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## Black Pugilism: The First Act In Twentieth Century America

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BLACK PUGILISM  
THE FIRST ACT IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
History

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by  
Angel Mario Lopez  
August 2023

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Approved by:

Diana Johnson, Committee Chair, History

Michael Karp, Committee Member

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## ABSTRACT

When teaching about the twenty-first century in the United States of America, educators delve deeply into how the Jim Crow Era was but a new manifestation of a slave-era philosophy. As W.E.B. Du Bois states in his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.” Inspiring pro-Jim Crow government officials and citizens to impose economic and political segregation on black citizens that, on paper, are “separate but equal” when infringing on their civil and human rights deliberately. Limiting the black individual to the status of second-class citizenship where they are not slaves nor citizens, numerous historical figures emerged in the communal effort to end the color line’s systematic influence. However, among the accounts of brave activists fighting for equal rights between the races, those who defied the color line with more self-centered ambitions exist.

*Black Pugilism* studies, analyzes, and illustrates how the realm of professional boxing became a fascinating focal point of racial tension. Two manly descendants of enslaved peoples use the worldly popular craft to express themselves self-absorbedly and unapologetically or an appealing image of their community to their naysayers and oppressors. Those legendary men are “The Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson and “The Black Panther” Harry Wills. Readers will learn how and why professional boxing was a contentious arena between black equality activists against economically and politically advantaged pro-Jim Crow whites over the “reality” of white supremacy. A “reality” so faulty that when

even a single boxing match can effectively prove it as mere fantasy, white men nationwide pay rapt attention in hopes of validation for their racial and manly validation expectations. As W.E.B. Du Bois expresses in his 1910 magazine article “The Souls of White Folk,” “pity for a people imprisoned and enthralled, hampered, and made miserable for such a cause, for such a phantasy!”

So too, enters the politics of manliness. Precisely because, in early Jim Crow eyes, masculinity is an exclusively white trait. An underrepresented and virtually untaught history in the fight for equality in spaces of more than one color. Examining the encompassing racial and gender politics of the multi-decade story will reveal the ease of disrupting but the difficulty of ending the entrenched belief of inherent greatness by skin color. As seen when the sons of freedpeople are not seen and treated as men but as a lowly race of males of far lesser mental and physical makeup than any white man. Then, after revealing no correlation between masculinity and race, a new predominant narrative emerges of the black man as beastly and immoral. An unforgiving history of the frustrating and fatal gradual progression to one day become a justly and fairly treated demographic of American citizens.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my incredible advisors, Professor Diana Johnson and Professor Michael Karp, and outstanding program coordinator, Professor Jeremy Murray, words cannot express my gratitude for your guidance and wisdom. I hope to one day return the favor. Thank you.

Then, to Mr. Patrick Connor, an official member of the Boxing Writers Association of America and the International Boxing History Organization, your knowledge and wisdom truly helped solidify the pugilist history of race and manhood in *Black Pugilism*. I hope to one day return the favor. Thank you.

Lastly, to my beloved family, always cheering that this is another challenge I shall overcome. Words cannot express my gratitude. Plus, considering this ACKNOWLEDGEMENT runs a little long when they are routinely short, please accept my typical bluntness. Thank you. I love you all.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Sports have the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sports can create hope, where there was once only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination. Sports is the game of lovers.”

– Excerpt of Nelson Mandela’s (1918–2013) speech at the first Laureus World Sports Awards in Monaco (2000)<sup>1</sup>

*“In my years in the fight game I have found that the professional boxers who successfully carve out a name for themselves are highly sensitive and complicated people. It is no wonder that boxing champions react in so many different ways to the pressures that fame and wealth bring.”*

– Hall of Fame Boxing Trainer Angelo Dundee (1921–2012)<sup>2</sup>

“It reminds me of the old...something barbaric. When two people get in a pit and they throw money at them.”

– Hall of Fame Boxer, Walker Smith Jr. (Ring Name: “Sugar Ray Robinson”) (1921– 1989)<sup>3</sup>

“As an irrational outlet of ceaseless clamors for greater self-endangerment and imposed violence intertwining with constant prayers for fighter safety and fair

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<sup>1</sup> Laureus, “Nelson Mandela's iconic speech | Sport has the power to change the world,” YouTube Video, 04:35, February 9, 2020, <https://youtu.be/y1-7w-bJCtY>.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald Early, *The Cambridge Companion to Boxing: Cambridge Companions to Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), Introduction, Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Fighting Centre, “Sugar Ray Robinson never enjoyed boxing 🥊,” YouTube Video, 00:15, August 17, 2022, <https://youtu.be/-V5ple3oMxl>.

treatment, boxing's engrossing platform is lendable to many social and cultural tensions."

– Masters Program Student of California State University, San Bernardino,  
Angel Mario Lopez (1998–Present)

## Why I Write

In Las Vegas, Nevada, on April 28, 2022, MGM Grand Garden Arena's press room held the final press conference before the unification title fight at Super Featherweight (130 pounds) between the World Boxing Organization (WBO) champion Shakur Stevenson, an African-American, and the World Boxing Council (WBC) champion Oscar Valdez, a Mexican-national.<sup>4</sup> During intermission, Bob Arum, TOP RANK promotions president and Hall of Fame promoter, formerly for Muhammad Ali, left the stage after responding to questions about the undercard.<sup>5</sup> His replacement claimed it was so the spotlight fell strictly on the two champions.<sup>6</sup> Stevenson's knowing smile turns into annoyed lip biting and then a yawn, not caring to help clear Arum's name for resurfacing accusations of prioritizing fairer-skinned fighters first and black boxers last.<sup>7</sup> Stevenson's agitation carried into the April 30 post-fight press conference after defeating Valdez by unanimous decision to become the unified and lineal 130-pound champion.<sup>8</sup> Stevenson's expression read annoyance for Arum's opening words and congrats to his manager, James Prince, until finally receiving the stage.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Top Rank Boxing, "Oscar Valdez vs. Shakur Stevenson | FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE," YouTube Video, 30:20, April 28, 2022, <https://youtu.be/ewrrxB1mMs0>.

<sup>5</sup> Top Rank, "FINAL PRESS."

<sup>6</sup> Top Rank, "FINAL PRESS."

<sup>7</sup> Top Rank, "FINAL PRESS."

<sup>8</sup> Top Rank Boxing, "Oscar Valdez vs. Shakur Stevenson | POST-FIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE," YouTube Video, 22:55, April 30, 2022, <https://youtu.be/iCZ5Qf8sikc>; "Lineal": Best of the weight division.

<sup>9</sup> Top Rank, "POST-FIGHT."

These feelings result from the ever-present anti-black boxer sentiment befalling all weight classes, recently pervading boxing lingo with the abbreviation NBF, meaning No Black Fighters.<sup>10</sup> So pervasive that Promoter Cameron Dunkin exposed TOP RANK promotions in 2010 for a “chart” logistically prioritizing and steering non-black fighters away from black boxers, whose careers are stagnated by lack of exposure and fights.<sup>11</sup> Most troubling for Dunkin is his current roster contains black prospects, themselves unsure about their chances in professional boxing due to what they couldn’t control at birth.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, the color coding practice Arum utilizes profits from adhering to the social inequality and racial discrimination that stems from the color line of the late nineteenth to twentieth-century American society. A prejudiced philosophy dictating the market, government, and community by levying “harsh penalties on anyone who crossed it” “long before the Jim Crow era began.”<sup>13</sup> As Frederick Douglas explained in 1883, the color line denies black Americans suitable housing and their youth education, leaving them “only such labor” that brings “the least reward.”<sup>14</sup> So pervasive that the unofficial Colored Heavyweight Championship in 1876 was formed due to segregation for the official World

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<sup>10</sup> Barbershop Conversations, “Cameron Dunkin-Top Rank Matchmaker Keeps Elite Fighters Away from Black Fighters-“Their More Gifted”,” YouTube Video, 10:27, October 10, 2020, <https://youtu.be/yEIFHZN-UpE>.

<sup>11</sup> Barbershop Conversations, “Cameron Dunkin,” YouTube.

<sup>12</sup> Barbershop Conversations, “Cameron Dunkin,” YouTube.

<sup>13</sup> Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 7–8 and 24, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/detail.action?docID=946701> (accessed July 12, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 24, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Heavyweight Championship.<sup>15</sup> A cutoff that mainstream America knew was necessary when the image's power could reinforce or help bring down racial barriers through racial tribalism. Inspiring or disabusing invested onlookers of the Jim Crow status quo by succeeding or failing in the ring where the imposition of will is left entirely between two men with their natural-born abilities and hard-earned skills. An impartial fighting ground.

Why the main focus of the thesis falls on the heavyweight division is a straightforward list of reasons. First, the cultural relevance of professional boxing hugely relies on the "health" of boxing's main attraction, the heavyweight division. Simply put, the sight of the biggest (relatively) skilled men punching one another to the face and front of the torso (minus the pelvis) to win by points or knockout is as engrossing as it is hazardous (that is, for competitors). This is apparent when a knockdown occurs, as the competitor has ten seconds to gather his senses and stand upright.<sup>16</sup> Whether the knockdown was a collapse onto the knees or the body tips over and the head drops hard onto the canvas, a "no three knockdown" rule allows this to continue until the referee stops the fight or someone cannot continue.

Through this gladiatorial spectacle, white pretentiousness and insecurity reached and boiled over. Within a country whose mainstream institutions denied

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Allen Baker, *The World Colored Heavyweight Championship, 1876–1937* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers), Preface, Kindle Edition.; Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Introduction – Tales Told at Ringside, Kindle.

<sup>16</sup> Knockdown: When anything but the soles of a competitors shoes touch the canvas. This includes one or both knees, laying flat on one's stomach or back, or landing on their bottom.



black men equal opportunity as Americans and actively subverted their community, boxing's enabling of black manhood coincided with the early twentieth century's "remaking of manhood" for more primitive qualities.<sup>17</sup> It is this dual historical shift that white men sought to prove and protect the superiority of the white race and that they are what keeps American civilization afloat.

However, these efforts are more sheltering and "fake till one makes it." And considering white America attempted to pair this with a combat sport where talking must (eventually) be backed with action, the white supremacy that shaped American society was routinely exposed. As "racial medicine" that "made white men cringe," succeeding black boxers "forced white men to take notice of [their] manly physique" and capabilities whenever "many white fans clamored for interracial contests."<sup>18</sup> An uproar to see that the white man is superior to all other races of males.

Thus, as heavyweight boxing became the main focal point of a contest over the reality of racial superiority and subordination, the profession developed "two major cultural subtexts" in "race," determining who spectators support, and "individualism," the scrutiny of the competitor's character by admirers and detractors in and out of the ring.<sup>19</sup> With this, boxing became a battleground that featured black manhood on full undeniable display. Yet, throughout early

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<sup>17</sup> Louis Moore, *I Fight for a Living: Boxing and the Battle for Black Manhood, 1880-1915* (University of Illinois Press, 2017), 10 and 15, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.5406/j.ctt1vsk8nk> (accessed July 12, 2023)..

<sup>18</sup> Moore, *Black Manhood*, 11 and 16, JSTOR.

<sup>19</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Introduction, Kindle.

twentieth-century America, “drawing the color line” in boxing created a competitive but racially exclusive cycle that crowned the Anglo-Saxon Protestant as the “ideal” man and “real” American idol.

### The Purpose of Black Pugilism

While boxing history has enjoyed recognition in scholarly journals, articles, and documentaries, a lack of active teaching of the craft’s historical importance in American history lingers. So come the underlining motivations and central argument of *Black Pugilism*. Firstly, when boxing history receives scholarly attention in academic writings, the reign of “The Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson (1908–1915) is routinely written as the height of NBF sentiment. Should any paper include the existence of the most prominent black boxer during the 1920s, “The Black Panther” Harry Wills, it is generally in passing reference. Failing to detail the consequences of Johnson’s person and achievements as he spurred an NBF period incorporating his years of heavyweight dominance and the entire Roaring Twenties. When mainstream America’s determination to prevent another World Boxing Champion from any other race than the white race, Wills failed to secure a title fight against “The Manassa Mauler” Jack Dempsey, the embodiment of the Roaring Twenties’ cultural values.<sup>20</sup> One can only imagine

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<sup>20</sup> Brian D. Bunk, “Harry Wills and the Image of the Black Boxer from Jack Johnson to Joe Louis,” *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 1 (2012): 64, ProjectMUSE, [muse.jhu.edu/article/485347](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/485347) (accessed July 12, 2023).

Wills's contribution to proving the black man's admirable worth if he defeated Dempsey.

Then, there is the intention to impress and push forward the teaching of boxing's significance in American society at the collegiate level. So, to encourage the formulation of formal history courses centered on the poor man's sport, this thesis aims for the best possible multi-decade account of inter- and intraracial politics, as mainstream America's true colors came to light in its behavior and treatment of Jack Johnson and Harry Wills. These men's intertwined and piteous histories speak of an era of anti-black pugilist excellency that speaks to twentieth-century America's core problem, the color line.

Now, what can a thesial timeline of anti-black boxer sentiment from early twentieth-century America reveal about the country's past? What significance does it tell about the poor man's sport beyond the ring? Well, the chronology of early American boxing offers a unique vantage point of boxing's importance to social and cultural periods beyond its parallelism and the inhospitable venture for civil and human rights. A tale of how the black man's effort to take back ownership of their manhood against the color line ties into the communal effort of ending their race's second-class citizenship in the US to gain an equal standing to white citizens. Whose position depends on (first) the predominant narrative of black inferiority and (then) the black hazard. The religious-like purporting of narratives bolsters the white supremacist ideology that (first) exclusivized and (then) championed white masculinity as what upholds American civilization.

Such are *Black Pugilism*'s arguments in recognizing the notably stringent NBF period Jack Johnson created that other black boxers toiled with, like Harry Wills. From the poor beginnings that fueled him to pursue a life of pleasure and masculinity, thanks to the notoriety boxing enabled in his professional and public image, "The Galveston Giant" successfully disrupted the faux reality of masculinity being exclusively white. After this, "The Black Panther" and his supporters in the black press sought to disabuse the new mainstream narrative of the black man as an immorally compromised and animalistic *being*. An effort on the boxing front that failed due to the normality of institutional adherence to the racially advantaged demographics' predominant prejudice against the descendants of enslaved. Such will be touched upon throughout *Black Pugilism* as boxing is proven not just a historical facet but central, in moments of history, to the progression of white and black American race relations within the intersecting realm of the fight over masculinity and the ideals of racial hierarchy.

Important to note, the mainstream press aided in sheltering "the mantle of" the "shaky white psyche" by demeaning black boxers as "a non-threatening Sambo" or demonizing them as "the dangerous savage to assuage their white readers' fears" long before the 1920s.<sup>21</sup> As made clear by *I Fight for a Living: Boxing and the Battle for Black Manhood, 1880-1915*, the color line's existence in boxing red flagged how "white authority based on the physical always stood on

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<sup>21</sup> Moore, *Black Manhood*, 19, JSTOR.

shaky grounds.”<sup>22</sup> *Black Pugilism* prioritizes one veiling method for the respective fighter’s career peaks because, by the end of Johnson’s reign, black and masculinity can no longer be heralded as incompatible. Resulting in the new foremost veiling method of black manhood as unfit for equal civil and human rights, and too animalistic and fatalistic to the surrounding white citizenry and American civilization.

Regarding their high-profile careers, these focalized boxers fundamentally contrast one another individually. Therefore, this work avoids any presumptions of such similarities. To aid in this endeavor are scholarly works supporting observations of these skilled pugilists’ deep turmoils as black men but different people in America’s preceding century.

For Jack Johnson, the catalyst to the NBF period of interest, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, Ken Burns’s 2004 documentary, tells of “The Galveston Giant’s” hidden emotional hurt at not being accepted and respected as a man by white and black America.<sup>23</sup> However, concern lies in the falsehoods that sensationalize the extent of Johnson’s fighting exploits, skewing the boxing history that inspired his widely-accredited project.<sup>24</sup>

As for “The Black Panther,” Brian D. Bunk’s “Harry Wills and the Image of the Black Boxer from Jack Johnson to Joe Louis” of the late great’s place in

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<sup>22</sup> Moore, *Black Manhood*, 20, JSTOR.

<sup>23</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, directed by Ken Burns (2004; Public Broadcasting Service, 2005), Documentary, <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/unforgivable-blackness-the-rise-and-fall-of-jack-johnson>.

<sup>24</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

boxing and civil rights is written by few.<sup>25</sup> Most satisfying is the similar belief that the second black World Heavyweight Champion owes many thanks to Wills and the supporting black media for shaping a white-aimed public image of black manhood that improves the possibility of a black world titlist.<sup>26</sup> Yet, not once does Bunk address Wills's lack of a world title match is also attributed to self-sabotage. Instead, he solely focuses on the actions of the mainstream side and why it's at fault—never problematizing Wills's loyalty to his ineffective manager, Paddy Mullins.<sup>27</sup>

All of the incorporated works and their arguments reveal the black boxer's plight stems from more significant social inequalities and a culture of discrimination against America's black community from the early twentieth century. No matter the black boxer's success in overcoming the mainstream's hampering of their careers, their perseverance couldn't outlast or overcome the color line—the offshoot of slavery that W.E.B. Du Bois, in his gripping 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, states is “the problem of the Twentieth Century.”<sup>28</sup> These historic fighters fell victim to the enforcement of racial superiority based on their people's submission to perpetuated inequality, no matter where they ran or how much they reasoned. The early twentieth century witnessed black Americans

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<sup>25</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 63, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>26</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 64, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>27</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 75, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>28</sup> Patricia H. Hinchey, *The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. du Bois: With a Critical Introduction by Patricia H. Hinchey* (Bloomfield: Myers Education Press, 2018), 5, ProQuest Ebook Central.

continue striving to end their second-class citizenship, which props up the full citizenship possessed by mainstream white America.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Ever since “The Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson became the first black World Heavyweight Champion from 1908 to 1915, published studies on his career in early twentieth-century Jim Crow America routinely examine his notorious color-blind lifestyle. Manifesting as the white man’s plight incarnate to refute the Jim Crow rhetoric that black males are physically and mentally inferior to white men by defeating all White Hopes seeking to “reclaim” the white race’s possession—the World Heavyweight Championship.<sup>29</sup> Concluding that Johnson exposed the intense mainstream fear that black progression leads to racial overthrowing and stating his personality proved detrimental to black civil rights efforts. That is until “The Brown Bomber” Joe Louis won the heavyweight championship as Johnson’s opposite through a carefully crafted and protected public image and boxing prowess during the Great Depression.<sup>30</sup>

The problem with the historiographical framework is more than a decade’s worth of No Black Fighters sentiment in twentieth-century America is ignored. Instead, scholars jump to the 1930s to analyze Louis’s part in improving racial equality in and beyond the ring through the 1940s. Plus, no attained piece correlates early twentieth-century racism to contemporary NBF sentiment.

