his way to a San Francisco saloon owned and operated by Jeffries and issued a challenge. Jeffries dismissed Johnson’s challenge, explaining, “I won’t meet you in the ring because you’ve got no name and we won’t draw flies.” Taking exception to Johnson’s challenge, Jeffries issued a challenge of his own, “I’ll go downstairs to the cellar with you and lock the door from the inside. And the one who comes out with the key will be champ.” When Johnson expressed doubt about Jeffries’ sincerity, Jeffries assured him that he was serious and that he was prepared to fight him.

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48 IBID
immediately. Johnson, undoubtedly embarrassed, frustrated, and unprepared for such an offer reportedly turned and walked away.\(^{49}\)

Every incident has more than one side to the story. However, Jack Johnson being yellow was the story most accepted and engrained in the public’s consciousness. What would later come out and become printed, acting as a retraction of sorts, was an article dispelling the yellow streak exhibited in the Klondike fight in which Johnson quit. Inside information stated, “When Johnson entered the ring he was nearly starved and in the fifth round he became so weakened from his previous lack of food that he could no longer continue and quit.”\(^{50}\) Johnson was brought in as a replacement for a boxer that dropped out at the last minute. Although the *Chicago Tribune* attempted to right the yellow streak’s wrongs, the article in which the *Tribune* had printed, “Champion Coward in Youth,” did more to add to the yellow streak than help resolve it.

The *Chicago Tribune* article attacked Jack Johnson’s lack of discipline in sticking to an occupation. Listed were numerous jobs in which Johnson had been previously employed. No job was to Johnson’s liking except what became his profession, pugilism. The article also harped upon Johnson’s lack of courage as a youth, possibly hinting that Johnson was yellow all along, strengthening the shared belief that all blacks were innately yellow. No mention was granted by mainstream newspapers to dispel the proposed yellow streak exhibited by Jack Johnson in refusing to accept Jim Jeffries offer to fight in the cellar. A similar challenge was offered to Johnson by Tommy Burns before the two finalized their contracts.

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DEFENDING JACK JOHNSON

\(^{49}\) IBID

\(^{50}\) “Champion Coward in Youth,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 3 1910, Sporting Section, 3.
Afro-American newspapers came to Jack Johnson’s aid, and delved into the challenge, asking, ‘How would accepting a cellar match benefit Jack Johnson?’ Their answer was simple it could not. In fact, it would be detrimental to Johnson’s success in the realm of boxing. Neither Johnson nor any other contender could gain anything by outing his skills to a champion. What can be won from beating the champion in a street fight? Afro-American newspapers agreed, certainly not the world’s heavyweight title. If Johnson crushes Jim Jeffries, it would be unlikely that the champion would agree to put his title on the line against Johnson, already having experienced the outcome. There would be little to no chance of a title shot.

Jackson J. Stovall, sportswriter for the Afro-American newspaper Chicago Defender, brought a prime example of outing your skills to light. In Stovall’s article, “Jack Johnson and James Jeffries,” found on the cover page of the Defender’s July 2 1910 edition, Stovall questions, “Why was Peter Jackson never world’s champion?” 51

The black Australian heavyweight, Peter Jackson, in the zenith of his career was conceded by leading scribes in pugilism as the greatest combination of boxer and fighter that the world had ever known. He defeated Frank Slavin in London on May 30 1892 for the heavyweight championship of England and Australia (British Commonwealth). Jackson’s brilliant victories throughout his eventful career put him in a class by himself. Backed by his European friends he challenged John L. Sullivan to do battle for the world’s championship, but was turned down with mock defiance by the champion who would in all probability have fell victim to his prowess. 52

What separated Peter Jackson and Jack Johnson was their margin of victory. Jackson, as a black man in predominantly white sport, felt compelled to prove himself in every fight and had the mindset to cripple his opponents. Johnson, on the other hand, never truly extended himself.

52 IBID
He would play with his opponents and steer away from danger with his exceptional cleverness, great speed, and almost impenetrable defense, enabling him to wage battle the full limit of scheduled rounds winning by a narrow margin. It was Stovall’s argument that Johnson’s closely fought battles led him to square off in a title fight, whereas quick victories over his opponents, ala Peter Jackson, would have put Johnson’s future interests in jeopardy. Stovall contended that Johnson was cognizant that his color would be a barrier to him in reaching the coveted goal of his ambition if he performed too brilliantly. Hence, the public was misled as to his real form. By showing his real form, Jackson, in comparison, robbed himself of the opportunity to become the champion of the world.

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ATTACKING JOHNSON’S CHANCE OF VICTORY

Considerable dependence was placed upon Jack Johnson’s alleged lack of gameness by the aforementioned events in Johnson’s career. The Washington Post reported to their readers that Johnson will “wilt when he see Jeffries in the ring, and will lose his nerve when Jeffries lands one good blow.” To further add to the theory of Johnson’s yellow streak, the Post contributed another reason to further question Johnson’s courage. In the July 3 1910 edition of the Post, in an article entitled, “How Far Jeff Can Go yet Unanswered Query,” the article brought up Johnson’s reluctance to fight a certain boxer, Sam Langford: “(Johnson’s) most marked evidence of apparent lack of courage has been the way in which he has side-stepped Sam Langford, for whose game he seems to have no great liking.” The said statement was erroneous. The fact of the matter was that Johnson and Langford clashed on April 26 1906, with Johnson winning a fifteen

53 IBID
54 IBID
round decision in a match that Johnson sent Langford down to the canvas in the sixth round. It was this fictitious journalism used to further advance the mainstream newspaper’s agenda against Johnson.

Former World Heavyweight Champion, James Corbett, a hired journalist for the Chicago Tribune, spoke loudly and adamantly about Jack Johnson’s chances, or lack thereof, to the Tribune’s audience as well as anyone in Reno who would lend an ear. The Washington Post printed one such comment made by Corbett, in an article entitled “How James J. Jeffries and ‘Jack’ Johnson Came to be Matched,” printed on the July 3 1910 edition of the Post. Corbett was quoted, “I don’t believe Johnson is game. I never saw a colored fighter who could stand up under real punishment.” The racist message was very ignorant on Corbett’s behalf, considering that the lone black boxer that Corbett faced in his career, an aging Peter Jackson, withstood a sixty-one round draw with Corbett, who would later become champion. The fight was called a draw after it was clear both fighters had exasperated all of their energy in what was a four-hour marathon.

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THE COMEBACK POSTER CHILD

The Afro-American newspapers stated it best when suggesting that mainstream newspapers “nobly fought Jeffries’ battles before the fight.” Mainstream newspapers made it their prerogative to dispel rumors that an athlete cannot make a comeback. History has taught that

59 W.M. Pickens, “Talladega College Professor Speaks on Reno Fight,” Chicago Defender, July 30 1910, Cover Page.
boxers attempting a comeback have overwhelmingly failed. Yet, mainstream media depicted Jim Jeffries as the comeback poster child.

Five years of inactivity from the ring left Jim Jeffries out of shape and approaching nearly 300 lbs in weight. The *New York Times* rest assured their reader base that Jeffries had come full circle in his training, convincing the public that “For a year and a half Jeffries has been working to get into condition for this final battle of his career.” The same article observed that through his training, Jeffries “has developed stronger punches” than he had at any point in his career. The *Times* also reported on Jack Johnson’s level of fitness and approved that he was in fine condition. However, in comparing the boxers, the edge was given to Jeffries as the *Times* believed Jeffries had peaked and maxed out his ultimate potential, a potential valued much higher than Johnson’s. How Jeffries came to reach his full potential was credited to the help of his camp in which the *Times* stated had “the best sparring partners in the country,” and with that advantage, Jeffries “had training along these lines that could not have been improved.”

Jim Jeffries’ training led to substantial weight loss, trimming what was nearly 300 lbs, Jeffries would enter the ring officially at 218 lbs. In regards to weight loss and building an impressive physique, Jeffries’ training would be a resounding success. However, the *New York Times* statement that Jeffries had “the best sparring partners in the country,” was misleading the public. One cannot question the experience behind the sparring partners that Jeffries hand selected. The team consisted of former champion James Corbett, filling double duty as contributing correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, Joe Choynski, Sam Berger, and African American boxer Bob Armstrong. They were professional boxers and together they compiled an impressive 87-35-15 record (wins, losses, and draws) that translated to equally impressive

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61 IBID
Jim Jeffries conducted most of his work with James Corbett, who had won the title nearly eighteen years ago and lost it more than thirteen years back. Joe Choynski was a contemporary with Corbett, while Bob Armstrong’s last match was nearly six years ago. The youngest of the sparring partners, Sam Berger, never made a dent in the heavyweight picture and was defeated handily by Al Kaufman, a legitimate heavyweight contender and presently the chief sparring partner for Jack Johnson. It must also be noted that Jeffries earlier in his career had defeated Armstrong, Corbett twice, and fought to a draw with Choynski. Through it all Jeffries contended, “If I lived to be a thousand years old I could not be trained better than I am now.”

Science was inserted into the debate of who would come out on top, Jack Johnson or Jim Jeffries. Novelist Rex E. Beach in an article written for the Chicago Tribune, predicted a Jeffries’ victory. Beach delivered his prediction for Jeffries based on science and the elasticity of Jeffries’ veins. Beach was adamant to the notion that age showed itself first in the hardening of the walls of veins and arteries. He then stated, “once they have lost their elasticity, a man is old be his years few or many.” Beach then confirmed that his medical informant had examined Jeffries and concluded that Jeffries retained artery expansion he had in former years, offsetting any advantage Johnson’s three-year age difference may have had. That according to Beach was enough to cast his vote of confidence to Jeffries, while scientifically backing up the mainstream newspaper’s portrayal of Jeffries as the comeback poster child.

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66 IBID
COMPARING WORK ETHICS OF BOTH BOXERS

Mainstream newspapers compared the work ethics of both boxers. Having already shed light on Jim Jeffries tenacious preparations, they discussed what they believed were Jack Johnson’s careless mannerisms leading up to the fight. What was printed for Jeffries was the opposite for Johnson. Johnson was framed as having a poor work ethic. In addition to his training, Johnson posed for pictures and displayed public exhibitions for fans and the press. On the other hand, Jeffries’ training was secluded from those who did not entertain within Jeffries’ private circle. Johnson was all smiles and never resisted to be photographed and to chat with those in attendance at his camp. This prompted George W. Lederer, a Broadway writer and producer, writing as a special correspondent to the *Chicago Tribune*, to point out the difference between the boxers. Johnson’s theatrics at his camp led Lederer to peg Johnson as, “Happy go lucky, carefree, reveling in what is today and with little heed of what may be tomorrow.” Lederer contended that Jeffries’ demeanor and approach adamantly clarified that “(Jeffries) is in Reno to train for a fight, not to give sparring exhibitions.” Lederer adds that it would be hard pressed to find anybody that trained as hard as Jeffries. Lederer alludes that Johnson’s carefree attitude is a charade, concluding that although Johnson smiles and greets the press showing no signs of fear, Lederer reiterates that “the coming fight can never be won by any laughing man.”

