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## Article Title: Heavyweight Champion Jack Johnson: His Omaha Image, A Public Reaction Study

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Article Summary: Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight boxing champion, played an important role in 20<sup>th</sup> century America, both as a sports figure and as a pawn in race relations. This article seeks to "correct" his popular image by presenting Omaha's public response to his public and private life as reflected in the press.

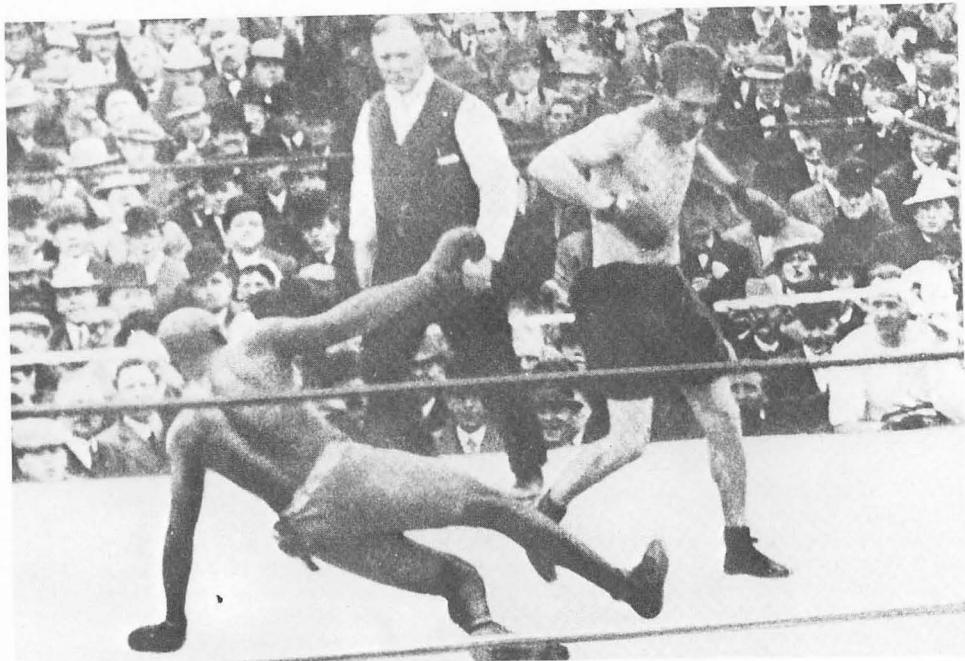
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Photographs / Images: Jack Johnson and Stanley Ketchel in the ring at Colma, California, 1909; Jack Johnson signs for the "Battle of the Century" at Hoboken, New Jersey. Others: George Little, James Jeffries, Tex Rickard; Jack Johnson and his handlers being stopped by Chicago police; James J Jeffries and Jack Johnson at Reno, Nevada, 1910; Union Station, Omaha, 1910, where fans greeted Jackson, the first Negro heavyweight boxing champion



*Jack Johnson and Stanley Ketchel in the ring at Colma, California, on October 16, 1909. Johnson KO'ed Ketchel in the 12th round.*



*Heavyweight champion Jack Johnson signs for the "Battle of the Century" at Hoboken, New Jersey, 1909. George Little, seated in front with cane, is flanked by Johnson and Johnson's opponent, James Jeffries. Tex Rickard stands on left in light suit.*

## **HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION JACK JOHNSON: HIS OMAHA IMAGE, A PUBLIC REACTION STUDY**

*By Randy Roberts*

Eldridge Cleaver, the once controversial black leader whose attitudes have fluctuated from hatred to praise for America, once examined the relationship between boxing and society. "The boxing ring," he said, "is the ultimate focus of masculinity in America, the two-fisted testing ground of manhood, and the heavyweight champion, as a symbol, is the real Mr. America."<sup>1</sup> Throughout the history of 20th century America, the heavyweight champion has provided a vicarious outlet for a wide range of emotions. The American people could love or hate a black champion like Jack Johnson or Muhammad Ali, depending on their personal predilections. And a bout such as the one between black Joe Louis and white Max Schmeling could inflame intense national rivalries to the degree that everyone from Adolph Hitler to Franklin D. Roosevelt to the common man felt he had something at stake.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps Budd Schulberg came closest to translating this relationship between the heavyweight champion and society into words when he wrote:

We have a theory about the heavyweight championship, that somehow each of the great figures to hold the title manages to sum the spirit of his time. All the great ones are not merely the best pugs of their day but demigods larger than life. It may all be accidental, but the main currents of their period either shape their personalities, or their personalities seem wondrously to reflect their times.<sup>3</sup>

There can be no doubt that the heavyweight champion has, as a symbol, played an important role in American popular culture.