Thus, this timeline of anti-black boxer sentiment during twentieth-century America seeks to provide a viewpoint into the dramatic and frustrating boxing

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<sup>29</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization (Women in Culture and Society)* (University of Chicago Press), Chapter 1 and Chapter 21, Kindle.

<sup>30</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 21, Kindle.



history rifled with the US racial history of representative politics and racial discrimination. Centered within the American African-diasporic male's effort to reclaim ownership of their manhood in the US as part of the venture for equal civil and human rights. As such, the unique wrinkle of this formal timeline aims to lay down the history of NBF's role in matters of race, manhood, and national pride, the origins and occurrences of White Hope, and Jack Johnson's rise, reign, and downfall before doing the same for Harry Wills. This comprehensive overview and breakdown of boxing history are for two reasons: (1) to be more convincing in the value of collegial pugilist history courses and (2) to the depth of white supremacist sentiment established in boxing that Johnson and Wills opposed. These histories aid in tracing the accumulation of mainstream racial politics that Johnson imploded and Wills attempted to fizzle down to end second-class citizenship in their racialized society.<sup>31</sup> Influencing how mainstream America viewed and interacted with the black community amidst the inequality of Jim Crow.

Thankfully, one foundational source is Paul Beston's chronology which considers how boxing "held a special place in the [American] national mind."<sup>32</sup> A chronology built upon seven American World Heavyweight Champions

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Allen Baker, *The World Colored Heavyweight Championship, 1876-1937* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers), Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Beston, *The Boxing Kings: When American Heavyweights Ruled the Ring* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), xi–xii, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/detail.action?docID=5059904> (accessed July 12, 2023).

who “developed an uncanny connection with their times.”<sup>33</sup> Making *The Boxing Kings* a complimentary viewpoint of Jack Johnson as a breathing medium that heightened Jim Crow America’s fervent desire to maintain social and institutional inequality.<sup>34</sup> Telling how his reign “when the title had become a symbol of American masculinity” and decisions “to violate [Jim Crow’s] social and racial decorum” shattered the belief that whites are the only men by displaying black excellence and achievement.<sup>35</sup> Though Beston dips little into Harry Wills’s history of fruitlessly trying to fight Jack Dempsey for the title in the 1920s, his impressive work lends itself well to the thesis’s underlining desire to inform readers why boxing is an underrated lens in examining American racial history.<sup>36</sup>

A fight over manhood and racial equality encompasses the Jim Crow era of legalized racial segregation and discrimination, which includes the early NBF era Johnson set off. As such, the thesis incorporates scholarly works that chronologize the origins and entrenching of Jim Crow’s philosophy and *de facto* and *de jure* policies. So enters Leslie V. Tischauser’s *Jim Crow Laws*, sharing his findings of the segregative philosophy’s adaptation and numerous specified policies and laws throughout the “North and South” to instill “discipline and self-control” in the black population while “as far away from whites as

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<sup>33</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, xiv, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>34</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 27 and 98, ProQuest Ebook Central

<sup>35</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 27–28, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>36</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 53, 62, and 64, ProQuest Ebook Central.

possible.”<sup>37</sup> Dating and detailing Jim Crow’s lifespan from 1865 to 1967, Tischauser’s timeline closely matches *Black Pugilism*’s fundamental inquiry on black Americans’ place in twentieth-century American society. Or, as Rosa Parks summarized, “I had decided that I would have to find out what rights I had as a human being and a citizen.”<sup>38</sup>

Aside from what makes the *Jim Crow Laws* of value for this thesis on boxing and racial history in early twentieth-century America, there is no consideration for the importance of sports in general. Beyond a victimized black football team and segregation limiting a white baseball team’s field practice options, there is nothing of Jack Johnson and Harry Wills in their fight against Jim Crow.<sup>39</sup> But still, incorporating Tischauser’s work helps recapture the intensity of racial representation and individual and communal fulfillment boxing carried through black communal association.

Combining social-oriented and boxing-oriented historical works strikes an enriching balance that *Black Pugilism* strives to establish with social histories that never considered boxing’s significant impact on American race relations. Luckily, there exist texts already successful in this endeavor for reference to ensure this thesis’s centering on boxing history and the importance of social history do not overwhelm each other. One is Gerald Early’s *The*

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<sup>37</sup> Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), xi–xii, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/detail.action?docID=946701> (accessed July 12, 2023).

<sup>38</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, xvii–xxiii and 129, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>39</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, xii and 141, ProQuest Ebook Central.

*Cambridge Companion to Boxing*, an editorial collection of boxing's origins, racial division, a medium of civil rights, and social and cultural periods influencing its business side. Yet, Harry Wills is only mentioned a few times when reading of the Roaring Twenties as a decade of peak sport cultural relevance for all Americans.<sup>40</sup>

Besides this, the article "Harry Greb, Gene Tunney, Jack Dempsey, and the Roaring Twenties" provides a more in-depth telling of heavyweight boxing's engrossing symbolic and authentic cultural significance.<sup>41</sup> Paired with Early's engrossing philosophies and comparisons between the heavyweight and lower weight classes, the *Companion* dates and details the importance of "The Great White Hope," "The Fight of the Century," heavyweight star power, Jack Johnson, and the Roaring Twenties fight scene.<sup>42</sup> Helping grasp the meanings derived from mixed-race contests through incorporating Early's articulating of boxing's "two major cultural subtexts" of "race and individualism" in "black and white" as "the most epic difference between men of the modern age."<sup>43</sup>

However, with the lack of recognition for Wills's historical significance in American racial and boxing history as a significant motivator, *Black Pugilism* calls out the mainstream influence that permeates this decade of boxing. Glossing over the coordinated campaign efforts of "The Black Panther" Harry Wills, the

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<sup>40</sup> Gerald Early, *The Cambridge Companion to Boxing: Cambridge Companions to Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), Introduction and Article 6, Kindle.

<sup>41</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.

<sup>42</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Introduction, Article 5, Article 6, Article 13, Article 21, and Article 23, Kindle.

<sup>43</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Introduction, Kindle.

black press, and the New Negro Movement for a second World Heavyweight Championship interracial match against “The Manassa Mauler” Jack Dempsey. A reactive safeguarding of the Jim Crow status quo established by the definitive color line against any disturbance of US society’s white-centricity by selectively forgetting and heralding preferred facets of the past and present.

Luckily, some passionate boxing and social historians have taken action to help rectify this slight to Wills’s legacy. Mark Allen Baker’s *The World Colored Heavyweight Championship, 1876–1937* examines the unofficial Colored Heavyweight Championship’s chronology from its “separate and unequal” origins to its profitable and prestigious years thanks to the quality of its title holders.<sup>44</sup> Alongside detailing their personalities and actions in separate societal periods, Baker also discusses how the integration campaign for the official world title “played a critical role in the destruction of the color line.”<sup>45</sup> Accompanying his near-century-scaled coverage of boxing and US history are appendixes as he analyzes Johnson’s and Wills’s contribution to the colored title’s rich history and opposition to the color line.<sup>46</sup> He states there are “three phases”: (1) “inception to Jack Johnson capturing the World Heavyweight Championship,” (2) fought for amongst less fortunate competitors “from December 26, 1908, until September 7, 1915,” and (3) Johnson’s world title uncrowning with Wills becoming the colored

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<sup>44</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Introduction, Appendix B, and Appendix C, Kindle.

<sup>45</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 7, Chapter 11, Preface, and Introduction, Kindle.

<sup>46</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Appendix B and Appendix C, Kindle.

champion to “The Brown Bomber” Joe Louis winning the world title in 1937.<sup>47</sup>

Designating Johnson as what intensified an already existing NBF era into a notably intense NBF period, engulfing Wills’s career, that now refused to allow any black World Boxing Champions in all weight divisions beneath heavyweight.

Having found the balance between scholarly texts that are boxing or social history oriented with those dually focused, there remains a need for sources solely concentrating on one of the two. Otherwise, a lack of greater insight into these men’s legacies will leave the body chapters an amalgamation of fractured bits. For Johnson, *Manliness and Civilization* examines his encroachment on the white-only characteristic of masculinity. Between “1880 and 1910,” Gail Bederman details why early corporatizing America, shrinking white middle-class opportunity, and black freedom prompted a shift in white masculinity from the virtue of “manly self-restraint” to amplified virility and brawn against all denial of any worldly desires.<sup>48</sup> Intensifying the white bitterness against Johnson’s world championship victory in 1908 and defeating the epitome of white masculinity in “The Boilermaker” Jim Jeffries in 1910.<sup>49</sup> Bederman breaks down the hatred against his reign and why the future black community and its boxers would face a more stringent color line as a consequence of shattering the bigot’s reality.

An outcome of the thesis’s curiosity on the retaliation against Johnson immediately after winning the world title in 1908 and what befell his demographic

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<sup>47</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Introduction, Kindle.

<sup>48</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>49</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

as he unwillingly became their racial representative by default of engrossed white attention. And to help dig into the level of brazen disrespect Johnson's character holds for Jim Crow rule, it is another socially oriented text that makes government-recognized marriage and the national anti-miscegenation policy its focal point. Chosen specifically for its coverage of the impact on the anti-miscegenation movement and the early New Negro's ire for Johnson's blatant interracial relationships, Peggy Pascoe's *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* examines the government-backed retaliation for his threatening of "white purity."<sup>50</sup> Detailing how the Jim Crow government increasingly weaponized marriage to spread the color line's influence from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>51</sup>

Additionally, it helps to capture the sheer racist intensity during Johnson's reign as the first black World Heavyweight Champion near the turn of the century. After defeating Jeffries in a title defense "billed as a national contest for racial superiority," Johnson's 1911 marrying of high white-society Etta Duryea and notorious adultery that pushed Mrs. Johnson to suicide in 1912 is what the *New York Times* deemed the natural end.<sup>52</sup> A conclusion derived from the belief of miscegenation diminishing the "white purity" that white manhood depends upon to keep American civilization afloat, it will always victimize any white

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<sup>50</sup> Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6–7, EBSCOhost, <https://search-ebscohost-com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e091sww&AN=1069299&site=ehost-live> (accessed June 19, 2022).

<sup>51</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 1 and 9–10, EBSCOhost.

<sup>52</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 164, EBSCOhost.

woman romantically involved with a non-white man. A natural consequence is Johnson becoming one of the most famous people in the world and what happens when non-whites cross the color line. Becoming the “foremost example of the evil in permitting the intermarriage of whites and blacks,” Pascoe recognizes that Johnson’s manner of (differing) domination of white men and women left him in bad standing with the New Negro.<sup>53</sup> In response to fellow black Americans asking him to stop pursuing white women and keep it within the race for the sake of the black man’s image, Pascoe notes that Johnson felt slighted by white and black America for being his manly self.

To which a bitter and rejected Johnson channeled this hurtful rejection of his authentic self and masculinity through a heightened image of black villainy. A living nightmare receiving national coverage from white and black outlets for his demolition of the previous white world champion and every subsequent White Hope with superior skills and physicality. Such powerful and “foretelling” imagery caused white America’s “dual consciousness” to target boxing’s exposure. As Johnson’s reign lay within the Progressive Era, his status as the most well-known non-white American brought Progressives and Jim Crow supporters together. So read in Dan Streible’s “A History of Boxing Film, 1894–1915,” as the Progressives campaigned for censoring this “barbaric” practice while Jim Crow enforcers wished to censor “colored grander.”<sup>54</sup> Johnson’s 1908 title claim

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<sup>53</sup> Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 165 and 175, EBSCOhost.

<sup>54</sup> Dan Streible, “A History of the Boxing Film, 1894–1915: Social Control and Social Reform in the Progressive Era,” *Film History* Vol. 3, no. 3 (1989): 235–236, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3814980> (accessed July 12, 2023).



highlights the disingenuous nature of Progressivists for teaming up with Jim Crow supporters to intensify boxing's opposition until his 1915 defeat.<sup>55</sup> Studying these particular "anti-boxing moralists" exposes the "dual consciousness" of Progressive's racial bias on who deserves a presumed good—an improvement for whites and American civilization but unnecessary for blacks.<sup>56</sup>

That mission is to stop the "irrationality" of celebrating violence and accumulated injury in a sporting culture of booze, women, and greed. Or, in a word, degeneracy. A supposed greater good that became a racially underlined movement against the ending of masculinity's once presumed white exclusivity by black America's communal face. Making "dual consciousness" another theme in exploring and analyzing the mainstream and black subconscious in early twentieth-century America. All while laying out the cons this coddling spells for the white demographic after black manhood became undeniable. As well as for the black community, as Johnson's actions and accolades spurred destructive and fatal white vigilantism.

Paralleling this identity crisis and shift for white men amidst a near-decade-long display of black excellence is the black man's communal and self-discovery for unity during the peak of Jim Crow. According to "The Lost World of the Negro, 1895–1915," the New Negro Movement arose not in 1920s Harlem but in the southern states "during the mid-1890s" through "emerging ethnic

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<sup>55</sup> Streible, "Boxing Film," 241–242, JSTOR.

<sup>56</sup> Streible, "Boxing Film," 241, JSTOR.

consciousness.”<sup>57</sup> Wilson J. Moses highlights the New Negro’s “two views of racial contributionism”: (1) “pride in distinct racial accomplishment” and (2) “to have that accomplishment accepted as part of the American picture.”<sup>58</sup> Moses’s focus on these views aids in respectively classifying the two black boxers as either an “appealer” or “opposer.” Influencing their relationship with black institutions and how well they individually fit their community’s efforts for mainstream acceptance. In tandem with “double consciousness,” the black American’s ability to see themselves through white eyes and then strive to attract goodwill or become the targeted antagonist in white eyes speaks to which New Negro Johnson and Wills chose to become. Was it the black antagonist threatening American civilization’s white-centricity and existence, or the black appealer adopting and adapting mainstream moral expectations of blacks in a disarming self-improving but still anti-color line manner?

Of course, as the New Negro is rooted in American society, the shifts made in the movement add greater detail to the chronology of the NBF era of focus. Assisted by Barbara Foley’s *Specters of 1919*, arguing the year 1919 and its “Red Summer” is “the political crucible from which the radicalism of the 1920s emerged” for white and black America.<sup>59</sup> Also, asserting the New Negro’s

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<sup>57</sup> Wilson J. Moses, “The Lost World of the Negro, 1895–1915: Black Literacy and Intellectual Life before the ‘Renaissance,’” *Black American Literature Forum* 21, no. 12 (1989): 61–62, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904421> (accessed July 12, 2023).

<sup>58</sup> Moses, “Lost World,” 63, JSTOR.

<sup>59</sup> Barbara Foley, *Specters of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), DESCRIPTION, ProQuest, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=3414258> (accessed June 19, 2022).

“radicalism of 1919 [became] the quietism of Locke’s culturalist manifesto of 1925” due to adapting mainstream “nationalism,” “the Achilles heel of twentieth-century mass movements for liberation.”<sup>60</sup> The New Negro’s adaptation of white American nationalism instead of what can organically formulate from their segregated community set their movement for failure in the 1920s. Abiding by mainstream America’s expectations of the black community disadvantaged the New Negro in the 1920s as it fundamentally meant the acceptance of staying on their side of the color line despite decades of white folk crossing said line to commit injustice in black spaces.

It abides by the mainstream understanding that once the black community stays in its “place,” there is little else to do besides keeping them there and focusing on other matters concerning white America. While ignoring or hindering the New Negro’s efforts for a fairer American society, the Roaring Twenties was when white America did its best to consume the bustling Gold Age of Sports events as a quasi-replacement and coping practice as what determines the state of the union as faith in the federal government diminishes through scandals. So, as the New Negro Movement took the strategically unideal open but reserved positive racial representation approach to attain racial equality, they required one ideally placed figure so unignorable that white America couldn’t afford to ignore him.

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<sup>60</sup> Foley, *Specters of 1919*, vii–x, ProQuest.

So enters “The Black Panther” Harry Wills, whose endeavor for the world title became a long, drawn-out case of racial assertiveness with support from black media. Failing to overcome the mainstream media and government entities supporting “The Manasa Mauler” Jack Dempsey and his management’s constant naysaying of his worthiness as a title contender and purposely giving Wills false promises. A rambunctious pursuit sorely underrepresented in popular boxing history as the New Negro tried to prove Jack Johnson was not the naturally incurring result when a black man achieves financial and manly distinction. With so much emotion pervading the 1920s beneath the celebrations and glamor, this timeline phase addresses boxing’s fervent segregation closely following the end of Johnson’s reign.

All inferred from Mark Dyreson’s “The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture,” the Roaring Twenties was when a near totality of white manhood’s supremacy was restored in American boxing.<sup>61</sup> While never again regarded by white male spectators as a popular craft that proves only the white male can exude masculinity, invested white spectators at least touted their race of men as the greatest during Dempsey’s reign. As is routine when a competitor is declared the new or continuing World Heavyweight Champion after (hopefully) beating the best possible opposition anytime, anywhere.

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<sup>61</sup> Mark Dyreson, “The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s,” *Journal of Sport History* 16, no. 3 (1989): 261, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43610285> (accessed July 12, 2023).

According to Mark Dyreson, professional physical competition in the 1920s symbolized high economic opportunity, spirited displays of determination to succeed, and good life spending.<sup>62</sup> While explaining why boxing best captures the cultural shift from sports strictly serving as “a political tool” in bringing up ideal citizens and “rationalizing social relations.”<sup>63</sup> Now, boxing became an exploitable spectacle for heralding white masculinity over all non-white masculinities with “cultural symbolism,” including “scientific efficiency,” “corporate ethos,” “the untamed energy of the frontier,” and the rebellious “anti-civilization” spirit.<sup>64</sup> For this to work, though, the world champions had to be white. As the mainstream subconscious knew, the popularity and celebrated attributes imparted on world champions are images easily wielded by organized non-whites attempting to end their societal imposition.

Such is what Harry Wills enrolled himself in after securing the colored title in 1922 until 1926 and defeating “The Wild Bull of the Pampas” Luis Angel Firpo in 1924 to become a world title contender.<sup>65</sup> As Jack Dempsey possessed the world title and Wills the colored title, the “Harry Wills and the Image of the Black Boxer from Jack Johnson to Joe Louis” article explains the significance of his pugilistic struggle.<sup>66</sup> The black press painted Wills as Johnson’s and the

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<sup>62</sup> Dyreson, “American Sports in the 1920s,” 261, JSTOR.

