Library of Congress.

Jack Johnson

Jeremy I. Levitt

Jack Arthur Johnson, nicknamed the "Galveston Giant," was the best heavyweight boxer of his generation and arguably in the history of boxing. He was the first African American heavyweight champion of the world, holding the title between 1908 and 1915. His boxing record was exceptional, including 113 official fights with 79 wins (44 by knockout), 12 draws, and 8 losses.

Johnson was not only an African American sports icon but perhaps more important, an American social icon who used boxing and fervent individualism to challenge white supremacy in the United States and beyond. He challenged the philosophy and practice of racial superiority of whites over nonwhites as expressed through state-sanctioned violence and the repressive control of America's sociopolitical, legal, and economic system. He was one of the country's most well-traveled, wealthy, and successful citizens. Johnson's life and legacy unveiled the myth of white superiority and consequently threatened the foundational premise upon which white supremacy rested. He single-handedly forced whites throughout the world to confront their racist misconceptions of blacks and defied the character of race relations in the United States; Johnson is consequently one of the most famous, infamous, and influential figures of the twentieth century.

Jack Johnson was born in Galveston, Texas, to Henry and Tina (Tiny) Johnson on March 31, 1878, one year after the remaining Union troops withdrew from the former Confederacy. Johnson's parents were born into slavery: Henry was born on a plantation in Maryland or Virginia in 1838 and was known for amusing his masters as a feared bare-knuckle exhibition boxer, and Tiny was born in North or South Carolina. Although the exact year of her birth is not known, she was younger than Henry.

Henry Johnson served in the U.S. Army's 38th Colored Infantry as a civilian teamster servant and likely as a carpenter during the American Civil War. He later worked as a bar porter, school janitor, and a supervising school janitor in Galveston's East School District. Tiny Johnson was a housewife who washed clothes to supplement the family's income. Despite the fact that they were illiterate, Henry and Tiny worked together to ensure that all of their children had at least five years of schooling and lived as law-abiding Christians. Henry settled in Galveston in 1867, but it is unclear when Tiny did.

Johnson had eight siblings, but only five lived to be adults. He had four sisters, including older sisters Lucy and Jennie, younger brother Henry, and adopted brother Charles. As the eldest brother, Johnson assisted his father with his janitorial duties and earned 10 cents and a new pair of red socks each week for riding along with and watching the milkman's horse-drawn wagon on Saturday mornings.

Galveston was the largest city in Texas and among the most prosperous in the country. It was a progressive city for blacks because there was gainful employment, and longshoremen were paid the same as whites, $2 a day, which was significant in 1877, particularly for African Americans that were lawfully considered property only 10 years prior. The city was said to have a Northern

optimism that did not manifest in acute racial tension, although racial segregation and inequality were a fact of life. There were no laws prohibiting black and white children from playing together, though the city's school system was segregated. It was on the streets, alleys, and docks of Galveston where Johnson befriended white children, joined racially mixed gangs, and ate, fought, and slept at the homes of whites. His experiences led him to respect but not fear whites. From his childhood, he had a naturally high opinion of himself that could not be destroyed by racism.

As a youth Johnson was often beaten up by neighborhood bullies and teased because he was physically frail and a bit cowardly. His older sisters often protected him from them until one day his mother threatened to beat him if he did not learn to defend himself, which led him to dismantle one of the older and tougher neighborhood bullies. His new-found fighting prowess gave him enormous confidence and quickly earned him a reputation as a hard-hitting tough guy.

Johnson dropped out of school after the sixth grade to work on Galveston's docks and later held various menial jobs as sweeper, porter, and baker's assistant. He went to Dallas in search of employment, working at a racetrack caring for horses and then as an apprentice to a man named Walter Lewis, who owned a business that painted carriages. It was Lewis who sparked Johnson's interest in boxing by encouraging him to spar with friends for fun, which the young man took to with great ease. While Johnson appeared to be on course with his training in the profitable carriage painting trade, he sought more.

Johnson traveled to New York at the age of 16 with less than a nickel in his pocket as a stowaway on a cotton steamer, in search of Steve Brodie, an Irish immigrant saloonkeeper who became famous in 1886 for claiming to have jumped off the newly constructed Brooklyn Bridge. Johnson was, however, discovered aboard by the ship's captain and forced to earn his fare by shoveling coal and peeling potatoes. When the steamer landed in New York, he concocted a phony suicide plot to jump overboard referring to himself as a "worthless colored boy" with no family or friends, thereby appealing to the sentiments of white passengers, who filled his cap with money. It was Johnson's natural inclination to adapt to adverse circumstances and manipulate black/white power relations that separated him from most blacks.