James Corbett concurred with George Lederer’s conclusion, adding that the large crowd would distract Jack Johnson. Corbett believed that Johnson’s “innate conceit and vanity will cause him to strive for the theatrical, to pose for the crowd and the pictures, whereas Jeffries will

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68 IBID
69 IBID
70 IBID
go about his work in a businesslike manner.”

Johnson’s perceived ignorance, Corbett concluded, would be his ultimate downfall.

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JIM JEFFRIES PHYSIQUE

The status of Jim Jeffries training regiment was laid to rest by Jeffries’ own statement, “If I lived to be a thousand years old I could not be trained better than I am now.” Mainstream newspapers now turned their attention to solidify Jeffries’ declaration by printing reactions of those who bared witness to Jeffries newfound physique. A physique that became more formidable than the Jeffries of old.

Jim Jeffries had transformed his body from a pudgy farmer to a rock hard physique resembling a Greek God chiseled out of marble. Everyday mainstream newspapers praised Jeffries’ physical appearance, printing various pictures of Jeffries to drive the point home. Interviews were conducted from sporting men whose opinions were valued. When asked about his thoughts of the upcoming match, Abe Attell, the bantamweight champion of the world, delivered his prediction along with the sole basis behind his vote of confidence. Attell was simply taken back at Jeffries’ physique. Attell stated that he had been misled by pre-training pictures of the former champion and before seeing Jeffries had thought Johnson to be a two to one favorite.

“Now I think there is nothing to it except Jeffries,” declared Attell. Tommy Burns, from whom Jack Johnson took the championship, concurred with Attell’s astonishment at Jeffries’ appearance. “Take it from me. Johnson has not got a chance.” Attell had changed his mind in

73 IBID
74 IBID
identical fashion to the Chicago Tribune’s comic protagonist, Sambo Remo Rastus Brown, upon viewing Jeffries’ physique.

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SAMBO COMIC

An element the Chicago Tribune incorporated into their coverage of the prizefight that was not implemented by either the New York Times or the Washington Post was a cartoon. The cartoon was a blatantly offensive caricature of blacks in classic ‘sambo’ style published daily until the day after the bout. The series followed protagonist, Sambo Remo Rastus Brown, in his travels to Reno Nevada to visit the camps of both Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries, where he would ultimately view the bout in his ringside seat. Each title of the comic carried a whimsical tone in its six picture block slide.

The opening comic of the series, “Sambo Remo Rastus Brown – He Meets Jack in Reno Town,” printed July 1 1910, displayed Brown arriving in Reno and was greeted by Jack Johnson. The following day’s comic, July 2 1910, was entitled, “Sambo Remo Rastus Brown – Jack Takes Him in Reno Town,” found Brown engaged in a sparring session with the champion. At the onset of the match, Brown was caught off guard never having agreed to spar. Brown was met with two punches to his face, compliments of Johnson. Brown, infuriated, threw a punch of his own which not only connected but knocked Johnson off his feet and onto the ground. The comic’s point of contention was to point out Johnson’s suspect chin. When hit squarely, Johnson’s track record indicated that he would be knocked down. To add insult to the theory, Johnson met the canvas from a punch from a civilian.

The July 3 1910 editions comic for the Tribune was entitled, “Sambo Remo Rastus Brown – He Bets on Jack in Reno Town.” Brown encountered a white man taking bets on Jim Jeffries and bet him $30 to the man’s $50. Brown dismissed the man feeling sorry for what he
believed was the man’s loss. Convinced that Jack Johnson would deliver a beating to Jeffries, Brown strolled into the next comic block where he met eye to eye with the challenger, Jeffries. Brown was shocked by the physical stature of Jeffries and instantly felt apologetic towards Johnson for he feared Jeffries would deliver Johnson a whipping. Brown in stereotypical sambo tone resigned his thoughts, “Po’ Jack.”

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TESTAMENT TO JEFFRIES STRENGTH

James Corbett dedicated an article to the testament of Jim Jeffries’ strength and physical appearance that had captured the press’ attention, entitled, “Nervous Feeling Hits Jeff’s Camp,” printed on the July 2 1910 edition of the Chicago Tribune. Corbett recounted a firsthand account of Jeffries’ strength, “(Jeffries) had me in a rib crushing embrace. There is no telling exactly how strong Jeffries is. While he was just playing with me those arms of his crushed me like the folds of a boa constrictor.”

Corbett continued to impress upon the nature of Jeffries’ strength by sharing information obtained through personal contacts who shared his opinion.

Collaborated opinions of persons that have visited Jim Jeffries’ camp marveled at Jeffries’ physique. James Corbett further illustrated that men whose opinion carried weight, such as Jake Kilrain, John L. Sullivan, Tommy Burns, Billy Muldoon, Mike Murphy, and Sam Langford have all concurred.

Corbett reiterated his prediction that Jeffries would be victorious over Jack Johnson citing the reasoning behind his judgment. Corbett explained that experts have agreed that if Jeffries could reach only half of his abilities and conditioning he possessed before

75 “Sambo Remo Rastus Brown – He Bets on Jack in Reno Town,” Chicago Tribune, July 3 1910, Sporting Section, 1.
77 IBID
his retirement that Jeffries would win hands down. Corbett’s vote of confidence transferred over to the gambling table. In a strategically placed Associated Press article published directly underneath Corbett’s article in the Chicago Tribune, regarded the bet placed by Corbett. The title of the article explained its premise, “Corbett Bets $5,000 on Jeff.”

John L. Sullivan had visited Jim Jeffries’ camp on July 1st three days before the showdown. He reported to his readers of a playful test of strength between Jeffries and Frank Gotch, the current world’s heavyweight wrestling champion. Sullivan described that the two men tangled together on the lawn pulling and tugging with each other on the inquiry of Jeffries’ corner man Farmer John. Farmer John suggested to Gotch to see how strong Jeffries was, “Let him pull you around Jim. I want to see if you can do the same with him that you do with me.” When they were finished with their demonstration, Gotch concluded that Jeffries was stronger in one respect at least then he ever was. Information had soon passed to media-likes of the event who were covering the bout in Reno. The framing of the tussle between Jeffries and Gotch helped Jeffries’ backers by giving them a small psychological victory.

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CLINCHED POSITION ADVANTAGE

Although wrestling was banned from pugilism through the onset of the Marquis of Queensbury rules implementation, an aspect of wrestling still played a major role within boxing, the clinch. The clinched position occurs when both boxers meet at close quarters. Their bodies resting on each other either holding on for self-perseveration or attempting one of three offensive options: First, a boxer can tie up his opponent’s arm with one hand while unloading shots with his

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own free hand. This method becomes very advantageous if both boxers use the same primary hand, such as both being right-handed, because if a boxer grabs and restrains his opponent’s right arm with his own left arm, it will disable his opponent’s stronger arm, while the aggressor still has his primary arm free to inflict damage. The passive boxer is then left in an uncompromising position to defend or strike with his secondary hand.

The second option once engaged in the clinched position is to ‘hang’ your body weight on the opponents while pushing him backwards, creating stress on the opponent’s lower back and legs, resulting in quicker fatigue and limited mobility in later rounds. The last option a boxer can resort to in a clinched position is similar to the second option. However, instead of simply driving the opponent backwards, the boxer will push his opponent and navigate him to a corner of the ring. Then break from the clinched position leaving the aggressor in the most dominating position inside the boxing ring, having his opponent trapped in the corner.

There are many aspects to the sport of boxing, but having the advantage at the clinch position can be the determining factor to push one boxer over the other if they are viewed as equal in skill set. Many believed Jim Jeffries already possessed a greater skill set over Jack Johnson. John L. Sullivan’s article covering the wrestling incident carried a positive tone with Jeffries’ supporters and became the tipping point needed to affirmatively confirm their vote of confidence to Jeffries.

* * *

ANALYZING STYLE DIFFERENCES

Mainstream newspapers had so far tackled issues questioning the conditioning and training of Jim Jeffries and tried their best to put the public’s doubt to rest. They then brought to light Jack Johnson’s cowardice yellow streak. Their attention now turned to analyzing the fight and to answer how Jeffries would be able to walk out of the ring with the world’s heavyweight
championship in hand. Two avenues predicated mainstream newspaper’s analysis of the bout. The first was dissecting the stylistic differences between the fighters. Secondly, mainstream newspapers compared mutual opponents that had fought both Jackson and Jeffries.

Joe S. Jackson, a prominent sports writer, critiqued in his article “How Far Jeff can go yet Unanswered Query,” printed in the July 3 1910 edition of the Washington Post, that Jack Johnson’s defensive style could not handle such a large man such as Jim Jeffries.82 To Jackson, it was simply a stylistic clash for Jack Johnson, because Johnson as a natural counter puncher prefers to be set before firing off shots of his own. Jeffries’ style of rushing in will not afford Johnson the luxury of being set, which Jackson argued would take Johnson out of his zone of comfort. Jackson brought forth two contests pitting Jeffries against James Corbett to aid his argument. Corbett was the first boxer to adopt the defensive posture, a style emulated by Johnson. Jeffries handedly beat Corbett in both of their matches, leaving Jackson to give his vote of confidence to Jeffries.

Novelist Rex E. Beach, acting as a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, shared his assessment on the stylistic differences between the two boxers. In the afternoon of July 1 1910, Beach arrived at the camp of Jack Johnson and sought differences between Johnson and Jim Jeffries. Beach observed Johnson to be a defensive tactician quoting, “(Johnson) is fast, marvelously fast. He has a straight left that taxes the eye to follow.”83 However, Beach concluded that all the quickness and agility that Johnson possessed was not used to stimulate his offense, but rather for self-protection. Therein laid the greatest difference between the men, “Jeffries would take a blow to his own if by doing so he could land. Not so Johnson.”84 The statement is

83 Rex E. Beach, “Reno Now Center of the Universe,” Chicago Tribune, July 2 1910, Cover Page.
84 IBID
reflective on Johnson’s unwillingness to mix it up, which favored Jeffries if the two were to exchange punches in a flurry.

James Corbett throughout his articles never failed to find a new way to back up his prediction of a Jim Jeffries’ victory. In his article, “Jeff Sure to Win, Says J.J. Corbett,” Corbett unveiled an animal analogy in an attempt to better relate his position. Corbett addressed that the two pugilists were like wild animals, Jack Johnson being representative of a wolf and Jeffries a lion. A wolf, Corbett explained, only fights when cornered similar to Johnson’s defensive fighting style. A lion, on the other hand, brings the fight and does not hesitate to attack. Corbett’s point of contention lied in the notion that “If a lion and a wolf were to get into a battle in a cage in a zoological garden, which do you think would win?” Corbett answers, “I don’t think there would be any doubt about the result.” Corbett concluded by supporting his friend, “May the best man win, and that man is James J. Jeffries.”