John Lardner thought the impact of Jack Johnson on the popular feelings of America was sharper than President William Howard Taft's.<sup>4</sup> Yet, boxing, for the most part, has not received attention from serious historians.<sup>5</sup>

This paper views professional boxing as a facet of American society rather than as a part of a circumscribed legend. In particular it deals with the reaction of Omahans to Jack Johnson as reflected in the press from 1908 to 1915, the years the black heavyweight held the title.

The importance of a newspaper's policy lies in what it reveals in general about the attitudes of society as a whole. As Harry Edwards observes:

Public opinion studies have shown time and time again that people will not buy or read anything with which they disagree. Americans are no exception. We tend to read only what reinforces our own attitudes. Newspaper reporters, editors, and publishers are keenly aware of this tendency. They have to be. For most newspapers operate to make money.<sup>6</sup>

Working from this premise, it might be expected that the editorial policy of the Omaha press in regard to Jack Johnson tended to reflect the social and cultural values of Omaha, an overwhelmingly white community.<sup>7</sup> By tapping community sentiment a newspaper reaction study can contribute valuable information for understanding the social milieu of a given locality and period.

Although Johnson was the first black man to win the heavyweight championship, he was by no means the first of his race to participate in prizefighting. Quite to the contrary, black slaves were among the first Americans to become involved in pugilistic contests. Pugilism was probably transported to America from England by wealthy sons of southern planters who visited England in the 18th century as part of their education.<sup>8</sup> And the first prize fights in America were between slaves, whose masters pitted them against each other for the purpose of betting and amusement. While cruel and debasing much in the manner of cockfighting, fights provided a certain amount of freedom for a handful of Negroes with uncommonly strong arms and extraordinarily hard heads.

One was Tom Molineaux, who was granted freedom after winning a considerable sum of money for his master, Squire Molineaux.<sup>9</sup> Unable to make any financial gains at his trade in America, Molineaux made his way to England, where boxing was

looked upon as respectable and profitable.<sup>10</sup> After defeating a few highly regarded English "pugs," Molineaux was matched with the English heavyweight champion, Tom Cribb. On December 10, 1810, the two fought the first international and interracial championship bout. The result proved ominous for future black pugilists. In the twenty-third round after Molineaux landed a knockout blow, the crowd turned ugly. Instead of being proclaimed the victor, Molineaux was attacked at ringside by thugs who broke his fingers and "tightened their own around his bull-like neck."<sup>11</sup> When Cribb had sufficiently recovered, the bout was continued, and Molineaux, weakened both physically and psychologically, was easily defeated by his revitalized foe.<sup>12</sup> Cribb thus emerged as the defender of both race and nation. As for Molineaux's race, it would have to wait almost one hundred years to see a Negro wear the heavyweight crown.

In the late 19th century, when the modern heavyweight championship was established, white pugilists began proclaiming a "color line." This line originated when John L. Sullivan issued his famous 1892 challenge to fight all contenders: "In this challenge, I include all fighters—first come, first served—who are white. I will not fight a Negro. I never have and never shall."<sup>13</sup> And the Boston Strong Boy never did. The tradition of drawing the "color line" was followed by Sullivan's successors—James J. Corbett, Robert Fitzsimmons, James J. Jeffries, and Marvin Hart. Indeed, the idea of a black fighting a white repulsed so many that "loyal southerner" Henry Long stopped an 1897 bout between Joe Green, a Negro, and a white fighter who fought under the name of "The Swede."<sup>14</sup> "The idea of niggers fighting white men," he exclaimed! "Why, if that darned scoundrel would beat that white boy the niggers would never stop gloating over it, and, as it is, we have enough trouble with them."<sup>15</sup>

During this period of blatant racism, "when the Ku Klux Klan and other anti-black organizations and individuals ranged the swamps, bayous, and mountaintops of 'Dixie' as well as other places," a libertine individual by the name of Jack (Li'l Artha') Johnson of Galveston, Texas, launched his fistic career.<sup>16</sup> In his years as a fighter, he defeated almost all his white opponents and openly flouted a good portion of the laws, customs, and mores of white society.