Johnson does not appear to have ever found Brodie but his independence, drive, and confidence took him to Boston to track down Joe Walcott, a famous West Indian welterweight boxer also known as the "Barbados Demon." Johnson worked in a horse stable to support himself and eventually met Walcott. His interaction with Walcott and idolization of other black greats such as Isaac Murphy, a famous jockey, and Marshall "Major" Taylor, a nationally recognized bicycle racer, taught him that blacks could excel in sports irrespective of America's Jim Crow system.

Upon returning to Galveston in 1894, Johnson worked in a custodial capacity for a boxing gym. Here he seemed to develop and refine his boxing skills.

By the age of 16 he was extremely well built, standing 6' tall with a powerful frame, muscular arms and legs, and immense hand and foot speed. Johnson tested his prowess by challenging members of his gang and others. The critical incident that appears to have given him the confidence to become a boxer is when he beat an older, bigger, and rugged man named Davie Pierson, who accused Johnson of snitching on him after the two were arrested for playing craps.

Johnson earned his living fighting on the docks and in the alleys, clubhouses, and private boxing clubs in the area from 1895 to 1898, ultimately entering the world of the Battle Royal. The Battle Royal was a blood sport where around four to eight (or more) blacks, sometimes blindfolded or tied together, would pulverize each other in a ring for the amusement of an all-white audience until the last man stood. The winner collected the change thrown into the ring by onlookers. To many, Johnson became the king of the Battle Royal. His experiences as a black fighter in a racist and segregated society provided him with the ring experience that prepared him for national prominence. In March 1899, Johnson turned 21 and was keen to leave Galveston. After a brief marriage to Mary Austin, an African-American childhood friend, his thirst to become a national prizefighter led him to Springfield, Illinois.

Too many, Johnson was the best boxer that has ever lived. Although as previously noted, his boxing record comprised of 113 official fights with 79 wins (44 by knockout), 12 draws, and 8 losses, it was the era in which he boxed, his flamboyant style, and raw power that allowed him to become a giant among men in the annals of history. Unlike the boxers of today that fight no more than 10 rounds, Johnson routinely fought 20.

His professional career began in 1899, and by 1915 he had conquered the boxing world. His stellar career, however, was almost derailed by early losses and personal tragedy. While traveling to Chicago, Johnson's train stopped in Springfield, where he disembarked in search of a meal. He was immediately spotted by Johnny Conner, a former fighter turned saloon owner and promoter, and was offered room and board and an opportunity to win $50 if he participated in a Battle Royal. Desperate for money, Johnson accepted and pummeled his opponents before a crowd including journalists and boxing promoters. His performance created a buzz and landed him a fight with John "Klondike" Haynes in Chicago.

Although Johnson had fought for money since 1895, it was not until May 5, 1899, when he made his debut at the Howard Theatre in Chicago against Haynes that his professional career began. The Haynes bout was a far cry from fighting strongmen on the docks of Galveston. Johnson was defeated by a body blow in the fifth round and had his $10 purse withheld for allegedly quitting the fight, forcing him to beg its promoters for money to buy food. He had no job, income, or home in Chicago, making him homeless and desperate; he moved between the residences of friends and homeless shelters. After fighting in Indiana and skipping out on his landlord in Chicago, Johnson traveled to

Pittsburgh, New York, and New Haven, sometimes fighting and other times working as a trainer. He eventually returned to Galveston and reconnected with white childhood friend Leo Posner, who was matchmaker for the Galveston Athletic Club. Johnson solicited Posner to organize fights for him while he sought out a manager and spent his spare time moonlighting as president of the Twelfth Ward Republican Club in Galveston.

Posner organized a fight between Johnson and Bob White, an experienced heavyweight and top fighter in Texas, which ended in a 15-round decision for Johnson and earned him $100 and wide respect. He quickly became regarded as one of the top black fighters in the region, at times fighting as many as twice per week. On May 1, 1900, he fought his first white opponent, an Australian fighter named Jim Scanlon. Johnson knocked him out in the seventh round and seemed to relish the opportunity to defy the baseless theory of white supremacy by knocking whites out in the ring.