<sup>63</sup> Dyreson, “American Sports in the 1920s,” 274–276, JSTOR.

<sup>64</sup> Dyreson, “American Sports in the 1920s,” 275–276, JSTOR.

<sup>65</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Appendix B and Timeline, Kindle Edition.

<sup>66</sup> Brian D. Bunk, “Harry Wills and the Image of the Black Boxer from Jack Johnson to Joe Louis,” *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 1 (2012): 63, ProjectMUSE, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/485347> (accessed July 12, 2023).

scandalous Dempsey's opposite, a sober "lover of home life" and devoted to his intelligent and maternal wife.<sup>67</sup> Somebody those white and black American men can see as the ideal American man deserving of a world title match. A goal Wills and his supporters hoped would begin breaking down the racial barriers to economically and politically empower black America and end the social stigma of the black man possessing no impulse control and being a natural aggressor towards the white race. But, realistically speaking, it is upsetting how established black outlets founded in opposition to Jim Crow used Wills's profile to display their community appealingly to their naysayers and opposers.

This was a troubling state of affairs that had Wills constantly gritting his teeth in the hope that his achievements would force a world title match. Sadly, Wills and his supporter's failure would come about due to white America's too recent memory of Johnson as a sign of what happens when black men are proven the white man's better. As inferred by the tremendously invested white minds never wishing again that any black man holds any world title to suggest the black race of men is superior to all others. From a mainstream understanding, Johnson, as a natural consequence of black progression, is why Wills could never get his world title match. However, Bunk shares a matching endpoint of Wills's career after 1927 ended his championship prospects, in which his participation in the "use [of] sporting figures as important symbols in the

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<sup>67</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 64–66, ProjectMUSE.

broader fight for civil rights” enabled “The Brown Bomber” Joe Louis to even fight for the World Heavyweight Championship.<sup>68</sup>

To be acknowledged and presented in the conclusion of *Black Pugilism*, Wills and the black press of the 1920s helped formulate the campaign strategy to paint Louis as an inoffensive and contributive public figure that won the support of white and black America. This enabled him to continue as the second black world champion and a cross-racial hero, complete Wills’ work in the ending NBF period, and dismantle the color line in boxing to inspire other sports to lose their walls of prejudice after Louis’s title reign from 1937 to 1949. Of course, taking inspiration from Bunk, one last emphasis on Louis’s success in inspiring black Americans in their fight for equal civil and human rights is owed to Wills and his supporters.

Naturally, the end of the conclusion will acknowledge the continuation of Jim Crow. While the black pugilist is credited for making black manhood no longer a deniable reality and humanizing the black man’s image, boxing is but another sport. Ending the continuation of the color line in Jim Crow form requires more than imagery from the ring. As each scholarly source acknowledges or helps to definitively determine the scope of boxing’s importance and impact on American race relations.

What is certain is boxing’s gruesome and engrossing scene where the truth of a competitor’s bodily limits and abilities become apparent is the

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<sup>68</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 75, ProjectMUSE.

necessary medium to refute white denial that a black can achieve masculinity definitively. And then made for the ideal platform to promote the black man and his community's positive qualities and contributive potential to American civilization. All little after the turn of the century, through these two black heavyweights and white America's rejection of black pugilism for exposing the Jim Crow Era's validity as embarrassingly fictitious. Covering the late nineteenth to early twentieth century America, the scholarly sources in *Black Pugilism* aid in telling the too little-known history of boxing as a battleground over the "access" and qualities of manhood along racial lines.



## METHODS

First and foremost, the central focus of this thesis is a substantial period of heightened No Black Fighter sentiment within the already existing era afflicting professional boxing, beginning with “The Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson and encompassing the career of “The Black Panther” Harry Wills. From when the color line’s philosophy of systematic racial separation, oppression, and undermining took shape as Jim Crow from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, boxing became a figurative and literal focal point of the black male’s struggle for recognition of their masculinity and then, as black men, their human and civil rights. To prove their inclusion into American society’s mainframe of politics and economy will benefit the country. To erase the fear of a black uprising to become the chief race that gatekeeps involvement in government and industry from the mainstream subconscious of racially advantaged pro-Jim Crow whites.

So, considering the intense NBF period stems from the late nineteenth century until coming into existence in the early twentieth century, strict guidelines and boundaries obey the historical themes pertinent to the careers of Johnson and Wills. Of focus are the racial struggle over American manhood, the fight for equality in civil and human rights from the gatekeeping pro-Jim Crow Americans, and the high-profile black American’s role in choosing to appease or oppose their white American detractors. In tandem are the social and cultural periods impacting the boxing landscape amidst Jim Crow America.

Relevant to *Black Pugilism* is the unofficial Colored Heavyweight Championship from 1876 to 1937, the New Negro Movement from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, and the Jim Crow Era from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. Utilized to establish boundaries on what historical themes, events, and characters help recapture and break down the historical tensions afflicting the two mediums directly or indirectly in their careers and personal lives. All within the American social fabric of a racialized and prejudiced society that disadvantages black Americans as second-class citizens. While across the social ladder, first-class citizenship exists solely for the white demographic who the country's politics and social norms advantageously revolve around.

For the catalyst spurring the NBF period of interest, the focus for Johnson was his fight and victory against the white supremacist ideal of manhood as white-exclusive by dominating white men in the ring, white women romantically, and flaunting his passion-driven exploits. He obtained everything the norm of white supremacist ideology claimed as unattainable and abnormal for non-whites—a living rebuttal to Jim Crow during its height. But, what fueled Johnson to enrage white America so brazenly was a deeply channeled sadness that white and much of black Americas refusal to respect and admire his manliness as the World Heavyweight Champion. The fact Johnson never experienced the acceptance and admiration a white man would in his position is a significant

factor in *Black Pugilism*. Telling more than what Johnson did but what led to his actions and the sort of individual behind the legendary “Galveston Giant.”

Attached to Johnson’s career are the New Negro’s origins in the late nineteenth century, new white manhood, the creation and solidifying of Jim Crow, Jim Crowers and Progressivists promoting the censorship of fight films depicting black excellence, the fight against “white slavery” with the Mann Act, and the Second Ku Klux Klan alongside *The Birth of a Nation* film. Each facet is chronologically analyzed in sequence to “The Galveston Giant’s” actions to explore their relevance to the histories of Johnson and Jim Crow America. Determining and explaining their significance and impact on black America’s campaign against the color line’s continuing to divide white from black through the de jure and de facto policies of entrenched racism in government institutions, pro-Jim Crow white communities, and the business side of professional boxing.

For example, in studying the connection between Johnson and nationwide anti-miscegenation, the utilization of the 1910 Mann Act against mixed-race intimacy is inspected for its hardening the regulation of black Americans into second-class citizenship. Through this, an observation of who Johnson was during his championship reign amidst early Jim Crow works to humanize this stark historical figure. Going beyond the surface of his notorious accomplishments in boxing to reveal him as a fatalistic jester masking the sadness of white and black rejection of his brand of masculinity with heightened black and gender antagonism.

As this procedure details the mutual influence between Johnson and early twentieth-century Jim Crow society, so is the case for Harry Wills. So, the priority for “The Black Panther” of the 1920s is his claim to the Colored Heavyweight Championship and leading world title fight contender. Critically, the focus falls on Wills and his supporting black outlet’s campaign and reasons for failing to secure a mixed-race title fight against the World Heavyweight Champion “The Manassa Mauler” Jack Dempsey and then “The Fighting Marine” Gene Tunney.

As for the social and cultural factors relevant to this venture, they are the belief that professional sports determine the nation’s future more than the federal government, the reserved appeasing nature of the 1920s New Negro Movement, Jim Crow during the 1920s, and the mainstream and black institutions clashing over the status of Jim Crow through media coverage of prominent pugilist competitors. Plus, when learning about all the media downplaying and judicial corruption blocking Wills’s earned right for a world title fight, the Roaring Twenties became a decade where white men used the better representation of their demographic in physical competition to justify their sense of racial and masculine superiority. While no longer innately superior due to the acknowledgment of black masculinity, they could at least “prove” themselves more capable and American than any black man.

The constant doubting of his abilities and skills and illogical explanations for why he doesn’t deserve a world title match makes Wills the heroic “appealer” attempting to show his opposition he deserves fairness and equality. A bold but

inoffensive communal “face” trying for mainstream acceptance as a man entitled to the opportunity to fight for the World Heavyweight Championship gatekept strictly for white American competitors. A man of admirable American quality and not a naturally insufferable consequence of equality.

This movement to reintegrate professional boxing to inspire further societal desegregation after the tacked-on consequences of Johnson’s critical achievement for recognition of black manhood necessitates factual bluntness over historical sensitivity. Not that sensitivity is an unimportant trait when writing about such contentious and saddening histories. Still, as a work for an underrepresented NBF period, there is a louder demand for frank writing.

As such, the discussed boxer’s achievements and predicaments in and out of the ring are factually scrutinized to disabuse common boxing history knowledge of any false or misleading narratives. Consequently, contemporary boxing historians seeking inspiration from the sport’s past and those referring to these competitors for fulfillment from their respective race’s distinguished pugilists may feel disgruntled. However, given the findings of the competitors discussed brought forth revelations of “he likely lied,” “he is also at fault,” “his career is not as preached,” and “these aspects of him are professionally detrimental,” disillusionment is necessary. These are not moral judgments derived from personal subjectiveness. The products conveyed in *Black Pugilism* from centralizing, researching, and studying boxing during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shall read bluntly of the white demographic and black

community struggling against each other over masculinity's supposed racial exclusivity and then the narrative of innate more excellent quality.

With these intertwined gender and racial histories, the sequential tales of Johnson and Wills's respective but comparable careers and hardships provides an intergenerational account of black Americans fighting against second-class citizenship. For black men, the struggle revolved around first proving its existence and then the nature of their manhood. While the racially partisan mainstream America, without fail, progressively complicated what a male citizen required to be an American man of respectful worth and societal fairness. Plus, urging why this engrossingly violent and skillful craft requires more substantial collegial attention for its pitting white versus black mortal bodies against one another to impartially determine which competitor is superior amidst the climate of Jim Crow riddled with dividing skin color tribalism for self-worth.

## THE GREAT WHITE HOPE: SENTIMENTS AND BEGINNINGS

### Bigger Than Johnson

When *Black Pugilism* began, the central focus fell on Jack Johnson's color-blind lifestyle in and out of the ring as the first black World Heavyweight Champion from 1908 to 1915.<sup>69</sup> How "The Galveston Giant" hindered the New Negro Movement, originating in the post-Reconstruction South by freed people.<sup>70</sup> New Negroes literarily and philosophically exercised their "new spirit of confidence and assertiveness" to prove themselves "racially responsible" and "worthy of respect."<sup>71</sup> But, then, holding back any political and economic gains after adjusting their community "to industrial democracy," advocating temperance, and using mainstream "civilization" for "racial uplift" was the far more known Johnson's poor sportsmanship, lavish spending, domestic violence, adultery with white prostitutes, and heavy drinking.<sup>72</sup>

As the most famous sportsman in the world during his championship reign, *Black Pugilism's* original objective was examining and scaling Johnson's effect on the New Negro Movement. As told in Ken Burns's *Unforgivable*

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<sup>69</sup> Paul Beston, *The Boxing Kings: When American Heavyweights Ruled the Ring* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 33 and 49, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/detail.action?docID=5059904>.

<sup>70</sup> Wilson J. Moses, "The Lost World of the Negro, 1895-1919: Black Literary and Intellectual Life before the 'Renaissance,'" *Black American Literature Forum* 21, no. 1/2 (Spring–Summer 1987): 61, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904421>.

<sup>71</sup> Moses, "Lost World of the Negro," 61 and 67, JSTOR.

<sup>72</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, directed by Ken Burns (2004: Public Broadcasting Service, 2005), Documentary, <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/unforgivable-blackness-the-rise-and-fall-of-jack-johnson>.; Moses, "Lost World of the Negro," 67 and 71, JSTOR.

Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson, the fourth black world champion did not care to support his people's effort to improve white and black race relations.<sup>73</sup> Even in professional boxing, Johnson did not care to help end the color line pervading a sport where all that should matter is the best fight, no matter their skin color. Notoriously by drawing the color line against fellow black heavyweights and faced heavy indignation from black Americans for ducking "The Boston Bonecrusher" Sam Langford before and after defeating "The Great White Hope" Jim Jeffries.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, by this point of the initial research, inspiration struck from Mark Allen Baker's *The World Colored Heavyweight Championship, 1876-1937* timeline, and *Black Pugilism* became an account of the underexplored NBF period Jack Johnson began in 1908.<sup>75</sup> A period in which the little regarded "The Black Panther" Harry Wills of the 1920s supported the New Negro's efforts to end the color line's grip on boxing and loosen its hold on American society.<sup>76</sup> This historical moment relates to contemporary American boxing with still present NBF sentiment, where promoters color code to prejudiced fans' desire to see fair-skinned competitors succeed.<sup>77</sup> All at the expense of black boxers that receive

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<sup>73</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, directed by Ken Burns.

<sup>74</sup> "Johnson Backs Away From Sam Langford," *Morning Press*, December 30, 1910, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MP19101231.2.42> (accessed July 14, 2022).; Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 27, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Ducker/ing: Describing a professional pugilist for avoiding another competitor in fear of losing.; Jeffries original ringname was "The Boilermaker."

<sup>75</sup> Mark Allen Baker, *The World Colored Heavyweight Championship, 1876-1937* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers), Introduction, Kindle.

<sup>76</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>77</sup> Barbershop Conversations, "Cameron Dunkin-Top Rank Matchmaker Keeps Elite Fighters Away from Black Fighters-"Their More Gifted", YouTube Video, 10:27, October 10, 2020, <https://youtu.be/yEIFHZN-UpE>.



downplaying narratives from the biased media and the competitor they need to fight for fan recognition, effectively hindering their careers. But, as is the fact of history, there is no repetition, as stark contrasts surface upon digging deeper. Such occurred after paying attention to the effect of Johnson's reign. And so, *Black Pugilism* incorporated the 1920s to examine how boxing, in a racialized white-centric society, played a part in the history of race relations amidst black civil rights efforts to fulfill the promises of equal human and civil rights.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, this chapter serves to help bring awareness to the symbolic and actual historical significance of the White Hope narrative with three tales of mixed-race title fights, including how highly profiled mixed-race matches threaten or support the idea of racial superiority. First, the 1810 and 1811 bare-knuckle meetings of Tom Molineaux, an American freeman, and Tom Cribb, a native Englishman, for the English and World Championship on English soil.<sup>79</sup> Then, almost a century later, the 1906 bout between "The Old Master" Joe Gans, the first black American world titlist and first black World Lightweight Champion, and "The Great White Hope" Oscar Nelson.<sup>80</sup> The third fight is particularly relevant because it is the first literalized "Great Fight of the Century" and the first "Great White Hope."<sup>81</sup> Laying the precedents that made Jack Johnson's 1908 title

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<sup>78</sup> Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 129, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/detail.action?docID=946701>.

<sup>79</sup> Gerald Early, *The Cambridge Companion to Boxing: Cambridge Companions to Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), Article 2, Kindle.

<sup>80</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.; Originally Oscar "Battling" Nelson.

<sup>81</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5 & Article 21, Kindle.

victory and 1910 victory against Jeffries so historically consequential during early twentieth-century Jim Crow America.<sup>82</sup>

### White Hope: Sentimental Origins

From 1812, the early nineteenth-century encyclopedia of English bare-knuckle competitors, *Pancratia* reads: “The greatest degree of expectation was excited in the public mind, with respect to the issue of the contest, and that NATIVES felt somewhat alarmed that a man of colour should dare to look forward to the Championship of England.”<sup>83</sup> Likely sailing from New York and arriving in England in late 1809, Tom Molineaux immediately entered the British fighting scene to become an undeniable contender for the English title.<sup>84</sup> An affronting venture to British society for a foreign African-diasporic male and self-ascribed “Champion of America” to dare challenge Tom Cribb.<sup>85</sup> Incidentally and symbolically engrossing, this foreigner’s “invasion” arrived not a decade after a few failed and one almost inevitable French invasion during the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 21, Kindle.

<sup>83</sup> Christopher James Shelton editor, “Cyber Boxing Zone -- Tom Molineaux,” *The Cyber Boxing Zone Encyclopedia -- Black Dynamite / American Bare Knuckle Champion*, CBZ MEDIA INC., 2008, Cyber Zone Boxing, <http://www.cyberboxingzone.com/boxing/tom-mol.htm>.

<sup>84</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 1, Kindle.; Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 21, Kindle.

<sup>85</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>86</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 21, Kindle.; Zack White et al., “Invasion Scares in Britain, 1793-1815.” *TheNapoleonicWars.net*, last modified 2019, <https://www.thenapoleonicwars.net/british-invasion-scares-overview>.

During the “Great Invasion Scare” from 1802 to 1805, an estimated 200,000 French soldiers did not cross the English Channel because Napoleon Bonaparte opted against a fourth attempt.<sup>87</sup> The heads and masses of the British forces knew this as merciful fortune. By 1803, the British government’s recruitment peaked at an untrainable, unarmable, unmanageable 450,000 enlisters of separate and opposing “small corps” refusing to fight outside their “localities” under the “control of military law.”<sup>88</sup> Deemed an “illogical and incoherent” situation by 1804, the public’s national pride tanked after learning King George III’s domain was effectively spared in 1805.<sup>89</sup>

This was made undeniable further by the lack of “large modern fortification” in the southern port and London to protect the British Isles.<sup>90</sup> By 1803s end, the construction of defensive towers to prevent the French from landing in the south of England lagged due to a disjointed work ethic between England’s men of politics and military men.<sup>91</sup> So, in 1805, with tower construction beginning by spring, after Napoleon abandoned his August attack, it is not unreasonable to think all levels of Britain’s social ladder felt a downturn in their “national pride.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> White et al., “Invasion Scares,” TheNapoleonicWars.net.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Hicks, “The “Great Fear” in the United Kingdom, 1802-1805,” *Napoleonica. La Revue* vol. 32, no. 2, (2018): 106, CAIRN.INFO, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-napoleonica-la-revue-2018-2-page-97.htm> (accessed June 12, 2022).; White et al., “Invasion Scares,” TheNapoleonicWars.net.

<sup>89</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 21, Kindle.; Hicks, “The “Great Fear”,” 106, CAIRN.INFO.