Mainstream newspapers succeeded in differentiating the styles used by both boxers. However, instead of stating the facts and allowing the reader to come up with his or her own conclusion on how each boxer would adapt to the other’s style, mainstream newspapers made it their prerogative to make that choice for their readers.

* * *

ANALYZING MUTUAL OPPONENTS

After analyzing Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries’ clash in styles and discerning which style was the best suited against the other, mainstream newspapers finished their pre-fight coverage with one last point to tip the scale in Jeffries’ favor. “Ring Records of Jeff and Johnson,” published in the July 3 1910 edition of the New York Times, chronicled exactly what its title

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stated. Jeffries’ career was profiled first highlighting Jeffries’ memorable bouts. The article then
drew comparisons of mutual opponents shared by both Jeffries and Johnson. Two men, Joe
Choynski and Bob Fitzsimmons, had fought both Jeffries and Johnson.

Joe Choynski was used as a barometer by mainstream newspapers because he had fought
Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson in his prime years. The Jim Jeffries - Joe Choynski match ended in
a twenty round draw. After the fight, Jeffries recalled that Choynski had landed on his jaw the
hardest blow he had ever received. An unofficial bout between Choynski and Johnson held
substantial weight in the article on a comparative standpoint, as Jeffries had drawn a tie in his
twenty round match with Choynski, Johnson on the other hand was knocked out in the third
round. Choynski possessed a hard crippling punch. What was pulled from the Choynski battles
was the measure of which boxer, Jeffries or Johnson, possessed the more formidable jaw inept to
pain and withstanding force. Jeffries withstood Choynski’s best shots for twenty rounds; Johnson
however succumbed to Choynski’s power in the third round.

The next common opponent shared by Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson was former
champion Bob Fitzsimmons. Jeffries bout with Bob Fitzsimmons was recounted as the match up
that gave Jeffries the greatest difficulty and delivered him the most punishment, yet he
persevered to victory. Johnson’s bout with Fitzsimmons however did not serve well as a
barometer between Johnson and Jeffries, as Johnson defeated Fitzsimmons who was woefully out
of his prime. Mainstream newspapers pointed out that Jeffries fought Fitzsimmons when
Fitzsimmons was in his prime, while insinuating that Johnson had easy pickings against an elder
Fitzsimmons. Mainstream newspapers invested much significance on the results of common

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opponents, which granted Jeffries another edge in the battle against Johnson, albeit a battle on paper.
Chapter 5

FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

The showdown between the giants of pugilism started exactly at 2:45 PM on a hot sunny July 4th in Reno Nevada. Veteran official timekeeper George Harting confirmed the time. Jack Johnson entered the ring first at 2:28 PM, a rare gesture as champions are allocated to come out last. Johnson was greeted to the tune of “All Coons Look Alike” played by the ringside band. If that was not enough to jar the psyche of Johnson then perhaps a heavy downcast of heckles among the predominately pro-Jeffries crowd may have done the job. Journalists observing the face and mannerisms of Johnson agreed that the champion was clearly rattled. Fazed or unfazed, either way Johnson walked into the ring with his signature ‘golden smile.’ Four minutes later at the time of 2:32 PM Jim Jeffries entered the ring. Johnson entered the fight adorning a festive blue trunk with an American flag as his belt. Jeffries chose purple trunks.90

The fight was originally scheduled to start at 1:30 PM.91 “The mill was to have started at 1:30 but the parade of the celebrities and the taking of three sets of moving pictures consumed an hour.”92 There was a roll call for former champions along with other boxing celebrities such as Hugh McIntosh.

When Sam Berger, Jim Jeffries chief second and manager approached Jack Johnson to parley about the choice of corners. Johnson dismissed the subject with the magnanimous declaration: “You can take any corner you want. Any corner is good enough for me.” Thereupon Berger chose the southwest corner where Jeffries would have the sun on his back.93

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It was reported that Jack Johnson had refused to fight at the last moment if the purse had not been split sixty to forty percent, a split that was dispersed more evenly than the previous seventy-five to twenty-five percent. What one can make out from Johnson’s demands can be directly related to Johnson’s confidence, or lack thereof. By pressing for a larger loser’s end, it told the uncertainty of Johnson’s self-confidence going up against the larger Jeffries.

W.W. Naughton’s ringside seat afforded him the luxury of hearing and observing events that could not have been identifiable through a bleacher seat in the arena. A keen observation made by Naughton through studying Johnson’s face as Johnson climbed into the ring was pivotal in answering the question of why a last minute change was made dividing the purse. Johnson had requested the change moments before the scheduled bout and even threatened to not come out of his dressing room until his accommodations were met. Naughton observed and noted that, “there was a look in Johnson’s eyes that I have never seen there before, and if I am any judge of human nature, as it crops out occasionally in pugilists, Jack was in a very fluttered condition.”94 In addition, the day prior to the fight, H.E.K. reported that Jack Johnson requested and was promised security should he defeat the white man’s hope, to safely escort him out of the ring in fear of his safety.95 The nervous feeling exhibited by Johnson linked the two events together providing an explanation to Johnson’s motive demanding the purse split.

What did Jack Johnson have to be afraid of? A man that did not allow race to become a factor in anything he did was all of a sudden requesting security guards and changing the division of the purse. Perhaps the mainstream media’s portrayal of Jim Jeffries had scared Johnson as well.

* * *

ROUND BY ROUND ANALYSIS

The first round started slowly as the two pugilists cautiously met in the center of the ring. It was an uneventful round as both fighters were getting a feel for their opponent and slowly adapted to each other’s game plans while constructing their own on the fly. Jack Johnson was the first to land a blow. A straight left that landed on Jim Jeffries’ torso. A lot of gamesmanship was shown as both boxers did a lot of smiling and winking, impressing on each other that each blow that connected did little harm. The blueprint that Jeffries laid out to the mainstream media was that he was going to rush Johnson from the opening bell in an effort to end the fight as soon as possible. However, thirty seconds into the fight Jeffries had a change of heart realizing how elusive Johnson’s defense was and wisely broke out a new line of decision.96 Jeffries focus on attacking the body was being applied, seeing that rumors that Johnson had weak kidneys had made its rounds around pre-fight reports that they almost seemed factual. James Corbett, Jeffries’ chief advisor, advised Jeffries to continuously aim for the body, “Jeff got the left to the body. That’s it, Jeff, right there, that’s where it hurts.”97

Round two was just as cautious as the opening round. There was a lot of wrestling and little boxing. It was plain to see that Jack Johnson was nervous in the opening round; however, the slight indecision and trembling of Johnson’s mouth and the glint of trouble in his eyes were gone by the second round.98

The third round witnessed a complete transformation from Jack Johnson. Timid the first two rounds, Johnson found his comfort zone and started putting together combinations of punches. After sending two quick left jabs to Jim Jeffries’ face, Jeffries continued to laugh them off. In retaliation, Jeffries continued to bore in pushing the action. Once inside Johnson’s defense

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Jeffries leaned his weight advantage onto Johnson and began in-fighting, landing short punches to Johnson’s ribs. The *Chicago Tribune* observed, “The white man is having trouble breaking down the colored man’s guard.”

At the end of the third round and followed thereafter with every subsequent round up to the eleventh, James Corbett had made a habit to stalk dramatically along the inner edge of the ring after every round until he reached a point directly opposite Jack Johnson’s corner. His purpose unknown, either to make personal observations of how the round affected Johnson or merely done in the hopes of irritating Johnson and unnerving him. After the eleventh round, Corbett stayed in Jeffries corner sensing his time was better spent encouraging his dissipating fighter.

Jim Jeffries was becoming a little anxious and flustered by Jack Johnson’s defense, rushed Johnson more frequently in the fourth round. Johnson sensing Jeffries’ frustrations recommends, “Don’t rush, Jim; don’t you hear what I’m telling you?” Jeffries then tags Johnson with a left, splitting Johnson’s lip. The crowd roars as Jeffries inflicts first blood. Johnson laughed it off realizing his lip had been reopened from a cut inflicted during a sparring session. “He’ll kill you, Jack,” yelled a sporting man who had bet $10,000 on Jeffries.

“That’s what they all say,” retorted Johnson and answered back a snappy left to Jeffries’ face. The fourth round belonged to Jeffries.

Round five was Jack Johnson’s turn to split the lip of Jim Jeffries, achieved by an uppercut that finally landed for Johnson. For the majority of the fight Johnson’s uppercut had

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missed its mark. Johnson’s punches were starting to find a home on the face of Jeffries. The pace was also slowing down.

Within the first five rounds, the fight was still hanging in the balance to be had by either fighter. The sixth round “the tide of the battle turned decidedly in Johnson’s favor.”103 Jack Johnson took control of the fight with blistering punches to the face of Jim Jeffries. A series of successful left punches cut Jeffries’ cheek. The punishment did not stop. Jeffries became desperate to land an equalizer, he “rushes like a cyclone” attempting to connect with haymakers (wild punches thrown with every ounce of energy). Johnson showcased his excellent defensive skills, countering Jeffries with punches until the end of the round, sending Jeffries back to his corner with his right eye closed and his nose bloodied.104 The sixth round was Johnson’s best round of the fight. The betting, which had been 2 to 1 before the fight started, shifted to even money on a panicky market.105

As Jim Jeffries arose from his stool to answer the bell for the seventh round, it was noted that he was “beginning to look more like a wounded bull than a clever thinking man.”106 Round seven saw Jack Johnson switching from counterpunching to initiating the offense. It was the first time in the fight that Johnson started to dictate the pace. Jeffries continued to rush in to get inside Johnson’s defense. It was noted that Jeffries was “not displaying the same judgment that he did in the opening rounds.”107 Both fighters reopen cuts on each other’s lips causing bleeding. It was yet another easy round for Johnson.

Round eight was mauled with consistent clinching as both boxers were trying to gain their second wind. Jack Johnson by this time waged a verbal war directing his attacks to James

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Corbett. Whenever Johnson landed a flush shot to Jim Jeffries’ face, he asked, “Hello, Jimmy (Corbett), did you see that one?”\textsuperscript{108} Jeffries lost a lot of steam behind his punches though his aggression had not tapered off. It was analyzed, “Jeffries tears in, but is apparently not landing with any effect.” Also reported was that Jeffries blows were not being well directed, opposed to Johnson’s punches, which had become snappier.\textsuperscript{109}

Round nine was an inactive round as both men show extreme caution. Jim Jeffries uses a dirty tactic of driving his head into Jack Johnson’s chest, shoving Johnson back and pinning him against the ropes. Johnson does not mind as he takes it calmly and seems to be waiting for his opportunity. Frustrated that Jeffries could not solve Johnson’s defense an angry James Corbett yelled, “Stand up and fight you coward!”\textsuperscript{110} At the end of the round, Jeffries snuck in a hard punch to the ribs of Johnson in a way that was not relished.