Soon after the Scanlon fight, Johnson took on and defeated Jim McCormick and Horace Miles and battled Haynes to a 20-round draw. He became stronger with each fight and developed into a gifted boxer; however, his career was put on hold when, in September 1900, Galveston was devastated by America's worst hurricane and natural disaster to that point. The hurricane killed over 8,000 people and displaced tens of thousands and obliterated about 70 percent of Galveston, including the home of Henry and Tiny Johnson. Johnson was deeply affected by the hurricane and its impact on Galveston—he served as a part of a black crew that assisted in both the relief and clean-up efforts. The hurricane also created a heightened incentive for him to generate money for his family.

He took on a promoter from Dallas by the name of A. Busch, who organized a few fights for him in Tennessee. Johnson fought his old foe Klondike and eventually found his way into the ring with Joseph Bartlett Choynski, a boxing icon and the first Jewish American athlete to rise to international repute. Although by 1901 Choynski was past his prime, white promoters were keen to keep Johnson from rising in the ranks too quickly and believed Choynski was the right antidote to their problem. On February 25, 1901, Choynski and Johnson fought in Galveston, and Johnson was knocked out in the third round. Both men were arrested in the ring and taken to jail by five Texas Rangers for prizefighting or fighting for financial gain, which was a felony in Texas punishable by two years in state prison. Oddly enough, they were placed in the same jail cell for 24 days, during which time Choynski taught Johnson invaluable boxing lessons. On March 8, 1901, a Galveston grand jury chose not to indict the fighters, and the county sheriff immediately released them and advised them to leave town before the state attorney levied additional charges against them. Johnson went to Denver, Colorado, and joined a boxing club named Ryan's Sand Creek House. He sparred with a string of fighters while in Denver.

Mary Austin visited and temporarily lived with Johnson in Denver and even accompanied him to California, then the boxing capital of the country.

He linked up with several fight managers and promoters and eventually settled with Frank Carillo, a hard-nosed Mexican American who dabbled in several professions including the saloon, racehorse, and dogfight businesses. He temporarily settled in Bakersfield and chose to live in the white part of town against the community norm of segregated living. Johnson viewed himself above the color line. He fought and lost a decision to Hank Griffen, son of a former slave, on November 4, 1901. Following this loss, He took several menial jobs until he had a rematch with Griffen in Oakland that December resulting in a draw.

Johnson next fought Frank Childs to a draw in Chicago and proceeded to knock out several no-name fighters in New England, Texas, and California. It was not until he fought Jack Jeffries that Johnson became recognized and even vilified by America. Jeffries was the younger brother of heavyweight champion Jim Jeffries, who was renowned for refusing to fight black boxers. Johnson's fight with Jack took place on May 16, 1902, in Los Angeles, and the prefight media blitz was replete with racial stereotypes and slurs. Johnson, who predicted he would knock Jeffries out 50 seconds after the fifth round began, was not fazed by the frenzy and appeared in pink ring wear. The packed building cheered for Jack Jeffries and hissed at Johnson. From the onset, Johnson toyed with Jeffries and, just as he predicted, knocked him out in the fifth only to roll him over and fan him in front of the white boxer's champion brother, whom Johnson said that he could "lick," too. This victory over Jack Jeffries and several subsequent fights made him a household name.

Johnson then fought George Gardner, another well-known white fighter, for 20 rounds in October 1902, barely squeezing out the decision. Carillo, Johnson's corner man, who allegedly placed a significant bet on the fight, brandished a gun and threatened to shoot his boxer if he lost. If this were not enough pressure, the media and white spectators castigated him whenever he faced a white opponent. He nevertheless had a great deal of pride, a strong mind, and little fear of people, particularly white men. On December 5, 1902, he fought Fred Russell, a boxer trained by Jim Jeffries (who wanted revenge on Johnson for dismantling his brother) known to be a dirty fighter. Russell ended the bout by punching him in the genitals, causing Johnson to collapse in the ring. While whites wanted to see Johnson fall, many were offended by Russell's dirty tactics and rushed the ring only to be repulsed by police. Johnson was awarded the victory on a foul.