On February 23, 1906, Tommy Burns, a French-Canadian,



*Heavyweight champion Jack Johnson and his handlers stopped by Chicago police for speeding shortly before beginning training to fight James Jeffries in 1910.*



*James J. Jeffries and Jack Johnson at Reno, Nevada, on July 4, 1910. Johnson knocked out Jeffries in the 15th round to retain the heavyweight championship.*

won the heavyweight crown from Marvin Hart in a vapid twenty-round fight in Los Angeles. Unlike the previous champion, Burns did not immediately draw the "color line," inviting a challenge from a black fighter. And at this time some of the best heavyweights were black. Forced to fight each other, such pugilists as Sam Langford, Joe Jeannette, Sam McVey, Jim Barry, Jack Johnson and others developed into the skilled boxers in the early 20th century.<sup>17</sup> Thus, when Burns left the possibility of an interracial championship bout open, Jack Johnson came forth with a challenge.

Johnson did not get his chance immediately. Indeed, he had to chase Burns to Australia before he received his opportunity. In an arena at Ruschcutters Bay, Sidney, on the day after Christmas, 1908, Johnson was given his chance to fight for the heavyweight championship of the world. The bout itself was unspectacular. Johnson knocked Burns down in the first round, toyed with him for the next twelve, and finished him in the fourteenth round.<sup>18</sup> In evaluating Burns, Johnson said, "He is the easiest man I ever met. I could have put him away quicker, but I wanted to punish him. I had my revenge."<sup>19</sup>

In certain cities the bout was seen as a minor catastrophe. A New York paper reported that "never before in the history of the prize ring has such a crisis arisen as that which faces the followers of the game tonight."<sup>20</sup> However, the Omaha press did not view the result of the fight in such cataclysmic terms. Probably it agreed with Jack London, who said about Burns, "He is a white man and so am I. Naturally I want the white man to win."<sup>21</sup> And the *Omaha Herald* sports editor wrote:

The Canadian fought a game battle and showed indomitable pluck, but was no match for the big Texas black. . . . Not since the days of James J. Corbett has the prize ring seen so perfect a boxer as Johnson. Long and lithe, he is as graceful as a dancing master and as true as an arrow in placing his blows.<sup>22</sup>

Unhappy, but resigned, the *Omaha Sunday Bee* commented, "Well, Br'er Johnson is an American anyway."<sup>23</sup>

Omaha writers were somewhat concerned by the ideological consequences of Johnson's victory. They were concerned about the lasting effect that the fight might have upon the "colored" community. It was fine that blacks had a great holiday in Omaha, but it was feared the celebrations could be carried too far.<sup>24</sup> The *Omaha Daily News* found something ominous in the following statement by Edward Morris, a black Chicago lawyer:

"Johnson's victory demonstrates the physical superiority of the black over the Caucasian. The basis of mental superiority in most men is physical superiority. If the negro can raise his mental standard to his physical eminence, some day he will be a leader among men. And Ethiopia shall come to her own."<sup>25</sup>

In the South it was reported that Johnson's victory would cause more blacks to take up prizefighting as an occupation, which in turn would mean "high priced negro labor for the cotton fields next season."<sup>26</sup> Thus, Johnson's victory might cause some disruption in the economy and traditional race relations.

While Morris discussed his "superiority" theory, and while southerners complained about the rising cost of labor, white American boxing enthusiasts were waiting for their ace-in-the-hole, James J. Jeffries, to emerge from retirement to teach Johnson a lesson. At ringside during the Burns bout, Jack London had written: "One thing remains. Jeffries must emerge from his alfalfa farm and remove that smile from Johnson's face. Jeff, it's up to you!"<sup>27</sup> Hence, when Johnson defeated Stanley Ketchel, the over-matched white middleweight, it was of no real concern to white partisans. Indeed, it was the opinion of many "students of the game" that Johnson would be no match for Jeffries; the boxing oracles felt that if Jeffries had "one-half his old-time form, [he would] clean up the negro in jig time."<sup>28</sup>

However, many boxing fans in Omaha expressed doubt with the opinion of the "students of the game" after they saw Johnson in action. On his way to San Francisco, the originally chosen site of the Johnson-Jeffries bout, Johnson stopped in Omaha on the afternoon of April 22, 1910. Met at Union station by a crowd of between three thousand and five thousand, Johnson was treated to an ovation of the "most prodigious character." Somewhat surprised by the warm greeting, Johnsen's manager, George Little, acknowledged that Omaha was a "grandly broad-minded town."<sup>29</sup>