<sup>90</sup> Hicks, “The “Great Fear”,” 114, CAIRN.INFO.

<sup>91</sup> Hicks, “The “Great Fear”,” 114–118, CAIRN.INFO.

<sup>92</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 21, Kindle.; Hicks, “The “Great Fear”,” 118, CAIRN.INFO.

So, the insult of a foreign black freeman daring to challenge the recently retired Champion of England, “The Black Diamond” Tom Cribb, made the native English people indignant. First, their military proved unprepared to fend off a foreign invasion due to their ineptitude in organizing and collaboration, skills a country’s forces are supposed to excel in. Then, the sovereignty of their king’s domain was not won but granted by the enemy. Now, a foreign black freeman, the self-dubbed Champion of America, was proving a contender for the Championship of England after defeating the retired Cribb’s pupil in July and remaining undefeated after an August match.<sup>93</sup>

As a Cribb-Molineaux meeting was proving inevitable, England’s common folk began to worry about the status of their manhood. They lagged as a defensive force, and their native men could not defeat a freeman on equal ground. Since the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade began in the early sixteenth century, white skin designated innate physical and mental superiority to the lowly Africans so “fortunate” to become “beasts of burden for white folk.”<sup>94</sup> For the English, Molineaux’s success threatened to reduce white English masculinity to less than a subhuman.

Thus, Cribb accepted the foreigner’s challenge. Otherwise, Molineaux’s boisterous claiming of the Championship of England might become legitimate if not defeated. How can the English bear the shame of a foreign freeman reigning

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<sup>93</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>94</sup> W.E.B Du Bois, “W.E.B. Du Bois – The Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920). (New York, NY: Library of America, 1987): 931, Amazon Web Services (AWS), [https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du\\_Bois\\_White\\_Folk.pdf](https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du_Bois_White_Folk.pdf).

supreme over England's native men? However, Cribb's voluntary retirement as the champion and highly regarded skillful ability led to such high certainty in his victory that only a low attendance of common folk witnessed the tremendous December 18 fight. Until falling from exhaustion by round 39, Molineaux faced "unavoidable disadvantages" of disheartening "xenophobia and racial prejudice" jeers from attendees, a "torrential rain" hampering the performance of the unaccustomed, and a broken finger after his pinning the less exhausted champion to the ropes caused an impatient crowd to rip him away.<sup>95</sup> Afterward, Molineaux's formal rematch request by letter asked for spectators not to let "color...operate to my prejudice."<sup>96</sup>

That time, on September 28, 1811, the English understood that Cribb's success largely came through a hindering of Molineaux. Knowing the Championship of England and a claim for the world championship at stake, such potential for glory or agony pulled "upwards of 20,000 Englishmen."<sup>97</sup> All levels of the British social ladder appeared. From the second Earl of Yarmouth Francis Charles Seymour Ingram, Sir Henry Smith, the Marquis of Queensberry, the third Earl of Pomfret George Fermor, gamblers, pickpockets, weavers, and butchers.<sup>98</sup> Cribb stood to defend the honor and glory of English manhood in the eyes of all

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<sup>95</sup> Carl B. Cone, "The Molineaux-Cribb Fight, 1810: Wuz Tom Molineaux Robbed?," *Journal of Sport History* 9, no. 3 (1982): 87 and 89–90, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43609266>.; Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>96</sup> Cone, "Wuz Tom Molineaux Robbed," 87, JSTOR.

<sup>97</sup> Cone, "Wuz Tom Molineaux Robbed," 87, JSTOR.; Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 2 and Article 21, Kindle.

<sup>98</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 21, Kindle.; Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

his majesty's people. And Cribb succeeded by rendering Molineaux unconscious in round 11 to the celebratory uproar of the socially and economically diverse crowd.<sup>99</sup> For the masses of invested English people, they interpreted their national hero's victory as a promise of success in the Napoleonic Wars.

What propelled Cribb to a pseudo-savior status through pugilism instead of military contributions was his compatibility. Developing himself physically from working as a coal porter, a commercial profession that thousands worked, "The Black Diamond's" ring name told the English commoner that his humble and hard beginnings shaped him into a worthy national representative.<sup>100</sup> It was an honor the common Englishman now believed possible for himself after a former coal porter basked in the praises of the royally and militarily distinct members of society.

At a time when the Napoleonic Wars riddled English manhood with uncertainty, Cribb's existence after bare-knuckle success became therapeutically reassuring. The strength of Britain's people had not dwindled to where a foreign freeman could become the champion of the English. Back in London, Cribb met fan-stuffed roads celebrating for days until, after simmering down, approximately sixty upper-class men arranged "a celebratory dinner at The Castle Tavern in Holborn" and then another eight weeks later to gift Cribb a solid silver engraved

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<sup>99</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 21, Kindle.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Radford, "Lifting The Spirits Of The Nation: British Boxers and The Emergence Of The National Sporting Hero At The Time Of The Napoleonic Wars," *Identities – Global Studies in Culture and Power* 12, no. 2 (2005): 249 and 252, Taylor & Francis Online, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10702890590950609>.

cup.<sup>101</sup> Like the cup, Cribb's contribution to British manhood was deemed invaluable and warranted him to remain champion for almost twelve years with no more title defenses. Due to wartime demanding resilient manliness and pugilism becoming the perfect medium for expression on the homefront, British men held Cribb-Molineaux in the same thought. Fortunately, further cementing Cribb as a national sporting hero, the September rematch that ended the British man's "national insecurity" rang true in its inferred promise that united manly resilience and effort led to the British defeating Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.<sup>102</sup>

What lies in both Cribb-Molineaux meetings is the history of a native white becoming a White Hope symbol in all its racial and national implications before literalization. In the case of steamingly resentful English natives, the audacity of a non-white pugilist had England "crouched" like a beast waiting for the chance to punish whom they believed conquered, as classified by W.E.B. Du Bois in his 1910 *The Souls of White Folk*.<sup>103</sup> Stating the "vast applause at the superiority of white over black soldiers(!)" persists and is jointly held with the United States of America in the twentieth century.<sup>104</sup> A misfortune plaguing all matters of representation which British journalist of culture and sport Pierce Egan recognized in *Boxiana, Or, Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism*:

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<sup>101</sup> Radford, "Lifting The Spirits Of The Nation," 252–253, Taylor & Francis Online.

<sup>102</sup> Radford, "Lifting The Spirits Of The Nation," 252, 261, and 265–266, Taylor & Francis Online.

<sup>103</sup> Du Bois, "Souls of White Folk," *Darkwater*, 923 and 934, AWS.

<sup>104</sup> Du Bois, "Souls of White Folk," *Darkwater*, 928, AWS.

Comprising the Only Original and Complete Lives of the Boxers.<sup>105</sup> Initially published in 1812, Egan summarized Molineaux's circumstance as "the sporting world preferred having a white to a black pugilistic champion."<sup>106</sup> Begging the inquiry of if the world prefers white over black, is it not indicative of whose influence rules the Western world?

### White Hope: Literalized

Before Molineaux's 1818 death in Galway, Ireland, the staunch Cribb fan came to respect his fighting ability, style of dress, and self-confidence.<sup>107</sup> Though the most basic courtesy in the fight game only came after Molineaux the threat became Molineaux the subdued. A circumstance found not only in the United Kingdom but all Western countries, wherever white and black live within the same borders, and whenever two men from their respective races meet in the ring. Transforming an already dangerous contest of imposed wills into an event that determines which race is superior through the understanding that the two competitors are the best both races offer. As a repeating occurrence from boxing's bare-knuckle years to the gloved era just before the turn of the twentieth century, the black boxer threatening to prove the idea of racial superiority a

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<sup>105</sup> Pierce Egan, *Boxiana, Or, Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism: Comprising the Only Original and Complete Lives of the Boxers* (United Kingdom: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1829), 1, Google Books, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Boxiana\\_Or\\_Sketches\\_of\\_Ancient\\_and\\_Moder/wMhBAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Boxiana_Or_Sketches_of_Ancient_and_Moder/wMhBAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).

<sup>106</sup> Egan, *Boxiana*, 339–340, Google Books.

<sup>107</sup> Egan, *Boxiana*, 339–340, Google Books.



fallacy irrefutably became the villain in the ring and potential target outside of the ring in white eyes.

In the postbellum United States of America of the twentieth century, should any white fighter that all white Americans on the social ladder identify with lose to a black boxer, the coercively conjured reality of masculinity being exclusively white risked being shattered. Such nearly occurred on September 3, 1906, between “The Old Master” Joe Gans, the first black American world champion, and white Oscar “Battling” Nelson.<sup>108</sup> Comparative in Western racial and nationalist overtones, Gans-Nelson’s American knot is the rejection of black manhood’s existence and not just the quality of white manhood like what Cribb-Molineaux made the English writhe anxiously. Only a couple of decades after the end of chattel slavery in America, Gans’s distinction as the world’s best boxer during his championship reign refuted the Jim Crow status quo that black males are too physically and mentally inept at attaining any masculine distinction. Thus, as the first literalized White Hope fight came to fruition in 1906, its prelude and conclusion showcased white America’s genuine fear and rejection of any defiance of the color line.

Important to note, Gans becoming the first black World Lightweight Champion in 1902 came not a decade after the Supreme Court Plessy v. Ferguson decision legalized the “Jim Crow culture [seeking] to prevent all contact

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<sup>108</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.

between black and white people.”<sup>109</sup> With Jim Crow at its peak from the 1900s to the 1910s, the “separate and unequal” clause reinforced the color line’s applicability nationwide.<sup>110</sup> In 1906, one North Carolina senator’s justification for the de jure continuation of a slave-era practice stemmed from fear of a racial overthrow: “The Negro had not been segregated merely for political or race advantage, but ... for his good and the country’s good, and speaking broadly, for our own salvation.”<sup>111</sup> If America’s black race even enjoys political and economic equality, it will spell definite societal instability. Translating to the necessity of white Americans receiving better opportunities and freedoms over second-class citizens through de jure and de facto Jim Crow enforcement. This way, the white race purportedly leads the country while the black race obeys their betters for everyone’s sake.

However, even before Jim Crow officially became the law of the land, boxing’s status as an illegal sport imbued it the unique quality as one of the few integrated professions that brought together white and black competitors and observers in differing proximity. And despite white America’s usage of pugilist spectacle to celebrate and vindicate the legitimacy of white supremacy and masculinities racial exclusiveness, “The Old Master” exploited that proximity and existing prejudice practices to climb the boxing ladder.

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<sup>109</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 7–8, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>110</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 45–46, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>111</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, xii, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, on November 25, 1874, Joseph Grant entered the Gay Nineties shucking oysters at Baltimore Harbor's Broadway Market at a time when every three days, somewhere in America, a black male lynching occurred.<sup>112</sup> A tragic norm that the color line levied as necessary to keep blacks "in their place" to ensure disproportionate social, economic, and educational advantages for whites. A definitive answer to the "Negro Question." Coined in "The Negro Question in the South" (1892), Thomas E. Watson lamented Southern free people as "an ever-present irritant and menace" for their impulsive tribal voting in opposition to white Southern values, encouraging the latter to distrust Northern suggestions increasingly.<sup>113</sup> Ultimately, free people unsatiated by (routinely infringed upon) equal rights in the South led to racial strife through the political disconnect between white and black.

This article from late nineteenth-century America ignored the constant economic slights the black man and his family felt daily from job discrimination. Into the early twentieth century, masculinity came from a male's economic achievement or distinction by prospering in an occupation that satisfies his family's needs and desires.<sup>114</sup> Thus, with few other avenues available to the desperate black father beyond the menial, any profession became an option. So

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<sup>112</sup> Collen Aycock and Mark Scott, *Joe Gans: A Biography of the First African American World Boxing Champion* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers), Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>113</sup> William A. Link and Susannah J. Link, eds., *The Gilded Age and Progressive Era: A Documentary Reader*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 188–189, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1vsk8nk>.

<sup>114</sup> Louis Moore, *I Fight for a Living: Boxing and the Battle for Black Manhood, 1880-1915* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 12, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.5406/j.ctt1vsk8nk>.

enter boxing. Its illegality aside, its popularity offered an opportunity for masculine expression through physical and financial success. Alongside the scores of black men entering professional fighting part-time to help feed the family, or full-time in pursuit of respect as men of financial success and sports dominance, the 1880s witnessed the founding of approximately five hundred and four black newspapers “to protest the treatment of black people.”<sup>115</sup> These outlets utilized the black boxer’s image to celebrate and inspire further black success. Plus, when the victim of corruption or conveying the black boxer’s plight is made representative of mainstream conniving to keep the black male in a position the white demographic can deem unmanly.

And so, the black Baltimorean entered the fight game with a hunger for food his previous occupation couldn’t satiate and a better life. Thus, by the late 1880s, the newly named Joe Gans started, as many other black competitors did, in the battle royal scene—a continuation of the antebellum practice of slave fights for their owner’s entertainment.<sup>116</sup> In postbellum America, a recurring event before official matches, multiple young black men fought until the last standing or stopped for impatient white spectators to throw coins for scrambling competitors. Its continuation reinforced the idea that black males are undeserving of a man’s respect in white eyes, while for black competitors, it helped to make a quick but small buck. Nevertheless, Gans developed a reputation for superb potential and

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<sup>115</sup> Moore, *I Fight for a Living*, 18, JSTOR.

<sup>116</sup> Aycock et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 2, Kindle.; Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 4, Kindle.; Boxers typically alter their birthnames for commercial reasons.

toughness in just a few battle royals. Moreover, he eventually secured proper management in a white-manager-dominated sport, usually unwilling to deal with non-whites. But in Gans, his prospects of greatness and monetary gain were certain.

From fighting as his recent ancestors did as human cattle to fighting as a world title contender, Gans's victories secured him a shot at the World Lightweight Championship in 1900. However, after Gans won more of the twelve rounds fought thus far, the reigning Frank Erne won by forfeit after delivering Gans a headbutt that compromised his left eye to definite blindness should the title defense proceed.<sup>117</sup> Realistically, when Gans told the referee to stop Erne-Gans, Gans won by winning more rounds. But, whenever the opportunity struck, the prevention of black excellency was paramount during Jim Crow's peak. To certify the establishment of de jure and de facto segregation based on ordained racial supremacy versus inferiority, the most popular sport of the time had to reflect that "reality." And so, the Baltimore Sun, a former mainstream outlet with a history of supporting color line dominance since the slave era, published a celebratory "Gans is Whipped" article to insist Erne won with superior skill with no mention of a headbutt.<sup>118</sup>

In the mainstream's nature to conjure "realities" to legitimize Jim Crow, episodes like these displaying impunity in their enforcement did go from

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<sup>117</sup> Aycock et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 6, Kindle.

<sup>118</sup> Aycock et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 6, Kindle.

frustrating to fatal. As scorned in Ida B. Wells's 1900 "Lynch Law in America," stating the "unwritten law" of de facto lynching is an epidemic of an immoral cultural norm stemming from the motivation to uphold white supremacy's factors of, amongst others, the so thought white exclusivity of manhood and white women.<sup>119</sup> While mobs also targeted black women and children, Wells's highlighting of the steeper quantity of lynched black men speaks to their threat to the white male's "innate superiority" whenever exercising manliness. In white eyes, the "potentiality" of a black man made superseding innocent until proven guilty "with the greatest publicity" a sign of social stability thanks to continued white superiority and purity.<sup>120</sup> The latter is enough reason for lynching the "offender" as soon as possible.

The sheer impunity of Jim Crow coercion underscores the double-edged nature of the color line's classification as a necessary philosophy. In postbellum twentieth-century America, free of the absoluteness of bondage, some possibilities (not open opportunity) existed for freemen to earn personal and racial-communal upliftment within their community. These included schools, social clubs, media outlets, and churches. Then, in sports, there lies the chance to pull from the mainstream subconscious a conscious acknowledgment of black masculinity to observe what happens when white men face a supposed sign of a black-on-white overthrow. Then, in boxing, two competitors determine who reigns

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<sup>119</sup> Link, eds., *A Documentary Reader*, 201–202, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>120</sup> Link, eds., *A Documentary Reader*, 202–204, ProQuest Ebook Central.

supreme on equal standing through methodically exercised violence, hopefully without corruption.

Thus, on May 12, 1902, after twelve years of disrespect and hard-earned victories, Gans knocked out Erne in the first round to become the first black American world champion and the first black World Lightweight Champion.<sup>121</sup> Returning to a parade in black Baltimore gowned in “diamond stickpins, elaborate canes, and flashy clothes,” Gans proved to black Americans that Jim Crow was not totally preventative of black excellence through exercising “Victorian respectability and sporting manhood.”<sup>122</sup> In sporting culture, beyond displaying black financial distinction by regularly betting “hundreds on a craps game and thousands at the [horse racing] tracks,” “The Old Master” made himself an asset by taking dives to benefit black gamblers and providing money to struggling black boxers.<sup>123</sup> As for his mannerisms, Joe Gans exercised a gentleman’s calmness and firmness to maintain dignity in the face of white disrespect. In 1903, Gans kept composure to defeat the white fighter who spat in his face during the referee rule instructions and then, in another successful title defense, exercised the importance of respect after inviting a white spectator howling “Fake(!)” into the ring.<sup>124</sup> Gans’s level-headed but firm conduct earned some white acknowledgment as a black individual better not directly offended.

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<sup>121</sup> Aycock et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 1, Kindle.; Moore, *I Fight for a Living*, 44, JSTOR.

<sup>122</sup> Moore, *I Fight for a Living*, 44–46, JSTOR.

<sup>123</sup> Moore, *I Fight for a Living*, 45–46, JSTOR.; Dives are when boxers intentionally lose for money.

<sup>124</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.

Beyond himself, Gans sought to display a successful black patriarch fulfilling his family duties after capitalizing on equal opportunity. Marrying two weeks after the 1900 world title robbery, Gans knew that for black Americans, “the home became a platform to prove racial parity” to white men living the American dream.<sup>125</sup> Also serving as a sign of overcoming the color line to achieve economic independence, a black patriarch practiced middle-class values to prove black masculinity beyond the physical and the pleasure-ridding sporting culture. It also sent a message to black America that besides strictly climbing the American social ladder “on their side” of the color line, it is possible to compete against whites and win. For the profiting black boxer, success meant promising prospects for their descendants’ economic and educational future. Moreover, Gans strove to be his bloodline’s only professional fight because such an achievement means he prevented his children from accepting pugilism’s bodily wear-and-tear and facing unwarranted white slander in exchange for money.