After firing Carillo for stealing funds, Johnson signed on with Tom McCarey, a bookmaker and poolroom owner from Los Angeles who immediately arranged for Johnson to fight Denver Ed Martin. Martin was called the black heavyweight champion because no white champion was willing to fight him. Johnson defeated Martin by decision in front of 4,000 spectators to become the black heavyweight champion of the world; however, Johnson would not be fulfilled until he defeated Jim Jeffries for the white heavyweight championship. Jeffries used race as a justification to avoid Johnson. Although Johnson won a $1260 purse in the Martin fight (which is equivalent to $25,000 today),

he was eager for a big-money fight that could yield $10,000, which he needed to fuel his flamboyant lifestyle that included numerous cars, clothes, and women. Johnson was one of the first Americans to own a Winton automobile manufactured by the Winton Motor Carriage Company. He was an avid driver.

After the Martin fight, Johnson became increasingly frustrated that the top white boxers refused to fight him. Nevertheless, he continued to box, hoping that one day his mastery in the ring would generate public outcry for a championship match with one of the white greats. Between 1903 to October 1904, Johnson traveled and won half of his fights by knockout and the rest by decision. His October 27, 1903, fight with Sam McVey in Los Angeles earned him $2796, which was his largest payday to date. The fight improved his image with the media and was the most profitable boxing event Los Angeles had ever hosted. The Johnson-McVey fights were so popular and profitable that their handlers scheduled another bout on April 24, 1904, in San Francisco, where Johnson jeerfully toyed with McVey and angered the crowd. Some fans were so incensed with his cat and mouse game with McVey that they flipped lit matches on his back, threatened his life with racial slurs, and attempted to assault him in the ring. Johnson responded by throwing the contents of his spit bucket at them and bolting out of the building. His masterful defeat of McVey caused the media to discuss his readiness for Jim Jeffries.

Johnson met and entered into relationships with two black prostitutes from Philadelphia, Clara Kerr and Etta Reynolds, in the summer of 1903. While his relationship with Reynolds was of limited duration, he developed a long-term relationship with Kerr and lived happily with her for about two years. Johnson moved to Chicago with Kerr and made Chicago his base of operations. However, when Kerr allegedly had an affair with William Bryant, one of Johnson's childhood friends, the boxer lost all faith in black women. Following his fallout with Kerr, Johnson suffered a loss in the ring, where race played a significant role in a decision against him.

Johnson fought Marvin Hart, a top white Kentuckian contender for the heavyweight title, in San Francisco on March 28, 1905. Hart was an avowed white supremacist; prior to the bout he openly hurled racial insults at Johnson, who responded by calling him a coward to his face. Although both men fought valiantly, Hart won the bout in a controversial decision by the fight's promoter and self-appointed judge, Alex Greggains. Jim Jeffries attended the bout and relished the outcome. After the Hart fight, Johnson went on a rampage, fighting 12 more times in 1905, winning the majority of bouts by knockout and losing one match in November in the second round for a foul.

The racist commentary of sports writers, bloodthirsty spectators who reveled in the notion of a white boxer defeating Johnson, and the dirty tricks of opponents in these fights revealed that Johnson was at the epicenter of a sick society and sport. In his 1905 fight against Sandy Ferguson, Johnson punished and embarrassed the white hope so badly that the boxer kneed Johnson in the genitals three times to the roaring approval of his fans, causing him to collapse. When the referee declared Johnson the winner on a foul, Ferguson and

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 if they could not get me one way they would another.

his spectators started a riot, though Johnson managed to slip away. The Ferguson incident was reminiscent of the bout with Russell; white men unable to defeat him in the ring sought to castrate him as slave owners did on plantations to keep their "black bucks" in check.

After his July 24, 1905, bout with Joe Grim, Johnson moved back to Los Angeles with Kerr, with whom he had reconciled. His life took yet another turn for the worse, however, when Kerr unexpectedly departed with what little money he possessed; she left him broke in the heart and pocket book. Taken together, these events deeply affected Johnson, who swore never to settle with other black women. In the year that followed he cleansed the heavyweight division while waiting feverishly for a bout with a white heavyweight champion. Johnson hired Sam Fitzpatrick as his new manager and even traveled to Australia with Alec McLean to show films of their fights and take on any contenders.