The next night, Johnson put on an impressive boxing exhibition at the Gayety Theatre. He parried the blows of sparring partners George Cotton and Marty Cutler and left both bloody and exhausted. With boxing over Johnson made a brief speech. He ended his informal talk by predicting that Omaha's Mayor Jim Dahlman would be the next governor of "Newbraska." The show was a complete success, "and about six out of every ten who watched the movements of the big black

champion [were] probably ready to bet their socks. . .that he [would beat] Jeff."<sup>30</sup>

Jeffries ended his seclusion on his western ranch. Urged on for psychological, patriotic, and even genetic reasons, he started the long, arduous process of getting his 320-pound body into condition to do battle for his race.<sup>31</sup> Events even took on a religious cast. The *Evening World-Herald* reported that the Colored Holiness Church of Hutchinson, Kansas, was going to hold special services to pray for Johnson.<sup>32</sup> In Omaha the Reverend H. E. Traile, pastor of the white First Baptist Church, sermonized on the bout. He picked the white man to win and felt that "every man with red blood in his veins should see Jim Jeffries regain the heavyweight championship from Jack Johnson at Reno July 4."<sup>33</sup>

Leading political figures took firm stands. Governor James Gillette of California indicated that there was no need to worry:

This Jeff-Johnson fight is simply a scheme to make a lot of money out of the credulity of the public. Anybody with the least sense knows the whites of this country won't allow Johnson or any other negro to win the world's championship from Jeffries. They just simply won't stand for it. Johnson knows that. He's no fool. He knows that to win that fight he would have to whip every white man at the ringside. So he has agreed to lay [*sic*] down for the money. Why, he would no more think of trying to knock Jeffries out than he would of trying to stop a bolt of lightning.<sup>34</sup>

Other sections of the country were not as sure. In the South local public officials and even congressmen "talked freely of the danger of the negroes having their heads turned by a victory for Johnson." One official feared that if Jeffries were defeated, young blacks would start "crowding white women off the sidewalks." One southern congressman, however, could justify a victory by Johnson. Said he:

It's hard for me to form an opinion. I think that a white man who would deliberately get in a ring to fight a negro deserves to be beaten to death. If Jeffries is defeated, most southerners will see he got what was coming to him."<sup>35</sup>

In Omaha the sports writers were pro-Jeffries. When Jeffries told Omaha sports writer Sandy Griswold that if he lost it would only be after the "hardest fight that has ever been fought in the heavyweight history," Griswold replied, "But he isn't going to beat you Jeff, so get that out of your head; don't entertain a suspicion of that sort."<sup>36</sup> The only question that remained was aptly stated by Omaha writer Max Balthazar:

Can the huge white man, the California grizzly. . .beat down the wonderful black and

restore to the Caucasians the crown of elemental greatness as measured by strength of blow, power of heart and being, and withal, that cunning or keenness that denotes mental as well as physical superiority?<sup>37</sup>

It is one of the ironies of history that such a magnificent build-up had to be wasted on such a horrendous fight. Johnson toyed with Jeffries in the ring while simultaneously carrying on a battle of lively repartee with Jeffries' handlers and ringside spectators outside the ring. The outcome was never in doubt; Johnson knocked out Jeffries in the fifteenth round. However, this was not the end of the fighting on that racially tempestuous July the Fourth, for no sooner had the Johnson-Jeffries fight ended than a wave of interracial rioting and violence swept the country.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, two blacks were killed by whites; in Houston, Texas, a white cut a black to death; in Roanoke, Virginia, six blacks were critically beaten; in Wilmington, Delaware, a group of blacks attacked a white and whites retaliated with a "lynching bee"; in Atlanta, Georgia, a black ran "amuck" with a knife; in Washington, D.C., two whites were fatally stabbed by blacks; in New York City, one black was beaten to death and scores were injured; in Pueblo, Colorado, thirty people were injured in a race riot; and in Shreveport, Louisiana, three blacks were killed by white assailants.<sup>38</sup> Scores of other incidents occurred across America.