Jim Jeffries and his corner changed their strategy in the tenth round. The new method was to tire the legs and lower back of Jack Johnson by pressing Jeffries’ body down upon Johnson, forcing Johnson to expend energy backpedaling with 218 lbs attached to his chest. By tiring Johnson’s legs it would limit his mobility and weaken his defense.

Round eleven was another round that was decidedly Jack Johnson’s. Jim Jeffries was deteriorating, his punches were coming out slow and his decision process was off. It was reported that Jeffries was also “apparently unsteady on his legs.”\textsuperscript{111} Three quick uppercuts in succession coupled with a hard left hook delivered by Johnson to Jeffries’ nose left Jeffries face a bloody pulp. Jeffries fought back and nearly turned the tide near the end of the eleventh round, when he landed a short right arm jab to Johnson’s solar plexus. Sportswriter H.E.K. noticed that it hurt

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\textsuperscript{108} IBID
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\textsuperscript{110} “Jeffries Blames Age for Downfall,” Chicago Tribune, July 5 1910, 24.
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Johnson who wobbled perceptibly, but before Jeffries could capitalize on the advantage, the effect of the punch wore off. Johnson, perhaps upset that he had been wobbled let loose and kept Jeffries’ head bobbing constantly until the bell signified the end of the round.

After the eleventh round, one of Jim Jeffries’ friends left the ringside crying. Spectators sighed as they saw the old champion’s leg shaking on his way back to his corner. The crowd was getting nervous as the outcome was becoming more and more decided before their eyes. In an effort to boost the morale of Jeffries and at the very least, themselves, the crowd started to vocalize their approval of anything that appeared to be a well placed punch by Jeffries. Jack Johnson in response played more theatrically to the crowd, giggling and showing off his smile whenever the crowd roared in approval of a Jeffries’ point.

Round twelve, Jack Johnson reopened the blood flow from Jim Jeffries’ nose that his cutman worked so hard to halt. After another decidedly Johnson round, Jeffries slowly walked back to his corner at the end of the bell and spat out blood. James Corbett who was jeering Johnson the entire fight even succumbed and acknowledged, “Johnson is making a sucker out of him,” and conceded “Johnson is landing left and right almost at will.”

Round thirteen was again all Jack Johnson. Jim Jeffries could not “solve the negro’s defense and [took] all the blows that [came] his way.” It was merely target practice for Johnson. Johnson’s devastation materialized on Jeffries’ right eye, which became nearly swollen shut, yet Jeffries continued to march forward, albeit on shaking legs. In the opinion of H.E.K. round thirteen was the end of Jeffries. H.E.K. explains, “In the thirteenth (round) Johnson started his man over the precipice. Jeffries was swinging wildly in desperation and Johnson was meeting

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him with straight punches with both hands at every point presented.”116 Even James Corbett was beginning to admit defeat as he was quoted at ringside expressing the power of Johnson, “No, there Johnson comes back with the left to the jaw! That’s a terrific punch. Can Jim take those things yet? He’s a marvel. That punch would have killed an ox.”117

In between rounds thirteen and fourteen Jim Jeffries confided to James Corbett that he could not see out of his right eye. Round fourteen, Jack Johnson continued his domination over Jeffries. Jeffries was breathing hard and was visibly worn down. Johnson, however, remained fresh and alive on his feet and his swagger was in full swing, jawing at Jeffries, “How do you feel, Jim? How do you like ’em, Jim?”118

After walking into three left shots in quick succession, Jim Jeffries responded back, “They don’t hurt.”119 The truth was not on Jeffries’ side because the punches were taking its toll. A tired Jeffries could not remove himself from harm’s way. N.N. Naughton commented that in the fourteenth round, “It seemed so easy for the big negro to free that left and send it in against the big white man’s face. Jeffries by this time was bloody from ear to ear, and his right eye had dwindled to a mere slit.”120 Jack Johnson having read and heard what his critics have written and uttered prior to the fight, glanced at his greatest critic James Corbett and remarked satirically, “He’s too clever; just like you.”121 The fight was all but over.

The ending started to unfold in the fifteenth round with a feeble attempt by Jim Jeffries to land a left to the body. In the process, Jeffries’ momentum carried him into Jack Johnson’s body where he tried to clinch. In a flash, Johnson broke away and shot a left and right to the jaw

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sending Jeffries staggering back against the ropes. There was simply nothing left in Jeffries gas
tank. He was simply running on fumes. Johnson then rushed in for the kill feasting on his hobbled
prey with a rain of lefts and rights sending Jeffries reeling blindly. Another short series of
punches later the “white giant went down for the first time in his ring career.”

Jeffries was knocked out of the ring, crashing over the lower rope and under the top rope only to be saved by
room afforded by the overhang of the platform.

Resting on his haunches and right elbow, Jim Jeffries looked around in a dazed manner,
coming to his feet and senses at the count of nine. Jack Johnson stood above his fallen opponent
gearing up to replicate what had just transpired. When Jeffries arose, Johnson continued where he
left off jolting Jeffries on the jaw twice sending him back to the canvas. On the count of nine,
Jeffries managed to position himself back onto his feet. Helpless, he staggered a bit trying to
regain his senses. “A left, a right, and another left – short, snappy, powerful blows – found their
mark on Jeff’s chin, and he went down for the third time.”

Once again, Jeffries was sprawled over the lower rope as half of his body was hanging out of the ring. At the count of eight Jeffries’
seconds stepped foot inside the ropes and helped their fallen hero back to his feet. Referee Tex
Rickard called the fight placing his hand on Johnson’s shoulder declaring him the winner. The
stoppage of the fight came at two minutes and twenty-seven seconds into the fifteenth round. The
time at which the fight was concluded was 3:41 PM.

When the end came with Jim Jeffries dropped dazed and inert, a church like stillness fell
over the multitude. Men stood on their hot pine benches, their faces tense and drawn, waiting for
the fight to be resumed. No heed was paid the victor, Jack Johnson, except by his friends at

123 IBID
ringside. The eyes of onlookers remained frozen on Jeffries, once their eyes thawed a procession of men with their heads angled to the ground made their way to the exits.\textsuperscript{126} The fight witnessed the greatest collection of men of the prize ring and those associated with the sport, sporting writers and other writers whose names are known in fiction, politics, and travel that has ever been drawn together in the nation, except at a national political convention.\textsuperscript{127}

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OFFICIAL RULING

Referee Tex Rickard pointed to Jack Johnson declaring him the winner by knockout. However, Rickard’s after the match rescinded his official ruling of the fight in a scandalous swipe against Johnson. Rickard’s commented to clarify the final ruling of the bout. Rickard elaborated, “The fight was won and lost when Jeffries went through (the ropes) the first time.”\textsuperscript{128} Rickard had observed that several of Jeffries’ corner men had assisted Jim Jeffries back to his feet after having been knocked down. “Under the rules of the game, which I have read thoroughly… this disqualified Jeffries.”\textsuperscript{129} The official scoring would be filed under disqualification, but in the minds of the public and in the articles expressed by the press, Johnson had clearly won by way of knockout. The importance of an official ruling of knockout opposed to disqualification is light and day in the realm of pugilism. Disqualifications taint a boxer’s record with an asterisk, for they are questioned and leave room to the imagination. A knockout delivers closure. It solidifies a boxer’s record and demonstrates a dominant performance.

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It is the law of the ring that if any one intervenes when a knockout is imminent, a knockout is recorded.\textsuperscript{130} For those at ringside it was a decisive knockout. Official timekeeper, George Harting, asserted his opinion that at the count of eight had not Jim Jeffries seconds rushed in and helped Jeffries, “There is no doubt that, independent of this action, Jeffries would have been counted out.”\textsuperscript{131} The \textit{Washington Post} concurred, “While Jeff was not counted out, this was a merely technical evasion, and it was a knockout in fact. It was evident that he could never have got up inside of ten seconds.”\textsuperscript{132}

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Chapter 6
DIFFERENT AS BLACK AND WHITE

After the ‘Fight of the Century’ concluded with an undisputed winner, Jack Johnson, the press for both mainstream newspapers and Afro-American newspapers went to work pushing their pencils once more in opposite directions.

For mainstream newspapers, the message was clear; Jack Johnson’s victory would do blacks harm. Another point drawn out from post-fight analysis was that age had defeated Jim Jeffries as much as Johnson’s fists. The mainstream media, who fought Jeffries’ battles in the preliminary stages of the bout, now fought Jeffries’ battles in an effort to save the white race from further embarrassment. Though the question of age was a non-issue during the pre-fight coverage, it now became the central theme laced within articles depicting Jeffries’ downfall, serving a dual purpose: an apologetic gesture towards Jeffries while chipping away credit at Johnson’s victory.

Jim Jeffries made a statement after the match that mainstream newspapers adopted and made the central reasoning why Jeffries had failed in his endeavor to return the pugilistic scepter back to the white race:

As for my fight, it was the best fight that was left in me. Had I met Johnson when I was in my prime, the result would have been different. I would have beaten him. As it was, I wore myself down, and was beaten as much by the effects of my own exertions as I was by Johnson’s blows.133

Jim Jeffries concludes that his age had aided in his defeat, discrediting Jack Johnson’s efforts. Age may have been a factor, but those at ringside soon discovered that it was not age hampering Jeffries, rather it was that Jeffries could not figure out how to breach Johnson’s superior defense.

All three mainstream newspapers in question published John L. Sullivan’s post-fight article. Sullivan observed, “Scarcely ever has there been a championship contest that was so one-

sided.” Sullivan described the match as having only one competitor, convinced that Jim Jeffries was never in the bout from the first bell tap to the last. To back up his bold assertion, Sullivan added, “Johnson didn’t receive a blow during the whole encounter that would have hurt a 16-year-old boy.” The fact that Jeffries could not land a telling blow was due to poor strategizing that Jeffries stubbornly refused to abandon. It became clear that Jeffries method of rushing in was detrimental to his success, for he did not peruse his height and reach advantage, leading to his downfall.

It is worth noting that Jim Jeffries boasted that he was in the best shape of his life prior to the fight. A statement not admitted if one’s confidence was not peaking. By asserting that you are in the best shape of your life, you are essentially taking away any safety net to fall your excuses on. It becomes a matter of win big or go home. Then after his loss, Jeffries states that he was not in the best shape of his life due to his age. Mainstream newspapers concurred with Jeffries assessment on his performance, using the excuse of age as the reason why Jeffries had lost. The factor of age was not as pertinent when applied to Jeffries and Jack Johnson. It was never a topic of discussion during the preliminary coverage of the fight. It was simply a matter of can Jeffries comeback from an idle lifestyle.