Johnson arrived in Australia on January 24, 1907, with great fanfare. He was an enigma to the Australians, who respected him as one of America's leading boxers but unsurprisingly shared the same racist attitudes toward blacks as white Americans. After he defeated Peter Felix, Australia's "colored champion," for the colored heavyweight title of the world on February 19, he dismantled Australian Bill Lang, another white hopeful, before 20,000 spectators on March 4. Johnson made plans to leave Australia, but not before having an affair with a white Australian woman from a prominent family. He was also arrested for physically assaulting McLean, who had filed a beach of contract claim against Johnson for failing to pay him a debt. He was forbidden from leaving Australia until the claim, which was decided in McLean's favor, was adjudicated that April.

Johnson returned to San Francisco in May, but had enormous difficulty finding anyone credible to fight, as the white heavyweight contenders stayed clear of him. He managed to muster two fights before getting what ultimately was one of his most strategic fights with ex-champion Bob Fitzsimmons, one of the hardest hitting heavyweights in history. Fitzsimmons fought Johnson on July 17, 1907, in Philadelphia, only to suffer an embarrassing knockout in the second round. Johnson's victory and public persona as a fearless and independent black man were celebrated by blacks all over the country and elevated the boxer to the status of an icon.

While Johnson fought nearly 30 more challengers over 12 years, his bouts with Tommy Burns in December 1908 and Jim Jeffries in July 1910 were the most important of his career and collectively the single greatest blow to white supremacy in the first half of the twentieth century. While his standing in the boxing world was at an all-time high, his fights with Burns and Jeffries would not occur for six more fights and another year and a half.

After defeating six other boxers in 1907 and 1908, Johnson and Fitzpatrick lobbied for a match with Burns, the Canadian world champion. Though they followed him to France to argue their case, Burns would not fight Johnson. He refused to fight a black boxer for less than $30,000 and berated Johnson with racial slurs in the press. An Australian promoter raised the capital for a fight between Burns and Johnson, however, offering $30,000 to the former and $5,000 to the latter. Johnson was not happy about receiving one-sixth of the amount of Burns but nonetheless agreed to fight in Sydney on December 26, 1908.

As Johnson entered the ring, 20,000 white Australians jeered at him in a seamless epithet of racial slurs; they did not come to see Johnson win but rather Burns thrash the black aspirant. Johnson was used to such abuse and walked down the aisle to the ring undaunted, cheery, and shaking his head with confidence. When Burns entered the stadium he received a standing ovation from the crowd. He also earned roaring cheers when he refused to shake Johnson's hand before the fight. Johnson pulverized Burns once the fight began, sending him to the canvas in the first and second rounds. With a smile on his face, he methodically talked to and beat Burns round after bloody round. He could have knocked out the champion in the first round but wanted to demonstrate his fighting skills to the world. Johnson made a mockery of his opponent by speaking to the press while pummeling him, only to knock him down a third time in the seventh round. His clinical handling of Burns was a silent retort to the widely held view among whites that blacks were weak in the stomach, yellow under pressure, and unintelligent in the ring. Johnson was holding Burns up and beating him by the thirteenth round to the utter dismay of the crowd, who called for the police to stop the fight. Burns wanted to continue, though in the fourteenth round he was so badly beaten that the police stopped the fight and the referee declared Johnson the victor. The victory created a numbing quiet as the stunned audience left the stadium. After defeating Burns, Johnson visited the grave of Peter Jackson, the black Australian heavyweight champion whom former white American world champion John L. Sullivan refused to fight on racial grounds for the world heavyweight championship that Johnson now held.

Johnson's victory sent shock waves of hope and pride into blacks in the United States and beyond and acute fear into white Australians and their Anglo-Saxon brethren in the United States. Many commentators responded with praise for the legal constraints on nonwhite immigration to Australia and de jure segregation in America. The triumph caused some sports writers to wish that there had never been a Slave Trade and that Johnson had remained in the trees of Africa. Even though Johnson was American, white Americans were indifferent to his world championship victory and had hoped that the white Canadian would defeat him. They feared the new champion's victory would empower and embolden blacks with racial pride—an unacceptable proposition given America's racial caste system. In contrast, Black America reveled in Johnson's

They have inspired me to attainment and they have balked me; they have caused me joy and they have heaped misery upon me; they have been faithful to the utmost and they have been faithless; they have praised and loved me and they have hated and denounced me. Always, a woman has swayed me—sometimes many have demanded my attention at the same moment.

victory, making him the most famous and respected athlete in that community.