Some of the rioting was provoked by individual acts. For example, in New York City, Nelson Turner, a black, was almost lynched for yelling to a crowd of whites: "We blacks put one over on you whites, and we're going to do more."<sup>39</sup> However, most of the rioting apparently was caused by whites' acts of revenge against blacks for the mauling Johnson gave Jeffries. The irritation caused by the defeat of Jeffries at the hand of a Negro "caused scores of street fights, negro hunts through the streets and outbreaks all through the night."<sup>40</sup> Omaha, which for the most part was untouched by racial confrontation, witnessed a third type of violence. For some unknown reason "Red" Dale shot and killed Henry Anderson in a quarrel over the Johnson-Jeffries bout,<sup>41</sup> and Rufus Coleman was killed by Eugene Jackson under similar circumstances. All of the men were black.<sup>42</sup>

While the Omaha press did not view the result of the Johnson-Burns fight in cataclysmic terms, it did see the

Johnson-Jeffries outcome as a major setback for race relations and boxing. In the realm of sports, Sandy Griswold wrote: "The calamitous event of yesterday sent a paralyzing thrill throughout the countries of the world."<sup>43</sup> Yet more serious damage was to be found in the field of race relations. An *Omaha Daily News* editorial stated: "In spite of occasional lynchings in the south, the social adjustment between the white and black races was coming to a better status when along came the Jeffries-Johnson prize fight and put the conditions back at least forty years."<sup>44</sup> The same editorial added that the white race would "probably manage to struggle along somehow in spite of the turn of events at Reno."<sup>45</sup> Thus, an editorial policy which was soft in 1908 was beginning to show definite signs of ossification by 1910.

Even though the Omaha press was hardening against Johnson, a complete metamorphosis was still three years away. While other cities and states banned the film of the Johnson-Jeffries bout, Omaha maintained a non-censorship policy. Elsewhere, within one day after the Reno bout, the legal machinery had been set in motion to prohibit the fight film. News of prohibition came from Texas, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Missouri, Maine, South Carolina, Virginia, Illinois, Arkansas, Michigan, Utah, Montana, Iowa, Washington, D.C., South Dakota, England, and South Africa.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, there now was considerable agreement with Governor William Burke of South Dakota when he said, "The fight pictures appeal only to the animal in man. I will join the movement to suppress them."<sup>47</sup> And most cities readily felt that Mayor E. S. Meals was correct when he said, "Harrisburg [Pennsylvania] has many colored people and. . .could not take any chances of disturbances."<sup>48</sup>

The people of Omaha, however, viewed the film controversy from a different perspective. They did not feel that the fight film needed to be prohibited from the city; their reasons varied. Chief of Police J. J. Donahue felt there was no danger of race riots because Omahans were "law abiding citizens" and Police Commissioner William F. Wappich saw no reasons to bar the film since there was really no prize fight, "only a fake."<sup>49</sup> Acting Mayor Frank L. Brucker took a more legal line: "I do not believe in moving pictures, as I think they ruin the morals of boys and girls, but I would not think it proper to stop the fight pictures and permit the other moving pictures to be shown."<sup>50</sup>

The most thoughtful and perceptive reason, however, came from an *Evening World-Herald* editorial:

If the moving pictures of the fight are to be prohibited, why not printed descriptions of the fight? And if prize fighting and representations thereof are to be thus. . .why not football? . . .those [cities and states] that have not taken action [to ban the film] may well hesitate lest they open the door too wide to the spirit of censorship.<sup>51</sup>

Consequently, Omaha, whether for petty or noble reasons, went against the national trend.

Between July, 1910, and September, 1912, Jack Johnson's name remained outside the limelight. In those two years he had only one fight, a lethargic nine-round win over "Fireman" Jim Flynn.<sup>52</sup> But starting in September, 1912, and continuing through January, 1913, his name became a regular feature on the front page of Omaha's papers. This was the period when Johnson's affairs with white women became a national issue. Chronologically, the time sequence went as follows: September 11, Johnson's first white wife, Etta Duryea, committed suicide; October, 1-7, Johnson was charged with the abduction of Lucille Cameron, a 19-year-old white girl from Minnesota; November 7, Johnson was charged with violating the Mann Act; November 20, the abduction charge was dropped after Miss Cameron refused to testify against Johnson; December 4, Johnson and Miss Cameron were married. These events more than Johnson's ring triumphs transformed the Omaha press attitude toward Johnson.<sup>53</sup>

Tragedy though it was, Etta Duryea's suicide was viewed by the Omaha press as an example of the basic incompatibility of the two races. The *Evening World-Herald* said the suicide only went to show "how sharp is the line that runs between the races."<sup>54</sup> The same editorial continued:

A tragedy that was one both figuratively and literally reminds us how limited was Jack Johnson's so-called "conquest of the white race." He whipped white competitors in the prize ring. He took the belt from the white champion, but he could not extend the conquest to those achievements that lie in the province of sentiment and affection.<sup>55</sup>

With this editorial, no doubt reflecting changing community attitudes, the transformation of Johnson's image was begun.