The Washington Post came to Jim Jeffries’ defense by pointing out that, “it simply exemplifies the progress of the sport pugilistic, in which ‘youth will be served’ is about the only adage that really wears.” Jeffries entered the ring at thirty-five years of age. He certainly was not old and for that matter, Jack Johnson was certainly not young at the age of thirty-two. The adage, ‘Youth will be served,’ would be put to better use when describing an upstart boxing

135  IBID
prospect defeating a fading champion. The three-year disparity between the boxers did not warrant such a lopsided contest. The gap in talent between the boxers was closer to three decades than three years.

W.W. Naughton, a boxing expert and hired hand for the Washington Post, in an effort to strengthen the argument that age had factored into Jim Jeffries’ loss, shed light on past boxing contests that pitted a fading boxer against an uprising star in the sport. Naughton described the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries match as playing out in the same manner that James Corbett defeated John L. Sullivan, Bob Fitzsimmons defeated Corbett, and how Jeffries had defeated Peter Jackson. The commonality behind the listed matches in the mind of Naughton proved the cycle that youth will be served in the progress of the sport of pugilism. However, Naughton made a grave mistake in his reporting that essentially voided his and the mainstream newspaper’s contention that age was the culprit that defeated Jeffries.

The mistake that W.W. Naughton made was citing an example that did not match his argument, and on the contrary, doomed the theory that Jack Johnson’s victory was due to a marginal three-year age gap. Naughton’s example of twenty-six year old James Corbett defeating then champion, John L. Sullivan, who was a month away from his forty-fourth birthday, did well to further the belief that youth trumps age. Also bringing into the conversation of a young twenty-two year old Jim Jeffries defeating thirty-six year old Peter Jackson brought further credence to Naughton’s point of contention. However, the example that tripped Naughton and mainstream newspaper’s emphasis on age, was erroneously tying in Bob Fitzsimmons victory over James Corbett.

Bob Fitzsimmons met James Corbett on March 17 1897 to determine the world’s heavyweight championship, which Corbett had defended. The problem with W.W. Naughton’s

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argument was not that Fitzsimmons defeated Corbett, which he did. The problem was that Naughton mistakenly inserted an example that refuted his own argument that youth would be served. Fitzsimmons date of birth falls on May 26 1863, opposed to Corbett who was born September 1 1866; in essence, Fitzsimmons at the age of thirty-three defeated a younger Corbett, aged thirty, to win the heavyweight championship. The three-year difference in age was the same discrepancy played out in Jack Johnson’s victory over Jim Jeffries.

* * *

MOCKING JEFFRIES

Afro-American newspapers held a grudge against those that stirred racial controversy stemming from the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries contest. Afro-American newspapers pinpointed the root of the problem. Placing blame on Jeffries for inciting racial discord by promptly accepting the mantle mainstream newspapers had given him as the savior of the white race. They displayed their displeasure to Jeffries by mocking his loss.

James Corbett acknowledged that before the fight the white race hailed Jim Jeffries as the ‘great white hope.’ Now that the fight had concluded, Corbett was afraid Jeffries would have been diminished as the ‘goat’ of the white race. Corbett reminded the public that they had dragged Jeffries out of retirement and forced him back into the ring against his will. Apologetic to Jeffries, Corbett stated, “The blame is upon our shoulders.”138

Afro-American newspapers parodied James Corbett’s statement. Published in the Baltimore Afro-American Ledger, “Views of the African American Press,” was a special section dedicated to excerpts found in various Afro-American newspapers across the nation. An article pulled from the Philadelphia Tribune was one such example. The article used biblical references in comparing Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries. Johnson was heralded the black Samson while

Jeffries was compared as the ‘goat’ of the Philistines and their fallen hero Goliath. The article goes on to compare white gamblers who placed their bets on Jeffries as white Philistines.

Jim Jeffries vocalized his resentment of being dubbed the ‘great white hope,’ stating that he had a great life living peacefully on his alfalfa farm. He blamed his pride for attempting the comeback. Although Jeffries felt confident that his training had brought him full circle, Jeffries realized during the match that he had lacked the snap of youth. Jeffries felt, “The things I used to do were impossible.” Resigned to the fact that he was beyond his glory days, Jeffries was convinced that “Six years ago the result would have been different, but now-well, I guess the public will let me alone after this.”

The Baltimore Afro American Ledger reprinted another mocking article, this time found in the Afro-American publication Savannah Tribune. The article sarcastically chided Jim Jeffries’ statement, “I guess the public will let me alone after this.” The Savannah Tribune fired back, “Yes, bud, the public will let you alone, and we believe you will let the public alone, particularly one member of the public who hails from Galveston, Tex[as]. How unnecessary it is to call names at times!”

Comments such as these were laced into editorials and articles in Afro-American newspapers due to the build up of racial hostilities that ensued the aftermath of the fight. The three Afro-American newspapers in question were published weekly and due to the weeklong duration between editions, there was ample time to trace back the origin of racial hostilities in retrospect. Many in the black press believed Jeffries’ willingness to make the fight into a battle of

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races perpetuated animosity. Jeffries fell into the trap set up by the mainstream press, who pressed for the moniker of ‘Battle of Racial Supremacy.’

* * *

HOPES OF BRIDGING EQUALITY

Afro-American newspapers shifted the focus of Jack Johnson’s victory to extract benefits to African Americans. They spawned theories they made back when Johnson had defeated Tommy Burns to obtain the world’s heavyweight championship. They reprised topics consisted of bridging racial equality and using Johnson and his accomplishments as a role model for blacks. Afro-American newspapers also felt they were in position to hand out advice to Johnson and his future inclinations.

Lester A. Walton, sports editor of the New York Age, reiterated his statements he made back when Jack Johnson first captured the belt, stating, “Every time Johnson knocked down Burns a bunch of prejudice fell, and at the same time the white man’s respect for the Negro race went up a notch.”

Walton echoed his hopes once more after Johnson defeated Jim Jeffries, “I have always wanted to see Jeffries and Johnson meet, in the first place believing that Johnson would win, and secondly, feeling that the victory of the Negro over the white man would cause the white brother to hold us in higher esteem.”

Walton realized that two years ago his statements carried little weight; he then restructured his argument away from an entire race to that of individuals of a race.

Walton contended that despite the fact that African Americans were acquiring education and wealth; blacks as a race are considered the inferior of the white race. With that clearly stated, Walton shifts to make his point clear, “while any Negro would be foolish for a moment to

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compare his race with that of the dominant race, yet we are willing to make comparisons as to
superiority when it comes to individuals." Lester A. Walton thesis to his argument was to use
the case of Jack Johnson to display the superiority of individuals, irrespective of color, and
through Johnson’s efforts, blacks “are bound to be more highly respected.” Walton also
contends, “The white man will not generally underestimate us as he has been guilty of doing
heretofore.”

* * *

ADVICE TO JACK JOHNSON

Although it was the hope of the Afro-American press that Jack Johnson could elevate
African American status, it dawned on them that Johnson could hurt the race just as well. The
press witnessed Johnson’s antics in the ring against Jim Jeffries in which Johnson verbally abused
Jeffries and his corner men. Not immune to his verbal sting were fans who had jeered Johnson in
the ring. Public perception of Johnson was already on thin ice, yet Johnson never wavered when it
came to playing with fire.

After the bout, Jack Johnson concluded that he had won because he outclassed Jim
Jeffries in every department of the fighting game. The notorious punching power of Jeffries
that had been hyped throughout the press’ coverage seemed like a fairy tale to Johnson, as
Johnson reminisced, “Jeffries’s blows had no steam behind them. So, how could he hope to defeat
me?” Johnson also pointed out that he could not recall a single punch to the body that had
caused any discomfort. Johnson’s comments were valid considering that Johnson’s face and body

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were unmarked, with the exception of a slight cut to Johnson’s lower lip that had been reopened
from a sparring injury.

The *New York Times* article, “I Outclassed Him, Johnson Declares,” implemented quotes
heard at ringside made from Jack Johnson after he had returned to his corner having won the
battle. The following comments had run exclusive within the *Times*. The comments were raw,
unrehearsed, and directed by Johnson to his corner men. Johnson allegedly compared the fight
with Jim Jeffries with his match with Tommy Burns, stating that, “(Jeffries) was only half the
trouble Burns was.”\(^{150}\) Johnson’s post-fight comments did not sit well with white Americans. In
typical Johnson fashion, his actions after his victories rarely afforded his opponents an ounce of
modesty.

The editors of the *New York Age* delivered advice to Jack Johnson on how to conduct
himself under the lens of public perception. They advised him on two counts: First, “We hope
Mr. Johnson will save his money, not go scattering it around the country and die in poverty as
most prize fighters of our race have died.”\(^{151}\) The second and final suggestion:

> We hope Mr. Johnson will conduct himself in a modest manner. He can
> hurt the race immeasurably just now if he goes splurging and making a useless,
> noisy exhibition of himself… Any undue exhibition on the part of Mr. Johnson
> will hurt every member of the race; on the other hand, becoming modesty and
> self-control will win him many lasting friends.\(^{152}\)

Modesty was a trait that Jack Johnson’s character had yet to embark upon. Although the
*New York Age* was the one handing out the advice, it is worth noting that modesty in the form of
restraint from boasting Johnson’s victory was in large part advice given by mainstream
newspapers to the black race.

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\(^{151}\) “Advice to Jack Johnson,” *New York Age*, July 14 1910, 6.

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There were discussions from Afro-American newspapers that Jack Johnson should enter the realm of politics. A selfish request in the part of the press, but nonetheless displayed the level of commitment African Americans invested into Johnson’s success and his capabilities to bridge racial equality. Johnson’s achievements created among blacks a sense of independence that as individuals they could strive to compete against the white race. Reverend G.E. Bivens voiced sentiments in that Johnson’s victory “will have a tendency to make the colored man politically more independent.”153 The editors at the Chicago Conservator, a competing Afro-American newspaper serving the city of Chicago, went a step further suggesting Johnson should quit the pugilistic ring and cast his lot with politics and politicians.154

The African American voice in politics was marginal even though blacks held seats in the political forum during the Reconstruction period. The notoriety that Jack Johnson had acquired since the onset of his title reign made Johnson a primary choice to lead a political campaign. If Johnson was not to be successful, at the very least his presence on any matter that he brought forward would immediately gain recognition. The Afro-American newspapers that sought out Johnson’s service in politics were essentially using Johnson as a tool to further their own cause.

There were mixed reactions of Jack Johnson throwing his hat into politics. The editors of the Baltimore Afro American Ledger disagreed with the idea. They felt Johnson had dedicated many years to his craft and believed “that he can best conserve the interest of the race by keeping to that for which at this particular time he is best fitted.”155 In an interesting paradox, Jim Jeffries was dubbed by his white contemporaries as the savior of the white race; Now, Johnson was looked upon with similar graces.