After his fight with Burns, Johnson and his white girlfriend Hattie McClay traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia, where the boxer was prohibited from staying in white-only hotels, to fight Victor McLaglen. He defeated this boxer in the sixth round on March 10, 1909. His flamboyant lifestyle, combined with his alleged "marriage" to McClay, engendered significant attention. Interracial marriage was an aberration in Canada and America; in fact, thousands of black men were lynched or murdered for even the insinuation of relations with white women. Notwithstanding, he didn't care about the social status quo and continued to publicly enjoy the company of other white women, such as Belle Schreiber, after parting ways with McClay. When Johnson defeated a string of boxers in 1909, the media pressure on Jeffries was too great and purse too big to allow race to continue to serve as a cloak of avoidance.

Shortly thereafter, Johnson fired Fitzpatrick and hired George Little, a Chicago businessman who ran a brothel among other enterprises, to be his new manager. Johnson lived lavishly, spending money on his women companions, such as McClay, who reappeared, Schreiber, and another prostitute named Etta Terry Duryea. Even Kerr reappeared, claimed to be his wife, and sued Johnson for $406 she was allegedly owed. Finally, after years of ducking Johnson, Jeffries agreed to fight him. The fighters met on October 29, 1909, at New York's Albany Hotel, negotiated terms, and gave promoters until November 30 to submit their bids. George Lewis "Tex" Rickard, a successful businessman and casino owner, approached Johnson offered a $101,000 purse, which was the biggest offer in boxing history and worth nearly $2 million today, as well as two-thirds of the film rights to be split between the boxers. Rickard partnered with another promoter named Jack Gleason to avoid controversy after learning that Jeffries had secretly signed on with that promoter. Johnson agreed without consulting Little, as did Jeffries through his manager Samuel Berger. Both men received a $10,000 advance and the fight was set for July 4, 1910.

In the months preceding the bout, Johnson and Jeffries traveled on the road touring with various vaudeville shows and other carnival tours, while Rickard dealt with the politics of finding a venue for the fight. It was supposed to take place in San Francisco, but California Governor J. N. Gillette barred it for alleged moral and political reasons. Rickard moved the fight to Reno with the blessings of Nevada Governor Denver S. Dickerson. The run-up to the fight was filled with excitement, rumors, racial tension, heartbreak, scandal, and violence, particularly for Johnson. He created a love quadrangle with McClay, Schreiber, and Terry, resulting in feuds among the women. He also engaged in a violent

skirmish with a taxi driver who refused him service, pulled a gun on Sam Langford for threatening him, beat Schreiber after a domestic dispute, and was arrested for beating a man in a bar who insulted him. For his part, Jeffries made a considerable sum on the road but grew weary from all of the hype surrounding the fight. The pressure of being the "Great White Hope" wore him down to point where he wanted to quit touring; however, he readily accepted the role of the great white redeemer.

The contest between the so-called colored heavyweight champion of the world, an interesting title given that Johnson already defeated white champion Burns in Australia, and the "champion of champions" who had retired several years earlier was the biggest news in the nation and people from around the world tuned in to hear the fight via radio broadcast. The country's racial division was reflected in blacks' support for Johnson and whites' support for Jeffries. Americans did not consider this an ordinary fight but rather a clash of the races: a test to determine whether white subjugation of blacks was a natural right or arrangement of limited duration.

As Johnson walked into the ring for the fight, the majority of the nearly 30,000 spectators hissed and hurled racial slurs at him reminiscent of the Burns fight. Jeffries's entry into the stadium was met with the thunderous roar of nearly all those in attendance, who firmly expected him to dismantle Johnson. When the fight began, the boxers spent the first few minutes feeling one another out, and by the second round Johnson seemed to have had his opponent's number. He did a lot of talking and smiling while seeming to dominate Jeffries with uppercuts. The white boxer retaliated with insults, powerful body blows, and head shots, which by the fourth round had cut open Johnson's mouth. Nevertheless, Johnson incrementally wore Jeffries down in rounds 5 through 15 while the crowd became more incensed with the cavalier and masterful way he dismantled the former white champion. By the middle of the fifteenth round, Jeffries was bloodied with a broken nose, swollen-shut eyes, and other cuts. After Johnson knocked Jeffries down several times, white spectators began shouting racial epithets and demanding that Jeffries's corner not allow Johnson to knock out the white boxer. Soon after, Jeffries's camp threw in the towel, ending the fight. Rickard declared Johnson the winner.