For some, the incident which left the deepest impression on the white public appeared to be Johnson's marriage to Lucille Cameron. The reaction to this event nationally can hardly be minimized. On the floor of Congress, Representative Seaborn A. Roddenberry of Georgia introduced an amendment to the U.S.

Constitution which, if adopted, would prevent interracial marriages. In an emotion-packed speech, Roddenberry said:

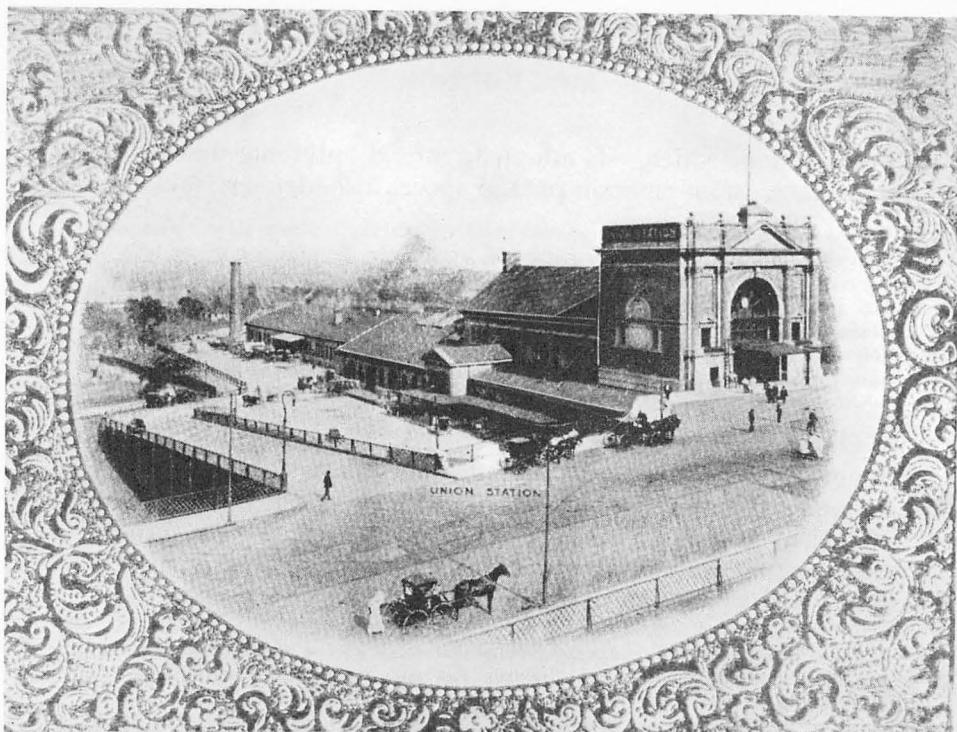
No brutality, no infamy, no degradation in all the years of southern slavery possessed such villainous character and such atrocious qualities as the provision of the laws of Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, and other states which allow the marriage of the negro Jack Johnson to a woman of the Caucasian strain [Applause]. ...Intermarriage between whites and blacks is repulsive and averse to every sentiment of pure American spirit. It is abhorrent and repugnant to the very principles of a pure Saxon government... . Let us uproot and exterminate now this debasing, ultrademoralizing, un-American, and inhuman leprosy.<sup>56</sup>

Omaha writers were, however, not as vociferous as the congressman from Georgia, but they did not let Johnson's actions pass unnoticed or uncondemned. After Johnson was convicted of a violation of the Mann Act, which forbids transporting women across state lines for immoral purposes, Sandy Griswold wrote:

The wire brought the glad tidings last evening that at last a white hope had succeeded in landing a knockout wallop on Jack Johnson. His name is Uncle Sam and he not only knocked the big black blackguard out, but knocked him in also—into the pen, and it is to be hoped for the limit—ten years.<sup>57</sup>

Johnson's escape from the authorities and self-imposed exile from the United States brought scathing comment from the Omaha newspapers. Again Griswold became the most vocal of the anti-Johnson faction. When Johnson tried to earn money by wrestling exhibition matches, Griswold, who was becoming increasingly bitter toward the champion, wrote that Johnson was "tryin' to pick a quarrel with a wrestler. Now weddyeknowabout that? We could almost pity the poor old crooked coon."<sup>58</sup> An editorial "policy" which had been moderate in 1908 was strained by 1910 and openly hostile in 1913.