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Chapter 7

RACE RIOTS

Mainstream newspapers were very quick to illustrate to Americans that Jack Johnson’s Fourth of July victory had opened a Pandora’s Box filled with negative implications for African Americans. Scare tactics were used citing clashes between races throughout the nation, while documenting race riots in the respective neighborhoods of the newspaper’s demographic. The implied message was clear, if uppity blacks were to celebrate, boast, or believe that Johnson’s victory meant an even playing field with whites, they would be attacked, lynched, chased by mobs, and even murdered for their insubordinate actions. The picture mainstream newspapers wanted to paint was a single black man in his prime beat a single white man six years removed from his prime. In that manner, blacks should not have much to celebrate. Yet, celebrate they did.

It was the consensus from members of each race that the clash of race supremacy was a frame job juxtaposed onto the match by mainstream newspapers. Blacks held Jack Johnson in high esteem and saluted him as a great boxer. White Americans on the other hand, held their combatant, Jim Jeffries, as the savior of the white race, someone who could rid white America of Johnson’s presence. The added labeling and buildup of racial hype backfired on white Americans who had bought into the theory. Sadly, many Americans had, blacks and whites alike.

The *New York Age* commented regrettaely on the attempts of mainstream newspapers to provoke a race issue. Lester A. Walton, sports editor for the *Age*, outlined that the fight between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries was not to decide whether the colored race was the superior of the white race, an angle in which mainstream newspapers had tried to sell the fight. Instead, Walton proclaimed that the fight was simply to “settle the question of who was the superior in brawn and cleverness – James J. Jeffries, who happened to be a white man, or John Arthur Johnson, a
Race riots broke out across the United States following the outcome of Jack Johnson’s victory over Jim Jeffries. There were battles in the streets of practically every major city in the nation. Blacks formed the greater number of those who were victims of the outbreaks. They were set upon by whites and were wounded or killed because of cheers for Johnson’s victory.\textsuperscript{157}

There were a few cases of attempted lynchings. In Clarksburg West Virginia, a black man was saved by the police from a mob of 1,000 white men who had organized after the announcement of the news of Jim Jeffries’ defeat. The mob drove African Americans off the streets. The \textit{New York Times} described the peril of one black man, “One was being led with a rope around his neck, when the police interfered.”\textsuperscript{158}

Another incident of an attempted lynching was reported out of Wilmington Delaware. Benjamin White was apart of a group of black men caught in an argument with white men over the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries fight. The disagreement turned physical with White and his black affiliates getting the upper hand of the skirmish. They were then chased by a white mob who witnessed the fight break out. The mob chased the group down several blocks where Benjamin White then fled inside an African American apartment house. The mob of whites by this time numbered several thousand bombarded the building with stones. The African American occupants also threw down whatever they could find injuring several whites in the mob. The police responded to the riot call and finally stopped the outbreak. When they arrested Benjamin White, the mob tried to lynch him.\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{156} Lester A. Walton, “Johnson is now Undisputed Champion,” \textit{New York Age}, July 7 1910, 6.
THREE MAJOR INCIDENTS

Three major race rioting incidents made news across the nation and reported in detail by all three mainstream newspapers in question. The three major incidents were not confined to a specific region but spread across various regions in the United States: Uvaldia Georgia, Pittsburg Pennsylvania, and Houston Texas.

Three blacks were killed and many more were wounded in a clash with whites at a construction camp in Uvaldia Georgia. It was reported, “Negroes at the camp have been insolent in their remarks about Jeffries for some time, and today were blasting that Johnson would kill the white man.” The black men at the camp had been drinking and their words “and their conduct so enraged the white people of Uvaldia that a party was formed to clean out the camp.” The act of forming a party to confront the men displayed a premeditated act of violence against blacks. What made matters worse and escalated simple jawing to a state of terror was that the white party approached the camp fully loaded with firearms. In response, the white men were met with volley after volley of shots from the black party, but no one in the white camp was wounded. The white men immediately returned fire killing three and wounding five others. The fire of the whites was so deadly that the surviving black men fled the camp and sought refuge into the woods, “where they are being hunted by the whites.” Reports on the incident then added that “late this afternoon the whites sent into town for more ammunition,” insinuating that the white party

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would not stop until all the men involved was slain. As a result, race issues in Uvaldia have been bitter and “the whites say they intend to run the Negroes out of the county.”

In Pittsburg Pennsylvania, black residents in the Wylie Avenue district prepared a parade for Jack Johnson in the case that Johnson was to be victorious on the Fourth of July. The Wylie Avenue district was a predominantly African American neighborhood with strong Greek and Russian enclaves filling in the voids. Police had been informed by white residents that if blacks were allowed to parade there would be trouble. It was reported that the leaders of several ward gangs had planned to get on housetops and bombard the parading African Americans with bricks from chimneys. Several gangs such as the Red Onions, the Owls, and the Forty-Niners, who would not hesitate to start a race riot, infested the district.

Police intervened and directed that a parade commemorating Jack Johnson’s victory would not be tolerated. Blacks became agitated at the news claiming they had the right to celebrate the Fourth of July. Against the wishes of the police, after Johnson’s triumph, one thousand African Americans took to the streets in celebration. True to the report a day earlier, white gangs had assembled on housetops and rained down bricks upon parade participants. Once the bricks started flying, rioting swept throughout the district. It took three separate calls for police reserves, bringing every white patrol officer on the reserve list to the district. Overall, fifty blacks were under arrest while four were in need of medical attention. It was not reported whether or not any white instigators were arrested. The omission of white arrests, or non-arrests, proved instrumental in the way mainstream newspapers wanted to spin the incident. Their message had been sealed and delivered to blacks; insubordinate actions will leave you in the

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164 IBID
165 “Stop to Negro Celebration,” Chicago Tribune, July 4 1910, 10.
hospital or in jail. It also inferred to white Americans that repercussions would be null or limited via police intervention.

The third major incident that caught mass media attention transpired in Houston Texas. Charles Williams, black, was a little vociferous in announcing Jack Johnson’s victory on a trolley car. A white man took exception on the trolley in which both men were riding, took out a knife, and slashed the throat of Williams. Williams was taken to a hospital where he later died. No mention of the white man’s identity made it to believe the attacker had gotten away. The Houston incident was widely printed to exemplify the uninhibited rage made possible by a jeering remark; on the other hand, incidents in Uvaldia and Pittsburg were premeditated strikes.

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REPORTING ON RESPECTIVE CITY RIOTS

The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* then reported on race rioting that occurred within their respective cities. The *Chicago Tribune* was left out of the discussion as the city of Chicago, adopted city of Jack Johnson, and did not peruse the result of the fight to incite violence.

The *New York Times* reported that in the city, fights between whites and blacks were frequent throughout the night. Gangs of men and boys formed apparently for the sole purpose of beating up any black person they could get their hands upon. In many instances, African Americans retaliated in part. There were many districts in the city under distress, and with little surprise, they were within African Americans sections of the community. Districts known as Hell’s Kitchen, San Juan Hill, and Harlem were hotbeds for racial hostility. Tensions ran so strong that, “Between 9 and 11 o’clock a wounded Negro was taken to that station (West Thirty-

169 IBID
Seventh Street Police Station) on an average of one for every fifteen minutes."\textsuperscript{170} To measure the scope of activity, the \textit{Times} reported that every police officer in the precinct was on ‘fight duty.’

New York was stirring with local gangs uniting to menace the streets searching for blacks. They would organize, “armed with clubs which they wielded with terrible effect.”\textsuperscript{171} The fact gangs were armed with clubs reaffirmed that their actions were a premeditated act of terror. The Pearl Button gang, a coterie of tough young white men in the neighborhood of Ninety-Ninth Street and Columbus Avenue, resented the result of the fight and were soon mixed up with about ten blacks from the tenement houses in Ninety-Eight, Ninety-Ninth, and 100\textsuperscript{th} Streets, which were almost entirely occupied by African American tenants.\textsuperscript{172} A mob numbering over 1,500 joined the Pearl Button gang in setting fire to an African American tenement house. The \textit{Chicago Tribune} adds that the mob “threw stones at windows whenever a frightened face appeared, and tried to keep the tenants inside by blocking the exits.”\textsuperscript{173} Luckily, an alarm was turned in and the fire department put out the fire before much damage had been done.

A howl of ‘Let’s lynch the first ‘nigger’ we meet!’ started a riot in front of a saloon in Eight Avenue near 135\textsuperscript{th} Street soon after news spread of Jack Johnson’s victory over Jim Jeffries. The banner cry was taken up and within a few minutes, a crowd had gathered. Then an Eight Avenue trolley car came along and somebody shouted, “There’s a nigger!” A moment later, a middle-aged man was pulled out of the car and badly beaten.\textsuperscript{174}

The \textit{Washington Post} reported on their city’s activity, noting there were more than 250 arrests made in the First and Sixth precincts. “Two hospitals were filled to the crowding point with black and white persons who had been injured in the clashes, and the police of the two

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\item \textsuperscript{170} IBID
\item \textsuperscript{171} IBID
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\item \textsuperscript{173} “Eleven Killed in Many Race Riots,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, July 5 1910, Cover Page.
\end{itemize}
precincts were kept on the move every minute.” In explaining the incidents, the Post summed up their report, “Negroes were chased, captured, and beaten in many instances without apparent provocation.”

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AFRO-AMERICAN RESPONSE TO RACE RIOTS

The Afro-American newspapers were divided in their response to mainstream newspapers persistent coverage of race riots. They took one of two options: Either they conformed to mainstream newspapers argument and denounced Jack Johnson’s achievements to seek peace, or they deflected the message quelling supposed fears among blacks that were fanned by mainstream newspapers. The latter response adamantly challenged the fear tactics of mainstream newspapers and was the primary route taken by Afro-American newspapers. Afro-American newspapers asked their reader base to understand the circumstances that were transpiring. What was going on, they contended, was much ado about nothing.

In an effort to quell widespread panic of potential white mob violence against blacks, leading Afro-American editorials pulled their best efforts to limit the damage incited by mainstream newspapers. The sport’s editor for the New York Age, Lester A. Walton, played down the race riots by simply avoiding the usage of the term. Instead, referred to race riots as disturbances in which blacks were attacked by white toughs. Another tactic employed by Walton was to discredit mainstream newspapers by labeling them as yellow journals and sensational newspapers, a ploy to diminish the serious nature of race riots to isolated instances.

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The death toll from race rioting incidents was never officially confirmed. Reports have exacted the range to be between eight to eleven reported deaths on the Fourth of July. Lester Walton in an effort to minimize the extent of racial hostility projected his own number to correlate with said stance. He reported that “In one or two instances members of the race died from injuries received at the hands of white rowdies.” The number of instances cited by Walton was off base, but if mainstream newspapers can mislead readers, Walton felt privy to the same privilege.