Black Americans celebrated throughout the country, and whites responded with ugly and pernicious violence. White citizens and police throughout the country openly spat on, beat, burned, lynched, and shot black Americans in an orgy of violence that resulted in the murder of at least 30 blacks with hundreds more severely wounded. The most detestable acts of violence occurred in the neighborhood of San Juan Hill, an area in the West 60s in Manhattan. A group of whites set a building in this neighborhood on fire, and then tried to prevent the black occupants from escaping. A black man riding on a streetcar who cheered for Johnson was assaulted by a white passenger. In Wheeling, West Virginia, a black man who drove the same type of car as Johnson was pulled from his vehicle by a group of whites. The driver was hung. Further south, several

black people were killed or injured in Uvalda, Georgia, after a group of white men shot their weapons through a black construction camp.

The victory meant more to blacks than any since Emancipation; however, Johnson was aware that too much chest pumping would only exacerbate the violence and dissuaded blacks from doing so while at the same time cautioning whites not to be uncivilized. He attended celebration parties all over the country, but Chicago was where he had the biggest following. He deposited his $101,000 purse in the First Trust and Savings Bank in Chicago and bought new cars and clothes and even shared some of his purse with his old friends in Galveston. He was on top of the world, but soon the world would be on top of him.

The media characterized Johnson as a black villain throughout his career due to his "ethnic cleansing" of great "white hopes," his ability to shatter white America's machinations about black inferiority, and his fearless and cavalier attitude toward life, including his fancy for white women. After defeating Jeffries, Johnson became the most famous sportsman in the world. He achieved what he had always wanted: iconic status. However, it was also his win over Jeffries that spurred the wagons of white supremacy rolling. He became the target of public and private discrimination. Nowhere was this more apparent that through the law. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia banned the distribution of the Johnson versus Jeffries fight for fear that the imagery of a black man legally pummeling a white man would threaten America's segregated status quo. In response to the fight, Congress also banned the interstate transportation of fight films in 1912. Johnson's victory and fiercely independent and boastful character infuriated white American society. He was the world champion in the manliest of sports, bold and defiant of white authority and custom, and a role model for other blacks. His example scared whites in America and beyond.

While Johnson became a soft target of local police for speeding, even going to jail for 25 days in San Francisco as perhaps the first black man to be racially profiled while driving, his real troubles began after he badly beat Terry Duryea, his lover. For most Americans, black and white, it was bad enough that he publicly courted white women, but to beat one bloody 55 years before Emmett Till was lynched for allegedly making an overture to a white woman, and then publicly marry her was too much for most white Americans to stomach. This was also the case in Britain, where Johnson traveled to fight British heavyweight Billy Mills in 1912. British Home Secretary Winston Churchill barred the bout, however, fearing that any interracial fight resulting in a loss by Mills could destabilize white rule in the colonies in the same way that racial violence ensued after the Jeffries bout.

Upon returning to the United States, Johnson fought Jim Flynn on July 4, 1912, in New Mexico and defeated the "white hope" in the ninth round after police stopped the bout. Soon after, he opened a saloon called Café de Champion on the South Side of Chicago, which was a major hit in the city. Johnson

was the champion of the world and a prominent businessman. However, his life took a serious turn for the worse when Duryea, who was abused by Johnson and shunned by blacks and whites, committed suicide in September. Scrutiny of him heightened when, within a month of Duryea's death, he had an affair with an 18-year-old white woman, Lucille Cameron, against the wishes of her mother. On October 18, 1912, Johnson was arrested and charged with the abduction of Cameron, but was thereafter released on bail to the displeasure of the crowds of whites who jeered for him to be lynched.

Johnson was charged for violating the 1910 Mann Act (also known as the White Slave Traffic Act), a federal act adopted to combat the sexual exploitation of white women, which made it a felony to "knowingly transport or cause to be transported, or aid or assist in obtaining transportation for, or in transporting, in interstate or foreign commerce, any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery or any other immoral purpose." Cameron refused to testify against Johnson, so the government was forced to drop its case. The two married soon after, to the utter dismay of Americans, particularly whites. Their marriage was condemned by local, state, and federal politicians and engendered venomous reactions from the governors of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Georgia, among many others. Immediately, antimiscegenation laws were introduced in 10 of the 20 states that permitted interracial marriages, and not fewer than 21 such bills were introduced in Congress.