What remained of the Johnson story after 1913 was anticlimactic. On April 5, 1915, under the broiling Havana, Cuba, sun, Jess Willard knocked out Johnson in twenty-six rounds. Both the *Evening World-Herald* and the *Omaha Daily News* trumpeted the result by printing extras.<sup>59</sup> However, there were no editorials devoted to the fight. Omaha by that time, like the rest of the nation, was devoting most of its editorial space to the war in Europe. Yet the newspapers probably agreed with Robert Fitzsimmons' statement: "I am glad as I can be that the title has come back to the white race."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the title of heavyweight champion of the world had returned to the white race, and there it would stay for twenty-two years. One of



*Union Station, Omaha (1910), where an estimated three to five thousand fans greeted Jack Johnson, the first Negro heavyweight champion.*

Willard's first statements after he defeated Johnson was that he would fight no more Negroes.<sup>61</sup> He never did. And the next six champions—Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, Max Schmeling, Jack Sharkey, Primo Carnera, and Max Baer—fought no Negroes either. It would take another crisis in the heavyweight division before a black would again fight for the title.

It is beyond question that Jack Johnson, both as a sports figure and as a pawn in race relations, played an important role in 20th century America. His name was found as often on the front page of a newspaper as on the sports pages. By the late 1920's the king of the African enclave of Swaziland told a friend that he knew the names of only two people in the western world—Marcus Garvey, the black nationalist, and Jack Johnson.<sup>62</sup>

As with many of America's super-athletes, black and white, the popular image of Johnson, resulting in part from fiction broadcast as fact, does not correlate with the truth. For example, the play, *The Great White Hope*, presents the white American reaction to Johnson as strongly against him as early as 1908. By

using Omaha as a case study, this distorted view of Johnson and his white detractors is somewhat modified. It was only after Johnson openly shattered the taboo against interracial marriage that the Omaha press turned against him. And that was in 1913, not 1908.

The fact that there was no strong Omaha reaction at first against Johnson does not mean that the black champion was accepted by most whites, for he was not. During this period of racial instability it was difficult for many whites to accept the racial implication of a black heavyweight champion. Race, Social Darwinism, traditional mores, social stability—Johnson threatened them all during his career. The American public expected an athletic champion to be molded on the Greek ideal. Johnson was black. True, he was gregarious and casual, and he had a certain amount of charm. As a fighter he was beautiful to watch, graceful, and won without real effort because he was superior to most fighters of his era. But he lacked modesty; in his demeanor could be detected more than just a trace of conceit. And he was black. This was not a period in American history when such a man could be accepted.

## NOTES

1. Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1968), 85.
2. Budd Schulberg, *Loser and Still Champion: Muhammad Ali* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971), 23-27; John C. Betts, "Organized Sports in Industrial America," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1951), 530, quoting Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf*: "There is no sport that, like this [boxing], promotes the spirit of aggression in the same measure, demands determination quick as lightning, educates the body for steel-like versatility. . . If our entire intellectual upper class had not been educated so exclusively in teaching refined manners and if instead of this it had learned boxing thoroughly, then a German revolution by pimps, deserters and similar rabble would never have been possible." An illustration of the reaction in the black community to a Joe Louis victory can be found in an article by Richard Wright reprinted in Paul Jacobs, Saul Landau, and Eve Pell, editors, *To Serve the Devil, Volume I: Natives and Slaves* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1971), 178-182.
3. Schulberg, 19-20.
4. John Lardner, *White Hopes and Other Tigers* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1951), 13.
5. There are some notable exceptions to this statement: Al-Tony Gilmore, Budd Schulberg, Norman Mailer, John Lardner, Rex Lardner, and Eldridge Cleaver.
6. Harry Edwards, "Sports and the Mass Media," as reprinted in *Sport in the Socio-Cultural Process*, Marie M. Hart, editor (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown

Company, 1972), 365; Leonard Shecter, *The Locks* (New York: Warner Paper Back Library, 1969), 131.

7. U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. *XIII Census of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 68. The 1910 census listed 119,580 whites and 4,426 blacks living in Omaha.

8. John Durant, *The Heavyweight Champions* (4th ed.; New York: Hastings House, 1971), 11; Rex Lardner, *The Legendary Champions* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972), 21; Nat Fleischer, *Black Dynamite: The Story of the Negro in the Prize Ring from 1782 to 1938*, I (New York: Ring Record Shop, 1938), chapter 2.