But despite mainstream outlets’ recognition of his premier skills and talents, they wielded his past of diving to say his title defenses in 1903 and 1904 were fake. Unlike white world champions who sparingly defended their titles for commercial profit, like the heavyweight champion “The Boilermaker” Jim Jeffries once in 1903, Gans was historically active.<sup>126</sup> Even then, Gans’s title defense victories were subject to a mainstream smear campaign. The San Francisco

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<sup>125</sup> Moore, *I Fight for a Living*, 47, JSTOR.; Aycook et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 6, Kindle.

<sup>126</sup> Aycook et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 10, Kindle.



Examiner claimed, on June 28, 1902, that the Erne-Gans rematch was an agreed-fixed fight until the Gans violated the agreement, and then the Butte Miner smeared, on July 5, 1903, “the three-day-boxing festival” a “triple farce comedy” and “unequal and interesting.”<sup>127</sup> To those unaware of professional pugilist culture, finding a world champion capable of staying silent against such disrespect is rare. And Gans is in that small pile as part of the bigger struggle to inspire his race to challenge and for the mainstream to reconsider the so-believed necessity of the color line.

As a black American with little formal education, “The Old Master” understood how depressing an unequal start in American life is for the future. So, born with an innate hard-grinding nature that produced a child oyster shucker “with strong, fast hands” at Baltimore’s Broadway Market, the adult Gans’s made his personal development known by, for example, gracefully accepting a controversial 1904 draw against “The Barbados Demon” Joe Walcott, the third black world champion and first at welterweight.<sup>128</sup> As a representative of black America, Gans did his best to silently and physically argue for equal opportunity by displaying black excellence, etiquette, and willingness to learn, similar to what Booker T. Washington called for in his 1895 Atlanta Compromise speech. Washington called his predominantly high-standing industrial white audience only to make available an inclusive industrial education and job for blacks to fill those

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<sup>127</sup> Aycock et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 10, Kindle.

<sup>128</sup> Aycock et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 3 and Chapter 10, Kindle.; Live spectators believe Gans won the title.

positions and make a manly contribution to American civilization, a proposition the black press and civil rights groups lauded.<sup>129</sup>

With black education a concern for the white and black populace, for opposing means and ends, it is little wonder why what can improve or undermine a person's chances of proving white superiority a fantasy came under attack. In 1904, with mounting calls to not take black education beyond a few years for menial work, James K. Vardaman won the election for Governor of Mississippi by running a fear campaign that an educated black is far more dangerous than an illiterate.<sup>130</sup> Stemming from mainstream greed for lopsided opportunities and fear of racial overriding to be the defining demographic of American society, the white anxiety and black pride of "The Old Master" culminated in Gans's life and career-defining 1906 fight.

As for white eyes across the country, the search since 1902 for a white fighter worthy of symbolizing the white race to defend racial superiority and the accompanying lopsided economic and political advantages concluded. In Oscar "Battling" Nelson stood a white man capable of reminding Gans and other black males why the white race is physically and mentally superior to the black race and why only whites are men. Heightening white America's emotional investment further, Nelson's future Hall of Fame promoter George Lewis "Tex" Rickard dubbed Nelson the first "Great White Hope" in the first "Great Fight of the

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<sup>129</sup> Link, eds., *A Documentary Reader*, 209–210, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>130</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 38–39, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Century” as a faux warning that the results would determine if a racial overriding was on the horizon.<sup>131</sup> Due to this, mainstream retailers and media “[illustrators] depicted Gans with a sloping forehead, bug eyes, and thick white lips” to agitate and make him lose focus.<sup>132</sup> In particular, cartoon postcards celebrated the fight’s capital success and displayed racist caricatures of Gans. Copyrighted by Ben Michaels, the “Biggest Nugget Ever Taken From The Nevada Mines” states the approximately \$30,000 fight suited the gold mining town of Goldfield, Nevada.<sup>133</sup> The gold boulder of comedic caricatures depicts Gans with disproportionate eyes, grossly oversized white sclera, a protruding wart-like nose, ballooned-up lips, and no oral commissures.<sup>134</sup> In the build-up for “The Great Fight of the Century,” Jim Crow’s ardent supporters voiced and contributed however they could support Nelson. But not in betting.

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<sup>131</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.

<sup>132</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.

<sup>133</sup> “Joe Gans vs. Battling Nelson, Goldfield, Nevada, 1906 Fight Postcards,” The Road West: The Steve Turner Collection of African Americana, Part II, *BIDSQUARE*, last modified December 3, 2020, <https://www.bidsquare.com/online-auctions/cowans/joe-gans-vs-battling-nelson-goldfield-nevada-1906-fight-postcards-2002251>.

<sup>134</sup> “Fight Postcards,” *BIDSQUARE*.

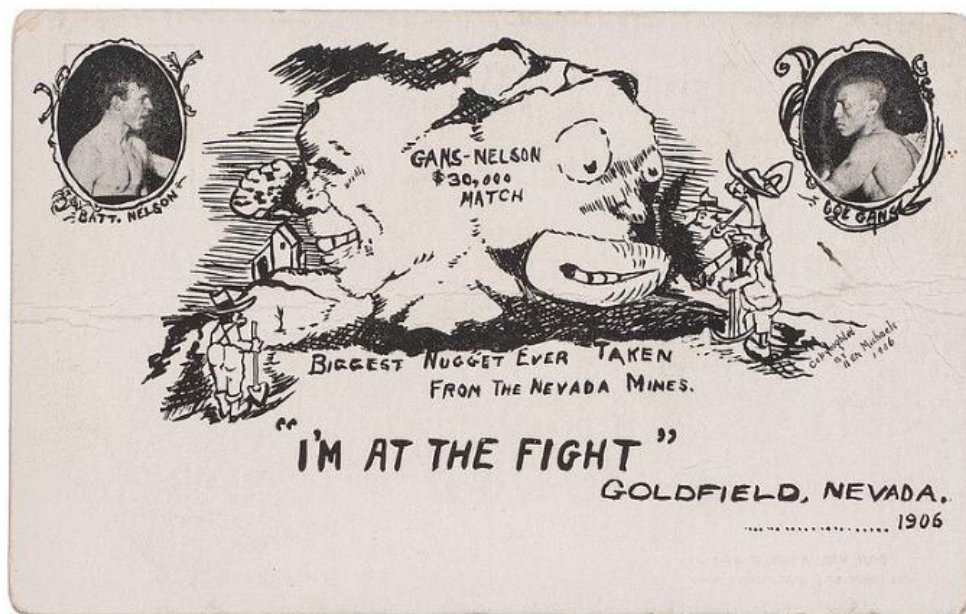
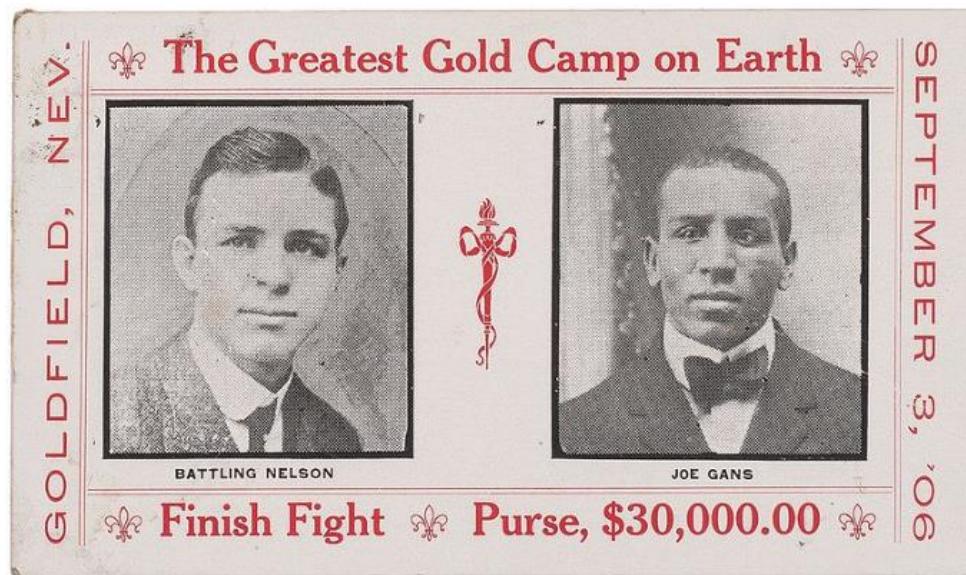


Figure 1. Two sides of the same promotional postcards. "Joe Gans vs. Battling Nelson, Goldfield, Nevada, 1906 Fight Postcards." Courtesy of "The Road West: The Steve Turner Collection of African Americana, Part II" from the online auction site *BIDSQUARE*.

For this notorious "Finish Fight," where the match does not stop until either fighter quits or cannot continue, supporters of the "White Hope" did not show

confidence in interviews or the betting pool. Even the World Heavyweight Champion Jim Jeffries held no faith, per an August 23 San Francisco Call interview, stating Gans will “slaughter” the “White Hope” “in a square fight.”<sup>135</sup> A day before the fight, a San Francisco Call article reported that Nelson’s fans have yet to bet in his favor in any capacity.<sup>136</sup> Instead, the “White Hoppers” in Reno merely fibbed about Gans-Nelson as an easy task for their man.

Besides representing his people against the attempts to degrade him psychologically with racist caricatures and words, two unfortunate factors motivated Gans to enter the fight as a must-win scenario. First, the demands of “Victorian respectability and sporting manhood” bankrupted Gans into acquiring an \$11,000 advance on his purse to continue adhering to them.<sup>137</sup> However, these values bankrupted Gans again and he arrived without a manager in Goldfield by train. So, the head of the Goldfield Athletic Club and Sullivan Trust Company, “Shanghai” Larry Sullivan, and his partner and general manager, George Graham Rice, promised to cover all fees and training expenses upon signing a contract.<sup>138</sup> Afterward, Sullivan shared his wealthy companions bet quite a bit of money on “The Old Master,” so if the “Finish Fight” didn’t kill Gans in the ring, then they would outside the ring.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> R.A. Smith, “Jefferies Picks Gans to Win,” *The San Francisco Call*, August 24, 1906, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19060824.2.98.1> (accessed July 11, 2022).

<sup>136</sup> Edward Clarke, “Wise Ones Wager Their Coin on Baltimorean,” *The San Francisco Call*, September 2, 1906, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19060903.2.60.1.2> (accessed July 11, 2022).

<sup>137</sup> Moore, *I Fight for a Living*, 46, JSTOR.

<sup>138</sup> Aycook et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 14, Kindle.

<sup>139</sup> Aycook et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 14, Kindle.

With everything on the line, it didn't matter that Nelson's management had Gans weigh in at noon, 2:30 PM, and 3:00 PM a few minutes before the fight to prevent re-nourishment, losing was a literal death sentence.<sup>140</sup> So, amazingly and horribly, already in pain from not re-nourishing his weight-drained body, Gans made "The Great Fight of the Century" on September 3 torturous for Nelson too. In three hours and with blood covering the competitors and canvas, Gans's endless headshots left Nelson dizzy and wobbly numerous times but cost a broken bone in the right-hand mid-fight.<sup>141</sup> Then, displaying why he is also called "Durable Dane," Nelson delivered tremendous body blows whenever Gans held on for a second wind.<sup>142</sup> Essentially, the fight became what "Finish Fights" hoped to become, a non-stop clash of attrition.

By round forty-two, the fight mercifully concluded on a disgusting note when "The Great White Hope" put Gans down with a groin punch, earning "The Old Master" victory by disqualification.<sup>143</sup> The day after, the *Morning Press* reported that Nelson, "the most unpopular man who ever visited Goldfield," shall remain to recover a few more days while Gans departed amidst congratulations from supporters and some former opposers.<sup>144</sup> But, before exiting by train, Gans, true or not, intentional or not, took another swing at "white pride" by stating "he

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<sup>140</sup> Aycook et al., *Joe Gans*, Chapter 14, Kindle.

<sup>141</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.

<sup>142</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.

<sup>143</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.

<sup>144</sup> *Associated Press*, "Offered Money to Lose Fight – Joe Gans Refused Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars to Lay Down to Nelson," *Morning Press*, September 5, 1906, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MP19060905.2.54&srpos=9&e=-----190-en--20--1--txt-tx!N-joe+gans----1906---1> (accessed July 11, 2022).

was offered \$25,000 to let Nelson win, but he would not say who made the offer.”<sup>145</sup>

It was an embarrassment to the white race. Earlier in August, mainstream America’s beloved World Heavyweight Champion, the best white man on the planet, stated only a fair fight showed which race is supreme.<sup>146</sup> Yet, Nelson proved himself undignified after being sent through the ropes and responding to his opponent’s helping hand with temperamental kicks and a few below-the-belt line punches the referee warned him about until the groin punch.<sup>147</sup> Thus, episodes of violence ensued between pride-wounded whites and proud blacks, all because promoters played on the Jim Crow sentiment that warned of a possible overriding if the white man’s representative failed to win against a black male. The fight signified the possible existence of black men and their potential to defeat the best white men on equal grounds.

Two days after “The Great Fight of the Century,” the Los Angeles Herald, in collaboration with the Associated Press, reported that Chicago experienced a “spirit of lawlessness” of white and black scuffles over contrasting match opinions.<sup>148</sup> Most notable is the following sentence: “In South Chicago, a fight between blacks and whites resulted in the severe beating of several negroes and

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<sup>145</sup> *Associated Press*, “OFFERED MONEY,” CDNC.

<sup>146</sup> Smith, “Jefferies Picks Gans,” CDNC.

<sup>147</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 5, Kindle.

<sup>148</sup> *Associated Press*, “Fight Causes Battles,” *Los Angeles Herald*, September 5, 1906, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19060905.2.83.1&e=04-09-1906-29-09-1906-190-en--20--101--txt-txIN-gans+----1906---> (accessed April 8, 2023).

the arrest of forty men.”<sup>149</sup> As Progressivist outlets, the Los Angeles Herald and Associated Press couldn’t even acknowledge the black’s manhood by print, not even when condemning white men for their cowardice. It is this common prejudice, whether the white American be an ally or not, that prominent blacks like Gans worked to undo by displaying a balance of black gentility and manliness. After his career victory, Gans returned to another Baltimore celebration, an even bigger cultural icon. With his 1906 winnings, Gans continued the Victorian and sporting lifestyle to create Baltimore’s best café and purchased the newly dubbed Goldfield Hotel for renovation, becoming a symbol of racial pride.<sup>150</sup>

Such economic gains by the prominent black gentleman and their community, despite Jim Crow, went against what the North Carolina senator in 1906 said was crucial for American continuity, “The Negro had not been segregated merely for political or race advantage, but ... for his good and the country’s good, and speaking broadly, for our own salvation.”<sup>151</sup> In translation, the black American’s rightful place in American society was as a second-class citizen for the white American’s advantage because a potential black-centric America will collapse into itself. So, combining this mainstream doomsday belief defining race relations to the existence of black gents like Gans proving

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<sup>149</sup> *Associated Press*, “Fight Causes Battles,” CDNC.

<sup>150</sup> Moore, *I Fight for a Living*, 47, JSTOR.

<sup>151</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, xii, ProQuest Ebook Central.



themselves better than his white opponents in character and physicality, the need to remind black Americans of their “place” was necessitated.

In Atlanta, Georgia, this need finally boiled over in 1906. Since 1902, including Gans’s successes, the build-up ramped with the arrival of black rural economic migrants viewed as “more lawless and immoral than the longtime black residents.”<sup>152</sup> By September 22, the heightening of this cynicism with fabricated attacks on white women by the Constitution, the Journal, and the Georgian birthed five days of white mobs hunting blacks disarmed by police, resulting in 26 deaths, one being white, and hundreds of injured.<sup>153</sup> On October 7, future founding member of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Francis J. Grimké urged blacks to have “brute force” ready without retributive spirit and agreed with whites about protecting a race’s women but condemned the usage of hearsay to assail another community for prospering.<sup>154</sup> Instructing his people’s men never to smear their manhood and self-respect and continue proving to be the former’s equal in business, education, and athletics.<sup>155</sup> And while against prizefighting, admits gratification when George Siler, the nationally renowned referee, and overseer of Gans-Nelson, said Gans proved the black a man and gentleman and when Boston’s Sunday Post inquired if the

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<sup>152</sup> Darlene C. Hine, et al., *The African-American Odyssey* Vol. 2, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2014), 425.

<sup>153</sup> Hine, et al., *Odyssey*, 425–426.

<sup>154</sup> Francis J. Grimké (Francis James), 1850–1937, *The Atlanta Riot: A Discourse* (Washington D.C.: s.n., 1906), 9–10 and 13–14, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/atlantariotdisco00grim/mode/2up>.

<sup>155</sup> Grimké, *The Atlanta Riot*, 6 and 11, Internet Archive.

recent and current successes of black boxers mean their fighting superiority.<sup>156</sup> A message of guidance in the frustrating aftermath of tragedy and where to derive inspiration, Grimké still knew black success in the nation's most popular sport meant humiliation in the eyes of Jim Crow.

And the Los Angeles Herald knew the conclusion of such humiliation to be a concern for the fight for black manhood. Published on July 6, 1908, the “Negro Fighter Passing Away” fretted if the decrowning of George “Little Chocolate” Dixon at featherweight in 1900, “The Barbados Demon” Joe Walcott at welterweight in 1906, and finally, Gans in 1908, spelled the end of black world champions.<sup>157</sup> In reverse, all seemed right in white eyes, with the world championships once again serving a cycle of white crowning that reinforced the belief in masculinity's racial exclusivism. No longer just advantaged in societal rights and institutional domination, the white man could again see “himself” through racial identity as the only one able to reign as a world champion. Still present in contemporary boxing is this coping viewpoint of tribal attitudes through shared racial or ethnic identity between the competitor and spectator.

### Conclusion

Comical enough, the Los Angeles Herald article unknowingly foreshadowed by noting the existence of the ultimate potential embarrassment in

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<sup>156</sup> Grimké, *The Atlanta Riot*, 6–7, Internet Archive.

<sup>157</sup> “Negro Fighter Passing Away,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 6, 1908, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19080706.2.56.2.12> (accessed July 14, 2022).

the illustrious heavyweight division, as one black boxer refused to be denied the greatest prize in sports. “Jack Johnson alone stands in a position to command the admiration of the fight world for his prowess, real or imaginary, as it may be.”<sup>158</sup> As summarily explained in *The Boxing Kings: When American Heavyweights Ruled the Ring*: “Mixed-race contests at lower weights were permissible but not at heavyweight—not when the title had become a symbol of American masculinity.”<sup>159</sup> While boxing remained illegal, Jim Crow’s de facto rules made it clear that the confirmation of a black man as superior to all men of the white race must never transpire. And where else would this nightmare scenario happen but where the biggest and strongest men equally fought to impose their wills?