To put into perspective the hostile aftermath of the Jack Johnson - Jim Jeffries match, it was revealed that at a general election more murders were committed and more brawls took place between whites of opposite political affiliations than what occurred between the two races after July fourth. Afro-American newspapers warned that mainstream newspapers would continue to incite more race antipathy by publishing and attributing every clash between the races for the next year to Johnson’s victory over Jeffries. Afro-American newspapers reassured the African American populace, citing there would be no troubles of a serious nature between the races as long as blacks do not assume any attitude of effrontery. Then proceeded to set the African American mind at rest, stating, “white citizens would take Jim Jeffries defeat in a sportsmanlike manner.” A statement made based more on hope than logic.

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The secondary route that the Afro-American press traversed was accommodating to mainstream newspapers rebuttal of Jack Johnson’s significant victory. The editors at the *Atlanta
Independent, an Afro-American newspaper, were wondering what all the chaos was about and how such havoc resulted from a spectacle of two gladiators. The Independent concurred with the city’s mainstream daily newspaper, the Atlanta Constitution, when they stated with reference to the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries bout that the best brute won.\textsuperscript{183} The Afro-American paper, Independent, concluded that, “neither of these great gladiators deserve enough consideration from decent people and neighbors to fall out among themselves.”\textsuperscript{184} The Independent conformed to mainstream newspapers by discounting credibility to Johnson’s achievement; in return, they wished their atoning message would speed the process of helping mend racial hostilities.

The Nashville Globe, another Afro-American newspaper, likewise failed to see why the prizefight has created such a great commotion in the country. “The Negroes are of course proud of J. Arthur Johnson, but they are not going to lose their minds because he won the victory.”\textsuperscript{185} The Globe created a dual meaning with their statement. First, it reassured to white Americans that blacks did not invest a higher purpose in Johnson’s victory, which combated other Afro-American newspapers contention that Johnson’s victory would pave a way for racial equality. Secondly, the Globe pleaded indirectly to African Americans not to make further exhibitions of them by gloating in the face of white Americans.

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Conforming or not to the white populace, Afro-American newspapers along with the Negro race rejoiced in Jack Johnson’s victory. Mainstream newspapers and the race riots instilled fear in blacks, however the notion made by mainstream newspapers that Johnson’s victory “will do the Negro race harm,” was mainly ignored. Instead, the mantle was replaced with the attitude

\textsuperscript{183} “Views of the African American Press,” Baltimore Afro American Ledger, July 16 1910, 4.
\textsuperscript{184} IBID
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brought forth by W.M. Pickens when he asked rhetorically, how “in the name of heaven can it harm a race to show itself excellent?”  

186 Wm. Pickens, “Talladega College Professor Speaks on Reno Fight,” Chicago Defender, July 30, 1910, Cover Page.
Chapter 8

WAR ON SUPPRESSION OF FIGHT FILMS

White Americans went to war against Jack Johnson, seeing their appointed conqueror, Jim Jeffries, failed to reclaim the championship. Mainstream newspapers aided to the bigotry by publishing everything that was relative in suppressing the fight films nationally. The agenda was to highlight the growing strength in the movement. Now everyone who did not care enough to formulate an opinion beforehand was seen expressing an opinion through daily articles that made front-page news. Johnson in the eyes of white Americans became public enemy number one.

Major Sylvester, Chief of Police of Washington D.C., become the lead voice arguing in favor of suppression of the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries fight film. Sylvester carried his mission to both mainstream and Afro-American newspapers. He specifically targeted and wrote to the New York Age to win support from the African American community. The New York Age was the leading Afro-American newspaper and their influence was widely spread across the nation. Sylvester had solicited the aid of both races toward the suppression of these particular films, in his words “on account of their inflammatory tendency.”

Sylvester’s intent on writing to the New York Age was to win the graces of the black race and convince them by playing to their fears, that such fight films will lead to more rioting between the races.

Major Sylvester had previously waged a successful campaign against billboards displaying criminal actions on account of the influence they have upon children. Sylvester also stated his intention to wage war against fight pictures because of their special character as displaying a ‘fight’ rather than a boxing match. However, differences between fights and pugilism were deciphered in stark contrast harking back to the implementations of the Marquis of

188 IBID
Queensbury Rules. Pugilism had evolved and became tamed with gloves, an active referee, and rules designed with the boxer’s safety in mind, so why start the acts of suppressing fight films on such scrupulous grounds? Why not stop fight films after Jim Jeffries knocked out James Corbett to become the world’s heavyweight champion? There is no need to follow a trail of breadcrumbs to find the answer; one simply had to view the color of Jack Johnson’s skin. Yet prominent mainstream papers refused to acknowledge the double standard.

In the special article contributed by Major Sylvester to the *New York Age*, a prominent point of contention raised by Sylvester regarded the need to shield the eyes of children from negative influences:

“The spirit of imitation on the part of children always prevails… we (police department) find them at burglary at very tender years, the result of bad reading, billboard hold-up pictures or moving illustrations of crime.”189

The point Sylvester wanted to bring into the conversation was that boxing moving pictures would deteriorate children’s morals and possibly land them in jail. Sylvester’s occupation as Chief of Police gave him immense credibility to the public. If there was a hole in Sylvester’s argument, it would be that ‘bad reading’ and billboards do not require a price of admission ticket. They are legible and visual representations that manifest in the public arena. Boxing moving pictures are consumed by a demographic willingly paying to view what is behind the curtains. Billboards are confined to a different nature; they are public domains that can be viewed by anyone without consent of a parent or guardian.

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CHRISTIAN COALITIONS JOIN THE FIGHT

The Christian community had also waged war on the suppression of fight films. Many vocal leaders spoke out on the venomous nature of boxing moving pictures. The United Society

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of Christian Endeavor, which has branches in every city and town in the country as well as in many foreign countries, had begun their campaign against the exhibition. The Boston branch of the society, through its secretary, William Shaw, addressed a petition to governors of every state asking that the pictures be barred from their respective states. Shaw argued that fight films corrupted public morals, especially in children, thus tend to the encouragement of crime.

Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore declared his opposition to the exhibition of the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries pictures, saying, “It would be wrong to show these horrible pictures, first, because the children have to be protected, and it is the children who would be most seriously affected if such exhibition were allowed.”

“If the pictures of this contest were shown,” Cardinal Gibbon’s prophesized, “I am sure hundreds of children would see them, and what would be the result? Their morals would not only be contaminated, but they would have a wrong ideal of the true hero.”

The argument that children’s morals would be corrupted when viewing boxing moving pictures could easily be remedied by following the lead of promoter Tex Rickards. Rickards promoted the ‘Fight of the Century.’ He also made his position clear on children in attendance for his promoted prizefight by drafting regulations. Even though there were no state or municipal laws that restrained minors from witnessing prize fights or boxing exhibitions, Rickard outlawed children under ten years of age from entering the arena. Furthermore, no child between ten and fifteen years of age would be permitted to witness the battle unless accompanied by a chaperon of mature age.

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193 “Fight Film Men will Bow to Law,” Chicago Tribune, July 8 1910, 5.
194 IBID
The seeds were planted by implementing rules barring children from viewing boxing matches. The motive behind the movement of suppressing fight films was clear in that they ignored the concept of simply barring children. Another avenue of thought worth pursuing, but avoided, was to advocate restraint from the public to avoid watching the fight film. Instead of modeling Tex Rickards’ regulations as a point of departure, and to establish concrete laws of admittance at a restrictive age, advocates against boxing moving pictures went for the jugular, attempting to ban the fight film industry entirely.

Ironically, neither Major Sylvester nor the Christian coalitions had made such an adamant stance against fight films when Jack Johnson defeated other white contenders. It was only after the fact that Johnson had eliminated all white contenders. There was no one else left in the public’s consciousness that posed an imminent threat to Johnson. Johnson had ravaged through great white hopes one by one until he exhausted all options white Americans had.

The United Society of Christian Endeavor was not the sole Christian representative voice in regards to the banning of fight pictures. There were Christian ministers that favored the fight pictures, although they happened to be black. The *Baltimore Afro American Ledger* in their July 23 1910 edition, reported in their article, “Ministers Favor Fight Pictures,” that, “The ministers conference, which is made up of pastors of the A.M.E. churches of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and New York, at a meeting held refused to indorse [sic] a resolution favoring the suppression of Johnson-Jeffries fight pictures.”196 One can then argue that proposed bans on fight pictures were due to racial prejudice of the outcome rather than on grounds of immorality.197

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DOUBLE STANDARDS – *CLANSMAN*

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Major Sylvester stated, “The display of the pictures would… renew the hostile feeling on the part of many white men.”198 In voicing his concerns over possible future bloodbaths between races, Major Sylvester won the support of many African Americans. Many blacks supported Sylvester, upholding the backing given to him by District Commissioners across the nation. African Americans felt assured that if fight pictures were to be barred in theaters on the grounds of inciting race riots and inflamed the passions of those who attended against another class of people, then certainly on the same grounds such plays as Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman* would be barred from the same theatres as being more harmful than beneficial.199

Thomas Dixon authored *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* in 1905, and shortly thereafter adapted his book into a play. *The Clansman* later inspired D.W. Griffith’s groundbreaking silent film, *The Birth of a Nation*, released in 1915. *The Clansman* associates blacks with treachery and incompetence, while depicting black characters in highly offensive stereotypes. Dixon’s portrayal of blacks, reduced individuals to a series of physical characteristics described in bestial terms, or to flawed personality traits.200 However, Major Sylvester’s responded to African American’s desire to bar the *Clansman*:

As to plays, wider latitude is allowed than to moving picture shows. From a police and legal standpoint we are at a disadvantage to reach the theatrical plays. They create but limited feeling because they are confined to a limited area… and the more intelligent stay away. Any play that would be condemned and held non-presentable by a jury of twelve law-abiding citizens would be immediately suppressed.

As to the Johnson-Jeffries pictures, the manly spirit should not be deprived the boy – he should be trained in proper athletics and the art of self-defense, but it is not necessary to incite one part of our people against another to accomplish this.201

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Major Sylvester’s point was well taken. Encourage the sport of boxing and the art of self-defense but discourage interracial boxing. As for Sylvester’s take on plays creating “limited feelings because they are confined to a limited area,” is confusing when compared to pugilism. If Sylvester is to be taken by his word, then boxing should create even less feelings due to being confined to a ring much smaller in dimension than any stage in a theater.

Major Sylvester’s true intentions were unraveling in front of Americans and it could not have sat well with African Americans. Jack Johnson’s victory had created yet another double standard. The double standard was revealed by Sylvester’s inactions to ban *The Clansman*, which by all accounts fit the criteria established in banning fight films.