9. Fleischer, 33-35. Molineaux is often credited with being the first American to take up pugilism as a profession. However, Fleischer notes that it was Tom's father Zachary who founded pugilism in the colonies.

10. In America boxing was considered a sport for only the lower classes, and there were no interracial bouts.

11. Schulberg, 12.

12. For slightly differing opinions on the bout, see Lardner, 25-26; Durant, 12-14; Pierce Egan, *Boxiana; or Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism; From the Days of the Renowned Broughton and Slack, To the Heroes of the Present Milling Era* (Leicester, England: Vance Harvey Publishing, 1971; first issued in 1812), 360-371.

13. Betts, 602.

14. Dale A. Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 1850-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 183. Somers does an excellent job of illustrating how Jim Crow laws affected boxing.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Al-Tony Gilmore, "Jack Johnson: A Magnificent Black Anachronism of the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Winter, 1973), 36.

17. One can get an example of how black fighters were forced to fight among each other by reviewing Sam Langford's record. Sam fought Joe Jeanette fourteen times, Sam McVey fifteen times, Jim Barry twelve times, Jeff Clark eleven times, and Harry Wills an unbelievable twenty-three times.

18. *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, December 26, 1908, 1. Actually, the bout was stopped by the police to prevent further injury to Burns.

19. *Omaha Daily News*, December 27, 1908, Sports Section, 2.

20. *Ibid.*, Sports Section, 1.

21. Schulberg, 17.

22. *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, December 26, 1908, 5.

23. *Omaha Sunday Bee*, December 27, 1908, Sports Section, 1.

24. *Omaha Daily News*, "Johnson's Victory Makes Negroes Glad," December 27, 1908, Sport Section, 1. (When an article title is reflective of a certain attitude or mood, it will be included in the footnote.)

25. *Ibid.*, "Negroes Celebrate Johnson's Victory; White Waiters Serve Them."

26. *Ibid.*, December 18, 1908, 6.

27. Schulberg, 18.

28. *Omaha Daily News*, "If Negro Shows No More Class, Its Easy For Jeff," October 17, 1908, Sports Section, 1.

29. *Omaha World-Herald*, April 23, 1910, 8.

30. *Ibid.*, April 24, 1910, 1.

31. Lardner, 143.

32. *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, "Will Send Up Prayers That Johnson May Win," July 2, 1910, 1.

33. *Omaha Daily News*, "Baptist Minister Picks Jeff To Win," July 2, 1910, 6.

34. *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, June 3, 1910, 16. Gillette later denied that he stigmatized the fight as a frame-up.

35. *Omaha Daily News*, "Should Jack Win, May Cause War in South," July 2, 1910, 6. All the quotes from the South came from this one article.

36. *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, July 1, 1910, 11.
37. *Omaha Daily News*, July 3, 1910, Sports Section, 1.
38. *Omaha Daily News*, July 5, 1910, 1-2; *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, July 5, 1910, 1; *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 5, 1910.
39. *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, "Race Riot Follows Prize Ring Victory," July 5, 1910, 1.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Omaha Daily News*, "Negro Killed As Result Of Big Fight," July 5, 1910, 1.
42. *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, "Killing Follows Celebration Over Late Reno Battle," July 6, 1910, 1.
43. *Ibid.*, 9.
44. *Omaha Daily News*, "Playing With Fire," July 9, 1910, 4.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Omaha Daily News*, July 6, 1910, 1; *Ibid.*, July 7, 1910, 1-2; *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 7, 1; *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, July 6, 1910, 1; July 9, 1910, 10.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1910, 1.
49. *Ibid.*, "Omaha Officials Will Not Bar Fight Pictures," July 6, 1910, 1.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, July 7, 1910, 8.
52. *Ibid.*, July 5, 1912, 11.
53. The national impact of the events are covered in Al-Tony Gilmore's "Jack Johnson and White Women: The National Impact," *The Journal of Negro History*, LVIII (January, 1973), 18-38.
54. *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, "A Lonely Woman," September 13, 1912, 12.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Congressional Record*, 62nd Congress, 3rd session, December 11, 1912, 502-503.  
Also see Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 88.
57. *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, May 14, 1913, 10.
48. *Ibid.*, December 1, 1913, 8.
59. *Ibid.*, April 5, 1915, 1; *Omaha Daily News*, April 5, 1915, 1.
60. *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, April 7, 1915, 8.
61. *Ibid.*, "Willard Draws Color Line," April 6, 1915, 12.
62. David Edmund Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), 207.