Remember, before and since Tom Molineaux, the black gentlemen in sports who miraculously attracted white admiration, still met detrimental mass white disrespect and corruption, professionally and mortally. So, what if a passion-driven black heavyweight reigned as world champion while repeatedly, flagrantly crossing the color line? In early twentieth-century America, an even more crucial “Fight of the Century” came to fruition with the faux-reality of the white man’s innate mental and physical superiority at fatal risk. A “Great White Hope” contest threatened to awaken Jim Crow’s supporters and enforcers to the reality of their responsibility as the only race capable of upholding and advancing

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<sup>158</sup> “Passing Away,” *Los Angeles Herald*, CDNC.

<sup>159</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 27, ProQuest Ebook Central.

American civilization as a fantasy. To forever alter American gender and racial politics because of the pious stringent nature of the belief in absolute white superiority.

## THE GALVESTON GIANT: THE CATALYST

### The Making of Jim Crow

From Leslie V. Tischauser's writings, de facto culture enabled Jim Crow's de jure segregation to legally and effectively separate white and black America into unequal private spaces and access to public facilities and services in the North and South from 1881 to 1964.<sup>160</sup> Where chattel slavery concluded in December 1865 after the Thirteenth Amendment's ratification, the color line's divisive philosophy inspired legal segregation to "violate or deny any American of any color his or her civil [and human] rights."<sup>161</sup> So, as the Supreme Court empowered state governments and local police to pass and enforce Jim Crow laws, mainstream white citizens legally conducted themselves by this "system of prejudice and discrimination."<sup>162</sup>

Jim Crow's beginnings were the peak of its aggression, as believers in the color line sought to establish a new status quo that rhymed with pre-Civil War race relations. But even then, as court cases like *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) legalized unequal opportunities, an "emerging ethnic consciousness" inspired a "new spirit of confidence and assertiveness among the recently freed masses of

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<sup>160</sup> Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), xi, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>161</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 7 and 36, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/detail.action?docID=946701>.

<sup>162</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 35–36, ProQuest Ebook Central.

black southerners.”<sup>163</sup> Dubbing themselves New Negroes, this communalizing drive for equal rights influenced their movement’s core motivations. Their ethos pursued racial responsibility and admirability to end the mainstream fear of racial overthrowing.<sup>164</sup> Approaching “race relations as a moral struggle,” the New Negro brought “moral influences [to make] white Americans more democratic and more just and black people” more suited for American “Civilization.”<sup>165</sup>

But still, “Negro Improvement” challenged Jim Crow’s principle that whites were the superior race mentally and physically.<sup>166</sup> A “reality” dependent on the black’s lack of advancement that Sarah Dudley Pettey, a first-generation free woman, challenged in North Carolina.<sup>167</sup> During the nineteenth century’s last two decades, knowing education can empower, Pettey joined a wave of black middle-class economic and professional growth to join “more than seven hundred other African-American women teaching in [southern co-ed] public schools.”<sup>168</sup> Within her community, she broke barriers within the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church with her “Woman’s Column” in “the Star of Zion” newspaper in the early 1890s and, in 1898, was “ordained the first female elder.”<sup>169</sup> After helping

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<sup>163</sup> Wilson J. Moses, “The Lost World of the Negro, 1895-1919: Black Literary and Intellectual Life before the ‘Renaissance,’” *Black American Literature Forum* 21, no. 1/2 (Spring–Summer 1987): 61, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904421>; Tischauser, *Laws*, 36, ProQuest Book Central.

<sup>164</sup> Moses, “Lost World,” 63 and 67, JSTOR.

<sup>165</sup> Moses, “Lost World,” 70–71, JSTOR.

<sup>166</sup> Moses, “Lost World,” 71, JSTOR.

<sup>167</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, “Gender and Jim Crow: Sarah Dudley Pettey’s Vision of the New South,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 68, no. 3 (1991): 261 and 265, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23519483>; Moses, “Lost World,” 71, JSTOR.

<sup>168</sup> Gilmore, “New South,” 261–262, 268, and 271, JSTOR.

<sup>169</sup> Gilmore, “New South,” 273–274, JSTOR.

progress her community towards black excellence and gender equality, Pettey felt ready to address white Southern racism directly.

Unfortunately, a nationwide white supremacist political campaign sought to “destroy [growing] black aspirations and to foreclose economic possibilities” to “profoundly [reorder] society” to the white’s advantage.<sup>170</sup> Mainstream parties “capitalized upon allegations of urban disorder, changing gender roles, and fear of black economic progress.”<sup>171</sup> In North Carolina, attacks on black suffrage reversed the trend of “more than 50” black state legislatures “between 1876 and 1892,” where the final black legislature lost in the early 1900s election.<sup>172</sup> Then, as an attack on generational growth, the curriculum for black public elementary schools emphasized to students “their place” as “law-abiding” inferiors.<sup>173</sup> This full-scale attack on black progression also served to remind and reassure white Americans of their rightful place.

During the Gilded Age in mid to late nineteenth-century postbellum America, the white middle class expanded through greater economic opportunities. Coinciding with the Second Industrial Revolution, the Gilded Age saw the humble formation of early-Victorian manhood championing generational growth while exercising self-control in business, public conduct, and virility.<sup>174</sup> A version of white manhood influenced by the widespread “small-scale, competitive

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<sup>170</sup> Gilmore, “New South,” 263, JSTOR.

<sup>171</sup> Gilmore, “New South,” 275, JSTOR.

<sup>172</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 20–21, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>173</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 38, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>174</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization (Women in Culture and Society)* (University of Chicago Press), Chapter 1, Kindle.

capitalism,” making it possible for young white men to enter an industrial-related profession, build experience, and emerge as “entrepreneurs, professionals, [or] managers.”<sup>175</sup> Notably, the expectation of giving back to American civilization, so more (white) citizens could progress in their pursuit of happiness, was a duty. Even Andrew Carnegie, one of the wealthiest industrial magnates worth billions today, in “The Gospel of Wealth” 1889 article, preached how philanthropy “is the proper mode of administering wealth” “for the comfortable maintenance and education of families” to increase “competence.”<sup>176</sup> Rather than charity for only immediate relief, Carnegie stated the redistribution of wealth should construct accessible institutions for ambitious person’s intellectual and skillful improvement, resulting in further industrial advancement for economic prosperity through generational growth.

However, the opportunities for middle-class men to push themselves and their families up the class ladder dwindled amidst the centralizing of goods and services as unchecked corporatization ran its course during the Gilded Age. As Henry Demarest Lloyd stated in his 1884 “The Lords of Industry,” the coal monopoly by Cornelius Vanderbilt and Samuel Sloan combined their mining, transportation, and selling resources to shrink other mine owners and retailers.<sup>177</sup> With the onslaught of low wages and high prices, a small-scale coal mine owner

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<sup>175</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>176</sup> William A. Link and Susannah J. Link, eds., *The Gilded Age and Progressive Era: A Documentary Reader*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 67–68, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1vsk8nk>.

<sup>177</sup> Link, eds., *A Documentary Reader*, 72–73, ProQuest Ebook Central.



asked about the “little guy,” a Vanderbilt lieutenant responded, “If the small operator goes to the wall, that is his misfortune, not our fault.”<sup>178</sup>

From 1870 to 1910, alongside economic depressions undermining the small-scale profitable business and entrepreneurs, the job market’s increase of only low-tiered positions dwindled the climbing of any corporate ladder.<sup>179</sup> This shift from widespread economic health and opportunity to a monopolized market by so few caused white manhood to move away from the Victorian virtue of self-restraint and the prioritization of serving family and community. As such, the monopolized market environment caused the white American man to approach American society as an all-for-one scenario. By the 1890s, this new economic reality of intense competition for whatever possible pushed middle-class men to pursue themes of the unrelenting competitor expressed through musculature, grit, and uncontained virility.<sup>180</sup>

As the then never changing factor of white masculinity, the destruction of any jeopardizing of their status as the superior race of men, white people couldn’t accept seeing a black person doing better than or close to themselves. In North Carolina, where a solid black political presence remained since Reconstruction, 1898 saw Democratic outlets literalize and call for a “White Supremacy campaign” to Wilmington’s electing of black officeholders.<sup>181</sup> One 1898 political cartoon from North Carolina’s *News and Observer* displayed an expensive

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<sup>178</sup> Link, eds., *A Documentary Reader*, 73 and 76, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>179</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>180</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>181</sup> Link, eds., *A Documentary Reader*, 216–217, ProQuest Ebook Central.

shining leather button boot with a white pant leg labeled “The Negro” stepping on a shoe sole size white man.<sup>182</sup> Illustrating the damage done to white masculinity’s pride by the industrial magnets and the fact black Americans in positions of power are maintaining what they earned. Back then, American manhood’s identity also relies on being the primary breadwinner in the household and satisfying all of the family’s needs and wants. Add that there are still black people in economic and political situations better than themselves, it becomes unbearable. In no way can black Americans do better than white Americans due to the ideals of racial and masculine superiority, arguing it is a scenario and embarrassment that cannot and should not exist.

As W.E.B. Du Bois shared in The Souls of White Folk article from 1910, he witnessed two respectively educated white gentlemen give “a tigerish snarl of rage” upon seeing a black woman sitting in a Pullman car and a few others driving a motor car.<sup>183</sup> Unfortunately, the publication year signifies this trait of absolute racial superiority did not change further into the twentieth century. And in America’s most popular sport stood the finest representative of the newest white man in “The Boilermaker” Jim Jeffries. As the World Heavyweight Champion from 1899 to 1904, when heavyweights weighed between the mid-180s to 190 and stood under six feet, Jeffries’s stood a hairy six feet two inches

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<sup>182</sup> Link, eds., *A Documentary Reader*, 217, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>183</sup> W.E.B Du Bois, “W.E.B. Du Bois – The Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920) (New York, NY: Library of America, 1987): 925, Amazon Web Services (AWS), [https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du\\_Bois\\_White\\_Folk.pdf](https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du_Bois_White_Folk.pdf).

and fluctuated in weight from the mid-210s to low-220s.<sup>184</sup> Paired with his powerful physique, Jeffries relied on bodily strength to attain victory while refusing to yield. A prototypical “Slugger” with superb stamina, strength reserves, and a low crouch set to jump and pummel.<sup>185</sup> To the believers of supremacy in whiteness and its manhood, Jeffries was post-Victorian white manhood personified. He was also the best man on the planet in the eyes of white America and its men—the ultimate white American folk hero.

With his fair skin and sports distinction, Jeffries reaffirmed the “religion of whiteness” in America that spread across Europe and the Euro-diaspora.<sup>186</sup> A celebration of whiteness emerging from the Western world’s economic successes in imperializing and colonizing Africa, Asia, the Caribbean islands, South America, and North America.<sup>187</sup> A necessary evil for white prosperity and the lowly, uncoordinated non-white people’s improvement. As in America, where the white demographic dominated and influenced politics and economics, hence the title of mainstream demographic, the black demographic made up the central other. The people most persecuted by the former due to their race.

As such, in Wilmington, North Carolina, the “White Supremacy campaigns” target were the established black politicians. On November 10, 1898,

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<sup>184</sup> Paul Beston, *The Boxing Kings: When American Heavyweights Ruled the Ring* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 29, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=5059904>.

<sup>185</sup> Slugger: A competitor relying on their one-punch knockout power to defeat their opponents.

<sup>186</sup> Du Bois, “White Folk,” 930, AWS.

<sup>187</sup> Du Bois, “White Folk,” 928–929, AWS.

whites conducted a race riot and killed ten blacks.<sup>188</sup> The political and religious counter-movement by black southerners, with Pettey's column writing and pulpit preaching, failed as the "violence of 1898 and ensuing disenfranchisement in 1900 effectively removed blacks from politics and reversed the rising economic prospects of urban blacks."<sup>189</sup> After black landownership dwindled and they lost property value "dramatically between 1895 and 1905," Pettey, her family, and many others migrated to New York City, creating a pathway for the Great Migration.<sup>190</sup> But still, the New Negro Movement pushed on to prove their people contributive, self-sufficient, and deserving of respect on both sides of the color line. Sadly, the face of black America post-"The Old Master" cared not contribute to this mission. Instead, he knowingly and selfishly worked against it.

### The NBF Era: The Build Up

In *The Souls of White Folk*, Du Bois states the "discovery of personal whiteness among the world's peoples is a very modern thing,—a nineteenth and twentieth-century matter," and is punitive when blacks challenge white authority and superiority.<sup>191</sup> In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he states, "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line."<sup>192</sup> But, for those drawing the color line, he expresses "pity for a people imprisoned and enthralled, hampered

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<sup>188</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, xviii, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>189</sup> Gilmore, "New South," 276 and 283, JSTOR.

<sup>190</sup> Gilmore, "New South," 283–284, JSTOR.

<sup>191</sup> Du Bois, "Souls of White Folk," *Darkwater*, 923 and 925, AWS.

<sup>192</sup> *The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois: With a Critical Introduction by Patricia H. Hinchey* (Bloomfield: Myers Education Press, 2018), 5, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=5377984>.

and made miserable for such a cause, for such a phantasy!”<sup>193</sup> For Du Bois, the effects of the illusion of race went both ways, what mattered was which side of the color line someone stood.

And when reading about this “new religion of whiteness,” a contemporary American may wonder what if a single black man proved an antithesis to the purported innate white superiority.<sup>194</sup> To go further, what if that offending black man exploited “racialized reputational politics” to prove his manhood undeniable and not mentally and physically the white man’s inferior?<sup>195</sup> Possibly, a superior? A self-identified New Negro who, rather than illustrating black progress in tandem with piety, “temperance, and sexual discipline,” embraced the “black villainy” stigma levied upon all blacks succeeding in racially mixed professions.<sup>196</sup> That would be “The Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson.

Born in Galveston, Texas, on March 31, 1878, John Arthur Johnson, the son of former slaves, began fighting professionally when Booker T. Washington, the then most well-known black American, urged “blacks to prioritize education and economic advancement over social and political equality.”<sup>197</sup> As derived from Ken Burns’s *Unforgivable Blackness*, the competing Johnson inferred this as an

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<sup>193</sup> Du Bois, “Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater*, 926, AWS.

<sup>194</sup> Du Bois, “Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater*, 924, AWS.

<sup>195</sup> DEREK H. ALDERMAN, JOSHUA INWOOD, and JAMES A. TYNER, “Jack Johnson versus Jim Crow: Race, Reputation, and the Politics of Black Villainy: The Fight of the Century,” *Southeastern Geographer* 58, no. 3 (2018): 227, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26510077>.

<sup>196</sup> ALDERMAN etc., “Black Villainy,” 227, JSTOR.; Moses, “Lost World,” 68–69, JSTOR.

<sup>197</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 31–32, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Tischauser, *Laws*, 28, ProQuest Ebook Central.

abundance of pleasure and recognition as a man, regardless of race.<sup>198</sup> The reason why was Johnson's poor beginnings, as he understood such achievements signify life-changing success. He hated the drudgery of being poor as the third of nine children with only five years of public schooling and little prospect of uplifting his domestic laundress mother, Tina "Tiny" Johnson, and school janitor father, Henry Johnson, from their meager living.<sup>199</sup> But by and large, meager work and living shielded black Americans from becoming noted in the mainstream consciousness as potential black villains. Something Jim Crow America's government institutions trusted its white citizens would also help resolve as they do with segregation.

A coordinative relation between the institutional realm and social sphere of early Jim Crow America, the Supreme Court sought to foster this emerging status quo. In the 1880s, the Civil Rights Cases "declared that the Civil Rights Act of 1875" only barred discrimination from the federal government, the Thirteenth Amendment only "outlawed slavery," and because "states' rights trumped [the few] constitutional rights," citizens may exclusively operate within their state's laws.<sup>200</sup> Thus, with no worry about federal punishment and living in a state without basic rules checking discrimination and racially motivated attacks, pro-

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<sup>198</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, directed by Ken Burns (2004; Public Broadcasting Service, 2005), Documentary, <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/unforgivable-blackness-the-rise-and-fall-of-jack-johnson>.

<sup>199</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.; Four of Johnson's siblings passed before adulthood.

<sup>200</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 19–20, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Jim Crow citizens “had the right to discriminate.”<sup>201</sup> Trickling into voting requirements, access to goods and services, the job market, and many other factors advantaged whites over blacks. With the Fourteenth Amendment protection of each citizen’s rights and privileges as Americans circumvented, and the right to vote trampled by open coercion and skewed history and literacy test grading, the 1890s saw black Americans finally fixed into second-class citizenship.<sup>202</sup> So, as the “age of Jim Crow had begun,” the New Negro boldly fought the white-centric society that is now a “reminder of slavery” from within “their place” while witnessing adapted slave-age pastimes reinforce the “code of white supremacy.”<sup>203</sup>

But this disenfranchisement spurred the young Johnson to become a legend. At twelve years old, in 1890, Johnson grew evermore unsettled with working alongside his illiterate father, a Civil War veteran reduced to a janitorial position as Jim Crow progressed the exclusivity of better labor and educational opportunities for whites.<sup>204</sup> Then, by 1894, after finding different menial jobs in hopes of earning more money and avoiding seeing his father toil for little pay, he entered the fighting game at 16.<sup>205</sup> Working as “The Galveston Giant,” amidst the

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<sup>201</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 20, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>202</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 19–20 and 27–28, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>203</sup> Andrew M. Kaye, “‘Battle Blind’: Atlanta’s Taste for Black Boxing in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Sport History* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 218, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43609893>; Tischauser, *Laws*, 19 and 29, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>204</sup> Louis Moore, *I Fight for a Living: Boxing and the Battle for Black Manhood, 1880-1915* (University of Illinois Press, 2017), 30–31, JSTOR, <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1vsk8nk>; Johnson claimed no equal to his father’s physical strength after his championship.

<sup>205</sup> Moore, *I Fight For A Living*, 31, JSTOR.

nationwide black rage for the national lynching epidemic, Jack Johnson concluded: "I have found no better way of avoiding race prejudice than to act with people of other races as if prejudice did not exist."<sup>206</sup> An outlook not unnatural for someone from the integrated society of Galveston, Texas, where white and black Galventons have been photographed in friendly and joyful proximity in card rooms and saloons.<sup>207</sup> But nothing exists of interracial intimacy as both sides of the color line deemed it inappropriate. And any black male who dares to become familiar with a white woman felt the insecure wrath of white men for daring to endanger white purity.