Humiliated by its inability to prosecute Johnson, the government aggressively investigated him and coopted Belle Schreiber, who was scorned by Johnson years earlier, to testify against him. Her testimony enabled the government to obtain an indictment against Johnson for violating the Mann Act. He was charged with transporting Schreiber across state lines for sexual use, engaging her in prostitution, and sexual perversions or physical abuse, the latter of which was later dropped by the government. On May 7, 1913, the case went to trial in the U.S. District Court of Illinois and an all-white male jury found him guilty of the sexual use and prostitution charges. The judge sentenced Johnson to a $1,000 fine and one year and a day in prison. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, however, took issue with the District Court's ruling, reversed the prostitution conviction, and remanded for resentencing the sexual use charge, though not before Johnson fled the country. He and Cameron escaped to Paris through Canada, arriving there in June 1913.

Johnson spent seven years living as a fugitive and fighting in England, Paris, Spain, Mexico, and Cuba, among other places. During this period he fought 13 opponents, losing only one bout to Jess Willard in Havana on April 5, 1915. In February 1916, while in England, he was ordered to pay a $1,100 fine for slugging his manager and was banned from England under the Alien Restriction Act. With the exception of the United Kingdom, Johnson was generally treated well in Europe and traveled with vaudeville shows to make a living. World War I made the continent an inhospitable place for him, however, forcing him to move to Latin America. After his friend and business partner Mexican President

Venustiano Carranza was assassinated in May 1920, Johnson was forced to leave the country. He returned to the United States on July 20, 1920, surrendering to federal marshals in California. He later reappeared in District Court in Chicago and was resentenced to one year in prison and sent to Leavenworth penitentiary in Kansas.

Johnson was released from prison in July 1921 and greeted as a hero by scores of blacks. Lucille divorced him in 1924, and he married a third white woman. He took on nine professional fights out of financial desperation over the next seven years, losing only two in 1928. He lived out his life as reluctant national and international hero to blacks all over the world, only to be killed on July 10, 1946, on U.S. Highway 1 near Raleigh, North Carolina, after crashing his Lincoln Zephyr on his way to New York to see Joe Louis and Billy Conn fight on July 19, 1946. He was 68 years old.

The boxer's relentless pursuit of excellence shattered and changed the world of sports and America's racist sociopolitical order. Jack Johnson was a maverick revolutionary. He transformed not only the world of sports, particularly boxing, but also American society. He is not simply an African American sports icon; he was one of America's leading sports and social icons in the early twentieth century. No other athlete or social activist during his era or since has provoked the minds and stirred the social consciousness of people while simultaneously exemplifying mastery of a craft. He defied all odds to become the indisputable heavyweight champion of the world and publicly defy social casting. He wore the clothes, drove the cars, dated and married the women, and knocked out the people inside and outside of the ring as he wanted.

Johnson's fearless brand of individualism, courage, and defiance of America's racist sports and sociopolitical orders were inimitable. He was an individual rights activist, which wittingly made him a civil rights pragmatist. He achieved what few in world history who faced systematic tyranny and violence could; he employed an apolitical philosophy of nonviolence using the weapons of hard work, excellence, and individualism to combat, invalidate, enfeeble, and dismantle a vicious sociopolitical and legal order, in this case American white supremacy. Johnson did not allow America's social status quo to define him; rather, he redefined it.

FURTHER READING

Ardell, Jean Hastings. "Baseball Annies, Jack Johnson, and Kenesaw Mountain Landis: How Groupies Influenced the Lengthy Ban on Blacks in Organized Baseball," *Nine* (Spring 2005): 103.

Deardorff, Donald, II. "World Boxing Champion Jack Johnson, Contemptuous and Irritating, Taunted Whites," *St. Louis Journalism Review* 8:3 (October 1995).

Evans, Art. "Joe Louis as a Key Functionary: White Reactions towards a Black Champion," *Journal of Black Studies* 16:1 (September 1985): 95–111.

Gilmore, Al-Tony. "Jack Johnson and White Women: The National Impact," *Journal of Negro History* 58:1 (January 1973): 18–38.
Johnson, Jack. *In the Ring and Out*. Chicago: National Sports Publishing, 1927.
Ward, Geoffrey. *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2004.