Afro-American newspapers detested the whole affair, declaring inactions of banning *The Clansman* showed inconsistency of the rankest nature. When *The Clansman* was staged a few years back, doors of every theater in the country were thrown open welcoming the racist spectacle. Billboards were covered with pictures that were created to inflame hate towards blacks. However, “no city forbade the show being exhibited, but when a Negro prize fighter defeats a white prize fighter, a great howl is set up about the race riots, race domination and the like.”202

Although real life scenarios linger in the public’s consciousness and hits human emotions harder than fictional tales, the dichotomy between *The Clansman* and the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries match was set so far apart in scope in relation to fact and fiction. Plays and movies are scripted, thus their intent is rehearsed by pushing a pencil to incite hate, then acted out for visual representation. Boxing matches are set up pitting one man against another in an experiment to see who would outlast, out finish, or outland the other. The actions encompassed within pugilism are impromptu and unscripted; hence, the hatred that brews is in direct correlation to which fighter a

member in the audience is rooting against. The audience experience is very different in a scripted play or movie. The writer is at liberty to frame characters to be loved or despised, in essence a universal appeal or dislike is branded. In a boxing match, the audience experience is different in that there is no predisposed hero and villain. The roles of hero and villain were administered through a racial prejudice that witnessed a black man whip a white man.

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The works of Major Sylvester along with a multitude of Christian coalitions in favor of suppression of boxing moving pictures created a domino effect on politicians whom one by one followed suit and banned the display of such films in their respective cities and states. The New York Times proudly boasted in their July 7 1910 edition by entitling an article, “Fight-Picture Ban is now Widespread.” It took just two days to widely ban the fight film nationwide, the two main culprits: Fears of race riots and objections on moral grounds. The Chicago Tribune ran a similar article, “More Cities Bar Fight Pictures.” The article reports that the following states of Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Texas, and Virginia all chose to ban the film.

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BANNING JACK JOHNSON

The banning of fight films spawned another movement. Instead of simply banning the reproduction of Jack Johnson’s victory over Jim Jeffries, certain cities pushed the envelope even further, attempting to ban Johnson altogether. Banning the appearance of Johnson in vaudeville exhibitions as well were in evidence, “(Johnson) will not be permitted to perform in Washington, D.C.”203 Meanwhile, authorities in Chicago, the adopted hometown of Johnson, refused to allow a

reception for Johnson staged by black citizens. To further illustrate the disfavor of Jack Johnson, not only was there a movement to ban vaudeville performances but a “protest against the appearance in this city (Washington D.C.) of Jack Johnson was made today to the District Commissioners, following a special meeting of the Pastors’ Federation.” It looked as though that the fight films was just a drop in the bucket in banning Johnson. Johnson was under the cross hairs of white Americans as Christian Pastors were protesting not only his films and vaudeville performances, but also his very existence in their cities.

Different cities took different approaches. Mayor Cutchin of Roanoke Virginia proclaimed that he would not interfere with the exhibition of the fight film, however the Mayor agreed with movie theaters to ban admission to African Americans. Banning blacks from watching the prizefight made little sense in inciting race violence, except to deny blacks a chance to watch a black man triumph.

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CRITICS OF SUPPRESSION OF FIGHT FILMS, THE LAW

There were critics of the works of Major Sylvester and his movement to suppress boxing moving pictures. The greatest critic, yet ignored, was the law. It was lawful to produce and showcase fight films. The great debate burdening the shoulders of politicians was whether to abide by the laws of the judicial system or succumb to pressures from the public and ban the reproduction of Jack Johnson’s victory.

Mayor Gaynor of New York City first announced that he would not make any effort to prevent the exhibition of the pictures. Gaynor added that he had not the right to stop the pictures

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any more than he had to stop the publication of stories of the fight. Gaynor, prompted by public and media pressures, reiterated his views on the proposed ban on the fight films: “I see it is said that I have decided not to interfere,” he addressed reporters as he tried to clarify what he believed to be a misunderstanding by the press on his attitude in regard to the motion pictures of the Johnson-Jeffries fight. “I have decided no such thing and have said no such thing. The question is not what I would like to do, but of what is the law. I shall follow the law. I cannot do as I please. As I said from the steps of the City Hall on the Fourth, this government is one of law, not of men.”

Mayor Busse of Chicago and the cities Chief of Police Steward also abided the law and stated that they would not interfere. Chief Steward spoke regarding the pictures:

It appears to me that Major Sylvester’s action in Washington is far-fetched. I am not a member of the association of police chiefs and do not know what their actions is based on. Personally, I should favor the barring of the picture displays from Chicago, but moving picture exhibitions of prize fights have not been taboed in the past and I see no reason why the pictures of the Jeffries-Johnson fight should be discriminated against.

Mayor Busse added that fight pictures never had been barred before and that he could not stop the exhibition simply because it showed a white man being knocked out by a black man.

The actions or inactions of the Mayors of New York and Chicago exhibited that other political leader’s actions to bar fight films was bordering on anarchy. Mayor Gaynor and Busse had the law in their defense, but somehow somewhere the law forgot to protect Jack Johnson.

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RESPONSE TO ANTI-FIGHT FILM MOVEMENT

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Afro-American newspapers reported on the hypocrisy surrounding the suppression of the boxing moving pictures. Their main agenda was to point out the double standard, in that if the white man, Jim Jeffries, had won, the moving pictures would have been shown and celebrated. Afro-American newspapers blasted the contingency attempting to suppress boxing moving pictures calling their actions childish.

Lester A. Walton of the *New York Age* referred to the anti-fight picture movement as the “most childish and idiotic crusade that has been inaugurated for some time.” Walton’s next point was the central argument posed by Afro-American newspapers on the matter, when he argued, “Had Jeffries won there would have been no opposition to showing the pictures, but as Johnson came out victorious the cry “Don’t show the fight pictures” was set up which now extends as far as India.”

N. Barnett Dodson, writing on behalf of the *Baltimore Afro American Ledger*, agreed on the childish claims, adding, “As to the legal suppression of the moving pictures showing the fighters in action, it is absurd and looks more like child’s play than the work of grownups.”

Afro-American newspapers in an effort to strengthen their argument took a page out of Major Sylvester’s playbook and played to the ‘other’ race. Although Afro-American newspapers did not have the luxury of printing their agenda-laced articles in mainstream newspapers, they did however, reprint articles found in mainstream newspapers that catered to their message in their own publications. The message, they believed, sounded more accommodating to the white race if heard from the mouth of a member of their own race.

Republished in the *New York Age* originally printed in the daily mainstream newspaper, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, came a letter from a white Cleveland minister. The Age prefaced the

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letter by first commenting on the aimless and prejudiced climate regarding the exhibition of the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries moving pictures. Christian ministers such as those belonging to the United Society of Christian Endeavor were viewed by Afro-American newspapers as irate and insensible. The *Age* then introduced the minister’s letter as a “calm and sane latter.”

In the letter, the minister scorns his white race, as exhibiting an attitude in which he insists is unworthy of the race. Although the minister addressed his disfavor with the brute nature of pugilism, he stated his reason to voice his opinion on the fight because he believed, “there is in this matter an issue more serious than the fight itself. It is the race prejudice that it reveals.”

As a minister, his letter read like a sermon. His congregation, which resides in Cleveland, was stretched as far east as New York with the aid of the *New York Age* enlarging his audience. His aim was to guide white American’s moral compass by rationally speaking to them in direct opposition to Major Sylvester and the movement to suppress boxing moving pictures. He argued that prizefights have “always tended to arouse the brute in man,” then questioned, “but why should the matter be treated differently when a Negro participates?”

The minister answers his own question citing that racial prejudice is a contemptible passion. He reports that white men have been the great offenders in post-fight disturbances. Then describes those involved in disturbing the peace as “men who are not sportsmanlike enough to wish to see the better boxer win.”

The reason the *New York Age* reprinted the minister’s letter was because he echoed their exact sentiments regarding boxing moving pictures: “If the white man had won, the white man would have exulted, the Negro would have borne defeat, and the pictures would have been

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shown. The disgrace is to the white man whose mean intolerance belies his boasted
superiority.”216

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On July 31 1912 less than four weeks after the Jack Johnson – Jim Jeffries fight,
Congress voted to prohibit the importation of fight films into the country and their transportation
across state borders.217 Another blatant act of hypocrisy clearly aimed at suppressing Jack
Johnson.

216 IBID
217 Gilmore, 90.
Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

Jack Johnson held the world’s heavyweight championship title from December 26 1908 to April 5 1915. Johnson in the process became the most recognized black man in the world and perhaps the most recognized man on the planet. In his prime, Johnson could not be defeated in the ring. In a time when newspapers controlled information; editors and journalists framed Johnson’s bout as a battle of racial supremacy, leading many whites to despise Johnson’s persona and accomplishments as Johnson would crush his white adversaries. The media’s propaganda led to an onslaught of battles waged against Johnson outside the boxing ring. Race rioting brewed across the nation as race antipathy ran deep as 100,000 to 150,000 words were written per day addressing white heroes and a specific black villain.

White Americans understood that Jack Johnson could not be beaten in the ring so they made Johnson taste defeat in the courtroom with the inception of the Mann Act. Johnson would be forced into exile. When Johnson came back to the United States, he did so without the world’s heavyweight championship, having lost it at the age of 37. Johnson would be blackballed along with every black boxer from there forth. It was not until Joe Louis that another black man was allowed to contend for the heavyweight championship. Louis obtained the title from “Cinderella Man” James J. Braddock on June 22 1937, an accomplishment made possible by Johnson paving the way.

To this day Jack Johnson leaves a legacy as the first black world champion under the Marquis of Queensbury rules. In 1971, Nat Fleisher, editor and founder of Ring Magazine as well as a member of the Boxing Hall of Fame, named Johnson as the greatest heavyweight of all time. Standing the test of time, Johnson’s name rarely ever fell off prominent boxing historians list of
top ten heavyweights of all time. Bert Randolph Sugar, who took ownership of *Ring Magazine* in 1979, placed Johnson fourth on his top ten greatest list of heavyweights in 1991. In 1997 editor in chief of the *Ring Magazine* at the time, Steven Farhood, gave Johnson his third slot in the greatest heavyweights of all time. Finally in 1997, Entertainment & Sports Programming Network, or simply cable channel ESPN the worldwide leader in sports, named Jack Johnson as the fourth greatest heavyweight champion to ever lace a pair of gloves.

On June 10 1946, Jack Johnson at the age of sixty-eight died from injuries he received during a car accident thirty miles north of Raleigh North Carolina, in Franklinton North Carolina. He was survived by his wife Irene Marie Pineau Johnson, whom had his body buried beside Etta Duryea in Graceland Cemetery in Chicago Illinois.

Up to the date of this thesis being published, there are ongoing discussions and preparations led by Arizona Senator John McCain, to present to Congress a formal reprieve for Jack Johnson’s Mann Act conviction.
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