So stringent and diverse by which state it's implemented, the color line essentially segregated all manners of an American citizen's personal life decisions. Yet, government entities and white citizens continued to enforce an infringement on individual freedoms of choice and opportunity through de jure and de facto racism to mitigate the risk of black domination over white men and women. As such, the black pugilist world became a necessary target. This refusal to witness white defeat reigned long before the conception of Johnson. As Pierce Egan's 1818 *Boxiana* reads, "the sporting world preferred having a white to a black pugilistic champion."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>207</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.; Miscegenation meaning interracial intimacy.

<sup>208</sup> Pierce Egan, *Boxiana, Or, Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism: Comprising the Only Original and Complete Lives of the Boxers* (United Kingdom: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1829), 339, Google Books, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Boxiana\\_Or\\_Sketches\\_of\\_Ancient\\_and\\_Moder/wMhBAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Boxiana_Or_Sketches_of_Ancient_and_Moder/wMhBAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).



Thus, making it all the more impressive that Johnson embraced “black villainy.” But then again, any black boxer becoming the World Heavyweight Champion meant becoming a refutation to “racialized reputational politics” that “proved” black inferiority.<sup>209</sup> Proving the Supreme Court’s recognition of white entitlement to “moral authority and political power” to deprive black Americans “of such basic freedoms as deciding where to eat, whom to marry, or where to sit on a train or streetcar” is baseless.<sup>210</sup> Shattering the “reality” of the white race’s moral, mental, and physical innate advantages that make them American civilization’s leaders and most contributive citizens, requiring constant speculative reinforcement to behold and interpret as proof. In boxing, the battle royal, usually preceding official matches, had a couple or more young blindfolded black men in a ring fighting until one was left standing.<sup>211</sup> Contrasting pre-Emancipation, black citizens competed for “a small purse” or, with no winner, all “contestants would scabble on their hands and knees for coins thrown into the ring.”<sup>212</sup>

In response, black citizens, like in Atlanta, Georgia, became more determined to make boxing and other sports communally uniting and increased their participation for monetary gain.<sup>213</sup> Black Atlantians endured segregation to

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<sup>209</sup> Alderman etc., “Black Villainy,” 230, JSTOR.; Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 32, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>210</sup> Alderman etc., “Black Villainy,” 232, JSTOR.; Tischauser, *Laws*, 17, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>211</sup> Mark Allen Baker, *The World Colored Heavyweight Championship, 1876-1937* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers), Chapter 4, Kindle.

<sup>212</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 4, Kindle.; Kaye, “Battle Blind,” 218, JSTOR.

<sup>213</sup> Kaye, “Battle Blind,” 219–220, JSTOR.

peacefully partake in sports for sensation and community recreation, like all-black baseball leagues with kid divisions to encourage discipline and personal growth.<sup>214</sup> With boxing, willing black children throughout the rural South met at a community center or a park to box for the gathering black crowd's enjoyment, helping foster an identity of black manhood within their community.<sup>215</sup> In this realm of harsh competition, Jack Johnson became a pugilistic machine by entering into battle royales. In the ring sometimes with nine others and, most of the time, exiting the last one standing.<sup>216</sup>

Then, beginning natively in his Galveston, Texas, in the early 1900s, Johnson would fight many white and black boxers until fortune struck in the form of Joe "Chrysanthemum Joe" Choynski.<sup>217</sup> A veteran Jewish fighter and one of the top heavyweights with quality wins despite standing below five feet and eleven inches, weighing between high-160s and low-170s.<sup>218</sup> Choynski epitomized the "Boxer-Puncher" with fundamentally sound offensive and defensive skills and excellent speed and power. After knocking out Johnson on February 25, 1901, in the third round of a twenty-round match, they entered the Galveston penitentiary for almost a month for illegal prizefighting.<sup>219</sup> The sentencing would have been harsher if professional fighting wasn't one of the

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<sup>214</sup> Kaye, "Battle Blind," 220–221, JSTOR.

<sup>215</sup> Kaye, "Battle Blind," 221, JSTOR.

<sup>216</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>217</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 7, Kindle.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>218</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 7, Kindle.

<sup>219</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 7, Kindle.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

most popular forms of entertainment. Locked up together, Choynski stated: “A man who can move like you should never have to take a punch.”<sup>220</sup> So, Choynski taught the young professional all his techniques in defense, offense, feinting, and countering. With them, Johnson departed from Galveston’s fight scene to compete across the country. In over a year, he secured a match against the popular but inexperienced Jack Jeffries, the younger brother of the World Heavyweight Champion, “The Boilermaker” Jim Jefferies.

On May 16, 1902, before “an enthusiastic crowd of 4,000 spectators” at the Hazard’s Pavilion Auditorium in Los Angeles, California, Jefferies admirers were sure that because of family relations, the younger Jeffries would easily defeat Johnson.<sup>221</sup> Instead, Johnson baffled the younger Jeffries with a tactically punishing style for five rounds before knocking him out and then telling the champion at ringside, “I could whip you too.”<sup>222</sup> The results surprised white fight fans across the country because in the Jim Crow Era, the “fact” is that black males were dim, lazy, weak, and “yellow,” slang for cowardice, as Johnson’s new style came to be labeled. Unlike clever white fighters, they received praise for advancing the science of boxing. So, as Jim Crow “referred to an entire way of life, an entire culture,” Johnson’s career earned clout for going the status quo by knocking out the World Heavyweight Champion’s blood brother and then openly challenging the apotheosis of white masculinity, Jim Jeffries.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>221</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 7, Kindle.

<sup>222</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 7, Kindle.

<sup>223</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 35, ProQuest Ebook Central.

However, well aware of his position in Jim Crow America, the older Jeffries drew the color line against all black contenders deserving of a chance for the crown jewel of boxing and American masculinity. A commiserating circumstance “The Galveston Giant” was determined to overcome, which meant temporarily abiding by boxing’s color line to win the unofficial Colored Heavyweight Championship created in 1876.<sup>224</sup> Stemming from black competitors forced to compete for a “separate and unequal” title, Johnson sought to prove himself the best black boxer looking to fight the white race’s peak professional fighter.

So, on February 5, 1903, once again in Southern California’s esteemed Hazard’s Pavilion Auditorium, Johnson displayed his admirable “violent masculinity”—the “ability to physically dominate others.”<sup>225</sup> A part of the post-Victorian American manhood that celebrated a man’s ability to assert and claim the desired results against adversity. As a black male displaying this trait to a high degree, the public hall enjoyed another record-breaking attendance through pugilism. Exhibiting his “primitive” masculinity traits of economic success, violence, and indulging consumerism before and after defeating his colored title predecessor, “Denver” Ed Martin.<sup>226</sup> Also sending a message to Southern California’s beloved World Heavyweight Champion, Jim Jeffries. Johnson

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<sup>224</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Appendix B, Kindle.

<sup>225</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 7, Kindle.; Devyn Halsted, “The Manliest Man: How Jack Johnson Changed the Relationship of White Supremacy and Masculinity in America,” *Footnotes: A Journal of History* 2 (2018): 98, Semantic Scholar, <https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/uahistjrnl/article/589/galley/576/download/>.

<sup>226</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 98–99, Semantic Scholar.

believed his skillset and physique ideal against Jeffries—standing six feet and a half-inch with a fighting weight of 205 pounds.<sup>227</sup>

However, Jeffries retired in 1905, and the world title came to the possession of “The Little Giant of Hanover” Tommy Burns of French-Canada in 1906, whose nation was amidst a “White Canada Forever” campaign.<sup>228</sup> Part of the “white settler nations” movement to segregate and secure resources and prospective services for white citizens, Canada prevented minority growth by passing “a series of immigration laws to prevent the entry of people of Asian and African descent.”<sup>229</sup> The American press fully supported the movement but not Canada’s first World Heavyweight Champion. The American media made it a practice to question Burns’ legitimacy. In a 1907 Los Angeles Herald article titled “Jeffries Only Real Champion,” Jeffries remained the world champion for retiring as an undefeated champion, and Burns’s reign is fractional.<sup>230</sup> Plus, while Tommy Burns traveled the Western World to defeat the national champions of Britain, France, Ireland, and Australia to prove him undisputedly a legitimate world champion, Johnson tailed him around the globe to fight in the same area and publicly goad him.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.; Fight Weight: the weight a fighter is most effective.

<sup>228</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 30 and 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner (American Crossroads)* (University of California Press), Introduction, Kindle.

<sup>229</sup> Du Bois, “White Folk,” 929, AWS.; Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Introduction, Kindle.

<sup>230</sup> “Jeffries Only Real Champion – Corbett and Fitz Had No Just Claim,” *Los Angeles Herald*, April 5, 1907, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19070405.2.77> (accessed August 21, 2022).

<sup>231</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

Amidst this, the money and fame Johnson's notoriety and success in the ring spurred him to act boldly color-blind within and when outside of the US. In early twentieth-century Australia, the government marginalized the Aboriginal people and enforced discriminatory policies on immigration to bolster white demographic dominance of government institutions.<sup>232</sup> In 1901, the Australian Parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act, also known as the White Australia Policy, to shut down immigration from all non-Anglo-Saxon countries that risk disrupting the plan for an all-Anglo-Saxon society.<sup>233</sup> With Asian countries facing the highest rejection in fear of "yellow fever," the Australian Parliament took inspiration from America's Jim Crow policies which advantaged the white populace under the "knowledge" that the fair race builds and brings prosperity to their nation.<sup>234</sup>

In response to these xenophobic and disenfranchising measures, minority brotherhoods formed. Formed in 1903, the Coloured Progressive Association (CPA) comprised forty to fifty black American, Afro-Caribbean, and Aboriginal seamen contributing to the fight against Australia's racist immigration and domestic policies.<sup>235</sup> An organization of black men striving to prove the non-white man is indeed a man, Johnson's return home departure after knocking out white Australian Bill Lang on March 4, 1907, earned him a CPA-hosted farewell

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<sup>232</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Introduction and Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>233</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>234</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>235</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

party.<sup>236</sup> Notably, Johnson's successes against white men in Australian boxing rings did not incite the same anger as in America. If anything, Johnson's impressive skillset and even more attention-grabbing physical strength and speed for someone of such remarkable size earned him admiration from white Australian men. But, what did pose a concern was the gathering of the demographics represented by the CPA at Sydney's ports with the curious white women. From then on, white Australia looked upon Johnson with disdain for "inspiring" impropriety.

Then, as part of his decision to live as color-blind as possible, Johnson committed the one sin too unforgivable for all white Western nations—miscegenation. On top of a highly publicized and condemned interracial relationship with a white Australian pianist in 1907, Johnson traveled internationally with countless white American women whom he openly called Mrs. Johnson in 1908.<sup>237</sup> Though routinely prostitutes, any interracial coupling with white women endangered the idea of white purity. As a result, Johnson had become the primary black threat to beat in the eyes of white Westerners worldwide for defeating white men and "dominating" white women.

Even worse is his gold-capped teeth smile, a symbol of high standing in the face of white resentment.<sup>238</sup> Before white eyes, the gaudiness of Johnson's attire as a self-made man was another out-of-place factor for a black male that

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<sup>236</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>237</sup> Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 103, Semantic Scholar.; Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>238</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

stupefied them. Regardless of Johnson's legitimate pugilist success and riches, his flaunting of personal wealth went against the expectation that African-diasporic dress and act humbly. A sign of assurance that the black race has no intention of grandstanding and outshining the superior white race, Johnson also breached this taboo. In the US and other white-dominated countries, Johnson strolled around with no deference to anyone of any skin color. Generally seen with a personally fitted all-white or all-black three-piece suit in public, Johnson's appearance included a miniature gold chain across the abdomen, a cigar, a pristine walking cane, and a thin golden band wrapped around his bowler hat.<sup>239</sup> Taking it further, Johnson would adorn his many Mrs. Johnson's in diamonds and transport himself in the fastest cars he purchased in cash.<sup>240</sup> Driving fast and recklessly on American or foreign streets or dirt roads and goad before jealous white eyes.

Thus, per the San Francisco Call, by January 4, 1908, the five-foot and seven-inch, under 180-pound Burns swore to defeat the "yellow" and greedy Johnson for \$30,000, "more money than any boxer had ever made for one fight."<sup>241</sup> Well, Australian promoter Hugh D. "Huge Deal" McIntosh met this requirement because he smelled an opportunity to make substantial profits if he

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<sup>239</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>240</sup> Moore, *I Fight For A Living*, 52, JSTOR.

<sup>241</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.; "Burns Says He Will Fight Johnson," *San Francisco Call*, January 4, 1908, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19080104.2.95.8&srpos=12&e=-----190-en--20--1-byDA-txt-txIN-jack+johnson----1908---1> (accessed July 13, 2022).



held the fight in his home country.<sup>242</sup> In accurate and angry reason, McIntosh was correct. Alongside his escapades with white Australian women and motivating Aboriginal people to speak bolder against the White Australia Policy, the white Australian media smeared Johnson's showcasing of his driving skills to Aboriginals in the outback. Feeling particularly bitter towards Johnson for telling the Aboriginals in the outback the culture of their colonizers was "primitive," while the Aboriginal is the source of Australia's greatness.<sup>243</sup>

Thus, on December 26 in Sydney, Australia, approximately 20,000 spectators, mainly from the hosting nation, expecting to see the "Swarmer" Burns gain recognition as Jeffries's undebatable successor, instead saw him become a battered, bloody mess.<sup>244</sup> Johnson enjoyed every second, hurling insults at Burns's manhood, punching power, and his cornermen while holding him up many times before each of many near knockdowns.<sup>245</sup> Even after Burns continuously hit his fractured ribs from the free body shots, the euphoric Johnson's golden smile never left as he stepped upon the prejudicial egos that denied the existence of his manliness and called him "yellow."<sup>246</sup> By the fourteenth round, the struggling and degraded champion was spared from a

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<sup>242</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>243</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>244</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 101–102, Semantic Scholar.; Swarmer: to always move forward and applying pressure with fast and strong punches.

<sup>245</sup> Jack London, "Jack London Describes the Fight and Jack Johnson's Golden Smile," *San Francisco Call*, December 27, 1908, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19081227.2.167.1.1> (accessed July 13, 2022).

<sup>246</sup> Library and Archives Canada., "Podcast Episode 60 – Tommy Burns: The Hanover Heavyweight," YouTube Video, 49:09, January 29, 2020, <https://youtu.be/aGam2pZqoYc>.; Johnson's rib fractures resulted in a week in the hospital.

knockout thanks to police intervening, causing the referee to stop the fight and declare Johnson victorious.<sup>247</sup> For white fight fans who subscribed to the “religion of white superiority,” the police’s intervention prevented the sight of another supposed peak white specimen from being rendered unconscious by a racial inferior.

Immediately afterward, the mainstream American press clamored for the retired and uninterested Jeffries (nearing 300 pounds) to defeat what the French-Canadian created by losing—the first black World Heavyweight Champion.<sup>248</sup> In an article summarizing how and why Burns failed in his most crucial title defense, leading boxing sportswriter Jack London ended his piece by stating, “But 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>249</sup> Like London, essentially all white American men believed the competitor best suited to defeat the big skilled black boxer was an even bigger and cruder white fighter who did not want to box anymore. An obsession that places macho ability and appearance over fighting skill.

Further fueling this incoherence, Johnson always fought with a gauze wrapped around his lower appendage for greater “visibility” through his tight

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<sup>247</sup> *Associated Press*, “Burns Is Outdone And Beaten To A Pulp By Negro Champion,” *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, December 26, 1908, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SDDU19081226.2>. (accessed July 13, 2022).

<sup>248</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 31 and 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>249</sup> London, “Describes the Fight,” *San Francisco Call*, CDNC.

boxing shorts.<sup>250</sup> An intentional “flaunt” of the black American’s supposed beastly vigor that white Americans interpreted as an accusation of ineptitude inside the ring and the bedroom. So, while the mainstream media sought to convince Jeffries to make a comeback, Johnson dealt with racial pushback from whites and blacks. Neither the “religion of whiteness” subscribers nor the New Negro appreciated the black villain stigma Johnson embraced, to the differing detriment of both groups.

### The NBF Era: The Beginning

“To me, it was not a racial triumph, but there were those who were to take this view of the situation, and almost immediately, a great hue and cry went up because a colored man was holding the championship.”<sup>251</sup> For context, Johnson’s winning of the World Heavyweight Champion should have been impossible for a black boxer of any national origin amidst the global “religion of whiteness.” Internationally, the white supremacist ego believed the best black specimen would always fall short of the poorest white man. In white eyes, race serves as an explicit identifier of superiority in physicality and mentality, which, for boxing, translates to fighting ability and skill. Plus, for it to be achieved by an openly lecherous and expensively gaudy black male infuriated white men. A delight felt by all black Americans as the black-owned Richmond Planet read:

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<sup>250</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 102, Semantic Scholar.

<sup>251</sup> Jack Johnson, *MY LIFE IN THE RING & OUT* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publication Inc.), Chapter IV, Kindle.

“No event in 40 years has given more satisfaction to the colored people of this country than has the single victory of Jack Johnson.”<sup>252</sup> Finally, a black boxer, a black man, won the most prized distinction in sports, the World Heavyweight Championship, the supposed identifier of the best man on the planet, achievements that pointedly said no racial superiority or white exclusivity to manhood. This event suggested there are only people of different races and nothing more.

Although, to the New Negro’s displeasure, there remained the champion’s life motto: “I always take a chance with my pleasures.”<sup>253</sup> For him, the good life meant accolades, materialism, and white women. In the eyes of Jim Crow, it mattered not that Johnson typically partnered himself with prostitutes because any white woman was too good for any black male. For the New Negro Movement, his behavior overshadowed what the New Negro strived to present to the mainstream consciousness. Internalizing “Puritanism, temperance, and sexual discipline” and condemning “all black venality, artificiality, and cynicism,” the New Negro spoke against blacks with a conspicuous and pretentious lifestyle.<sup>254</sup> Such happened to Johnson after word of his traveling with white prostitutes instead of an admirable black woman exhibiting black marital success reached the US. Outlets like the Nashville Globe condemned Jack Johnson as a “race traitor” who should have died a “celibate.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>253</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>254</sup> Moses, “Lost World,” 67–69, JSTOR.

<sup>255</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

But, even when the “city fathers” of the uniquely integrated Galveston canceled a parade to honor Johnson for displeasing its white and black community, his uncontained individualism still proved admirable to black Americans.<sup>256</sup> His fearlessness in fighting, mocking, knocking out, and celebrating over a white fighter before white viewers and intimate relations with white women proved awe-stricking. As such, while the White Hope Campaign began in 1909 for Johnson’s better, who wasn’t Jim Jeffries, mainstream America understood suppression must continue. White fight fans knew how sports could inspire movements to change or reinforce a society’s construction and with the first black World Heavyweight Champion attracting nationwide white and black attention—a need to end his distinction was immediate.

Encouraged in the infamous April 4 illustration by The Chicago Sunday Tribune, a well-dressed little blonde white girl directly pointing and asking a not-near 300-pound but well-sculpted Jeffries, cross-armed and pondering in fighting attire, if he will fight Johnson.<sup>257</sup> The message is that the little girl wearing a white dress with an untouched ribbon sash represents the future of white purity at risk of growing up in an America where the sanctity of the white woman’s honor is in danger of black lust. So, vigilantism resulted. From 1901 to 1910, a near

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<sup>256</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 35, ProQuest Ebook Central.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>257</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 106 and 118, Semantic Scholar.; Understood today as photoshopped.

approximation of 800 black Americans were lynched, with the leading cause being suspicion or accusation of engaging or assaulting a white female.<sup>258</sup>

Thus, as Johnson publicly credited his blackness for the resilience that endured chattel slavery to become the first black World Heavyweight Champion, censoring became a crucial step against the world's most known individual.<sup>259</sup> For the white Western world, his notoriousness aside, no higher profile existed than Johnson's. And this was an embarrassment for white American men because they failed to "correct" one of their nation's black males as he dominated them in the ring and openly partook in white women. So, fight film censorship served to protect white supremacy and prevent a suspected black uprising. Claimed for the sake of some skewed version of "racial harmony" that American civilization depends upon and the preference for disproportionate economic and political advantages.

With "reputational politics" at the core of his image, inspiring blacks to work against Jim Crow and illustrating a "doomsday" figure to whites, Johnson became a focal point of racial struggle.<sup>260</sup> Responding with the alliance of "humanitarian and racist motivations for motion picture censorship," the "anti-boxing moralists" now consisted of Progressivists seeking to end this

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<sup>258</sup> Alderman et. al., "Black Villainy," 236–237, JSTOR.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>259</sup> Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 104, Semantic Scholar.;

<sup>260</sup> ALDERMAN etc., "Black Villainy," 238, JSTOR.

dehumanizing “fistic brutality” and Jim Crow supporters.<sup>261</sup> In 1909, this new breed of moralists successfully convinced the state of Iowa to ban the Burns-Johnson film a week after the fight and then, in April, inspired a New York theater manager to seek out a Supreme Court injunction to prohibit the film.<sup>262</sup> By painting this national NBF movement as a moral endeavor, the campaign against Johnson attracted white citizens for the sake of their race and, by presumed extension, the sake of America. With a national ethics debate on the potential moral degradation that motion pictures presented against familial and educational values, all films for social commentary and educative entertainment received a pre-presentation review.<sup>263</sup>

But still, the allure of a boxing match seen to represent racial tensions and a heroic endeavor against whom mainstream America deemed the worst villain ever proved challenging to censor effectively. By 1909’s end, the Burns-Johnson film official nationwide banning did not prevent other routes of viewing whom the New Negro saw as a folk anti-hero.<sup>264</sup> Moreover, Johnson’s reign brought so much notoriety that even non-championship bouts enjoyed profitable screening despite a “consensus” of immorality. Especially with post-Victorian masculinity assuring downtrodden white men “working as cogs in factory production lines for

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<sup>261</sup> Dan Streible, “A History of the Boxing Film, 1894-1915: Social Control and Social Reform in the Progressive Era,” *Film History* Vol. 3, no. 3 (1989): 236 and 241–243, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814980>.

<sup>262</sup> Streible, “Boxing Film,” 243, JSTOR.

<sup>263</sup> Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2004): 86 and 88, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pq05z>.

<sup>264</sup> Streible, “Boxing Film,” 243 and 248, JSTOR.

large corporations” that their “consumption” of live fights and their “pictures” expressed manhood.<sup>265</sup>

So, before Jeffries was finally convinced “for the sole purpose of proving that a white man is better than a Negro,” Johnson had the pleasure of easy money all throughout 1909.<sup>266</sup> Driven by the emotional need to see the “bad Negro” punished with a beating, many low-quality “well-muscled white boys more than 6 feet and 2 inches tall” went against the masterful and powerful Johnson.<sup>267</sup> In a case of irrational yearning for Jeffries, white fans believed the bigger, the better. By the year’s coming end, the only remaining option was the World Middleweight Champion, “The Michigan Assassin” Stanley Ketchel. Standing just under five foot and ten inches and fighting at 160 pounds (but weighing 170 for this occasion), the “Slugger” possessed legitimate knockout power but unimpressive skill-wise. Interestingly, per the Blue Lake Advocate, in Colma, California, the 20-round meeting on October 16 gave Johnson a scare when Ketchel put him down, dazed, with a solid right head punch in the twelfth round.<sup>268</sup> However, Ketchel approached “cutely” with an arrogantly confident low

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<sup>265</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 98, Semantic Scholar.; Streible, “Boxing Film,” 243–244, JSTOR.

<sup>266</sup> GRIEVESON, *Policing Cinema*, 124 and 126, JSTOR.

<sup>267</sup> ALDERMAN etc., “Black Villainy,” 239, JSTOR.; Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 105, Semantic Scholar.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>268</sup> “A Black Is Now Champion – The Big Pugilistic Mill Is Still An Interesting Topic,” *Blue Lake Advocate*, October 23, 1909, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=BLA19091023.2.58&srpos=17&dliv=none&e=-----190-en--20--1-byDA.rev-txt-txIN-jack+johnson+stanley+ketchel---1909---1> (accessed July 14, 2022).



guard, prompting the angered Johnson to rise and knock out Ketchel with a furious right-hand punch to the mouth.

In his *My Life In The Ring & Out* autobiography, Johnson claims that upon knocking out Ketchel with a quick but powerful mouth punch, he embedded several of Ketchel's teeth into his left glove.<sup>269</sup> Yes, the left glove he used to push off the dusty canvas in an outdoor venue and dusted off immediately after knocking out Ketchel magically held his chompers. Looking closely at Johnson's person, he projected a grandiose self-image to avoid showing his emotional hurt to the white America that vilified him, even if it meant inciting anger from his fellow black community for drawing the color line himself.

Speaking of his fellow top heavyweights in Paris, France, who are black themselves, "The Oxnard Cyclone" Sam McVey, Jeremiah "Joe" Jeanette, and "The Boston Bonecrusher" Sam Langford, Johnson did not feign ignorance to "these colored boys" demand rematches.<sup>270</sup> Instead, not only did he draw the color line, Johnson insultingly referred to these proud fighting men as children. Then, in his personally revised autobiography, "I gave Langford, Jeanette, and those boys a chance before I was champ. I'll retire still the only colored heavyweight champ."<sup>271</sup> The champion preferred an easy 1909 fight year for easy profit versus proving himself superior versus the other top three heavyweights far superior to their past versions.

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<sup>269</sup> Johnson, *MY LIFE*, Chapter XI, Kindle.

<sup>270</sup> Johnson, *MY LIFE*, Foreword, Kindle.

<sup>271</sup> Johnson, *MY LIFE*, Foreword, Kindle.

Especially damning is his refusal of Langford after one fight. On April 26, 1906, in a 15-round match, a 27-year-old Colored Heavyweight Champion Johnson knocked down a bloodied 20-year-old Langford multiple times before the nearly thirty-pound-less and six-inch-shorter “Bonecrusher” retaliated with a body blow befitting his ring name.<sup>272</sup> From then on, Johnson won the decision by remaining on the defensive and no longer engaging Langford. But after Burns-Johnson in 1908, “The Boston Bonecrusher” stalked “The Galveston Giant” around America and the world just as he did to Tommy Burns.<sup>273</sup> Stalking and pestering the world titlist Johnson in the US and worldwide for a rematch. But Johnson couldn’t be bothered to go beyond public rejections when life as the world’s most extraordinary man by holding the World Heavyweight Championship was too good to risk.

Notably, this obsession with pleasure defined his open love life. A former prostitute of German descent named Belle Schreiber, whom Johnson met in Chicago, Illinois, attended the 1909 Johnson-Ketchel fight.<sup>274</sup> While Johnson and Schreiber would peacefully separate sometime afterward in New York as he “resumed [his] theatrical engagements,” the champion met “a [divorced] Brooklyn French-American extraction” of a prominent family named Etta Duryea.<sup>275</sup> Quickly falling in love, they entered an unofficial “marriage.”

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<sup>272</sup> Gerald Early, *The Cambridge Companion to Boxing: Cambridge Companions to Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), Chronology, Kindle.

<sup>273</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 10, Kindle.

<sup>274</sup> Johnson, *MY LIFE*, Chapter V, Kindle.

<sup>275</sup> Johnson, *MY LIFE*, Chapter V, Kindle.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

A stance that went against Jim Crow's second defining belief, "that interracial marriage is unnatural."<sup>276</sup> According to *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Marking of Race in America*, since the 1860s, mainstream society pursued anti-miscegenation laws "as a product of nature" to protect white purity.<sup>277</sup> An ongoing development that "reached well beyond the South," including "California, [Illinois], and Washington," while Texas itself outlawed miscegenation in 1837.<sup>278</sup> Such dead-set boundaries explain why the integrated Galveston society canceled Johnson's planned 1908 congratulatory parade. Even when Galveston's white communal members were photographed alongside black residents in card rooms and saloons, the firm stance that interracial coupling remained. A sentiment the New Negro supported fully, considering the denouncement Johnson received.

With no more "ideal" white fighters available, Jim Jeffries became "The Great White Hope." Perhaps this obsession with Johnson-Jeffries posed a saving grace for Johnson. On November 28, 1909, the Associated Press titled their article "Langford Calls Johnson's Bluff" to disagree with the "Giant's" assurances he could still defeat the "Bonecrusher."<sup>279</sup> If so, they reported that Langford's

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<sup>276</sup> Johnson, *MY LIFE*, Chapter V, Kindle.; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 1, EBSCOhost, <https://search-ebscohost-com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e091sww&AN=1069299&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>277</sup> Pascoe, *Miscegenation Law*, 1–2, EBSCOhost.

<sup>278</sup> Pascoe, *Miscegenation Law*, 6 and 137, EBSCOhost.

<sup>279</sup> Associated Press, "Langford Calls Johnson's Bluff," *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, November 28, 1909, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SDDU19091128.2.100> (accessed May 6, 2022).

management “deposited \$10,000 to bind a match of not less than twenty rounds” for a Johnson-Langford title match.<sup>280</sup> And so, frustrated with outlets undermining his claims to manliness by reporting his avoidance of Langford, Johnson met Jeffries on December 1909 and agreed to fight on Independence Day, 1910, in Reno, Nevada.<sup>281</sup> Not saying he would lose, but Langford, at this time, posed the greatest danger to Johnson’s world title reign. Per the Morning Examiner on January 30, 1910, the “Bonecrusher’s” existence grated the “Giant’s” nerves if Johnson’s pulling a firearm on Langford in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, meant anything.<sup>282</sup> Even worse was Johnson started the exchange by insulting Langford’s friend, “The King of The Battle Royal” Bob Armstrong, before the “Bonecrusher” threatened to chop down the “Giant.”<sup>283</sup> Luckily, authorities disarmed and shooed Johnson out of Pittsburgh.

But now, according to The Bulletin, focused on preparing for Jeffries in what hired promoter George Lewis “Tex” Rickard dubbed “The Battle of the Century,” Johnson stood to expose the fantasticalness of the claims of masculinity as an exclusively white attribute.<sup>284</sup> The stakes couldn’t be higher for Jeffries. For centuries, pugilism has stood as one of the hallmark crafts exploited to (disingenuously) prove why the white race triumphed over all the others. A value obtained by preventing non-white men from reaching the status of a world

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<sup>280</sup> *Associated Press*, “Johnson’s Bluff,” *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, CDNC.

<sup>281</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>282</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 10, Kindle.

<sup>283</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 10, Kindle.

<sup>284</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

champion amongst the biggest and strongest by beating the non-white in the ring or avoiding them. But now, all that remained was the former option and against the quintessential “black villain.”

A dramatic epic with a stage for fighting and not theatrics, Jeffries supporters, though confident in his victory, felt anxiousness for the approaching Fourth of July. As captured in the Tacoma Daily Ledger’s March 20 article illustration “Tom Cribb’s Final Triumph,” the story of and after Tom Cribb’s second meeting with Tom Molineaux in 1911 is told.<sup>285</sup> Yet, before reading the text of the second Cribb-Molineaux fight, eyes were immediately drawn to the illustrations and floating text. The depictions of Molineaux possessing duck lips, bulbous nose, and slanted back forehead and the handsomely drawn Cribb appear next to the commentary: “Champion One Hundred Years Ago, Like Jeffries To-Day, Left His Retirement to Uphold White Superiority Against a Negro Claimant.”<sup>286</sup> In the eyes of Jim Crow, Johnson stood as the latest and ultimate test that suggested the black race was the white race’s superior if victorious. And, as the mainstream subconscious sensed, exposing the fictitiousness of the white “gatekeeping” of masculinity as what American civilization requires.

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<sup>285</sup> Patrick Connor, “Crib vs. Molineaux art,” Email, 2023, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f9B49iZJ36kOHQOPct7RqQv5QkENjm4r/view>.

<sup>286</sup> Connor, “Crib vs Molineaux,” 2023.

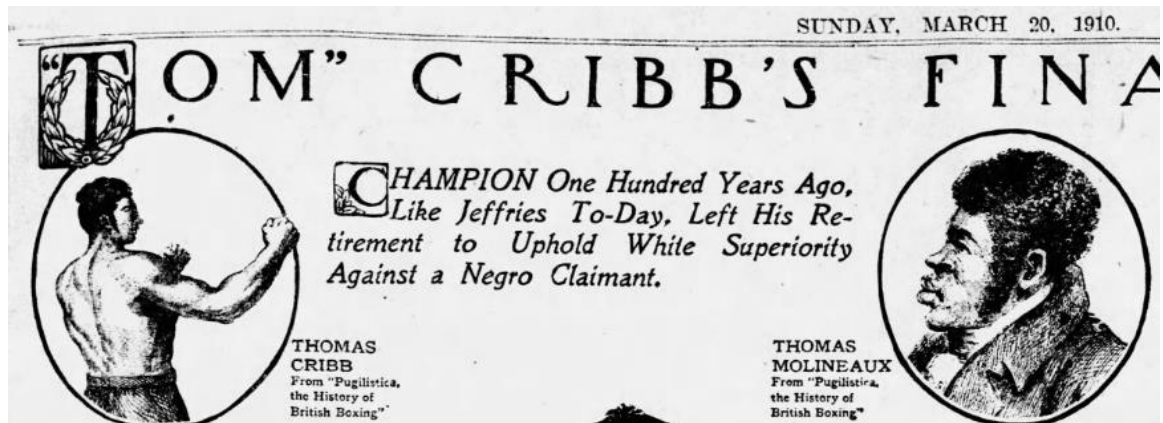


Figure 2. Article and Illustration. “J.C. Fireman. ‘Tom’ Cribb’s Final Triumph. *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, March 20, 1910.” Courtesy of Patrick Connor, official member of the Boxing Writers Association of America and the International Boxing History Organization.

In his way stood the “Hope of the White Race,” sent to prove the long culmination of American whiteness into one supreme specimen of “primitive masculinity” and keen intellect will always surpass the worst black villain.<sup>287</sup> Whereas in the “Negroes’ Deliverer,” per the political magazine Harper’s Weekly, A Journal of Civilization May 1910 publication, is an untrustworthy and nonsensical barbarian daring to declare himself a man after consistently dominating white men and women without pause for over a year.<sup>288</sup> From Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner, Theresa Runstedtler summarizes why Johnson’s color-blind behavior incited so much white rage and insecurity: “Given the widespread belief that a nation was only ever as powerful as its citizens’

<sup>287</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>288</sup> Barak Y. Orbach, “The Johnson-Jeffries Fight 100 Years Thence: The Johnson-Jeffries Fight And Censorship Of Black Supremacy,” *NEW YORK UNIVERSITY JOURNAL OF LAW & LIBERTY* vol. 5, no. 270 (2010): 274, NYU, [https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/ECM\\_PRO\\_066938.pdf](https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/ECM_PRO_066938.pdf).

individual bodies, the mounting efforts to maintain white men's physical fitness and white women's sexual purity were fundamentally intertwined."<sup>289</sup> So, if "Hope" is recognized, all is right in the world; if not, the "Deliverer" is the first of what is to come. Such is what the April 1909 innocent little blonde girl "feared." A life where white men failed to protect the stability of American civilization by preventing racial impurity via imposed dishonoring.

So too, it was inferred beyond America's borders. The US film industry's leading magazine, *The Moving Picture World*, captured the international relevance of the "Battle of the Century": "It is no exaggeration to say that the entire world will await a pictorial of the fight."<sup>290</sup> At stake was the legitimacy of the white-centric nation's reasoning for their imperial and colonial functions as serving the greater good of perpetrator and victim. Just like what *The Souls of White Folk* highlights about the belief of all "darkies" from "frailer, cheaper stuff" as "fools, illogical idiots": "Everything considered, the title to the universe claimed by White Folk is faulty. It ought, at least, to look plausible."<sup>291</sup> So faulty that a boxing match could effectively refute it.

Since playing the Burns-Johnson film in Australia two days after Johnson's crowning, before approximately 7000 whites, then to the UK, the US, and finally France and the French colonies, the 90 minute film marked the build-up to the fateful Johnson-Jeffries meeting.<sup>292</sup> With segregated "race theaters" becoming

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<sup>289</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>290</sup> Orbach, "100 YEARS THENCE," 275, NYU.

<sup>291</sup> Du Bois, "Souls of White Folk," *Darkwater*, 924 and 931, AWS.

<sup>292</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 2, Kindle.

spaces of “darkie” celebration for Johnson’s victories, one unknown English gentleman summed up white America’s responsibility: “Does anyone imagine for a moment that Johnson’s success is without its political influence?”<sup>293</sup> Now, while not politically impactful, a victory by Johnson wielded true significance considering, as W.E.B. Du Bois pitied, the baseless standards of white supremacy. An idealization of whiteness so extreme that a single boxing match can legitimately awaken a substantial number of the color line’s benefactors to the reality that skin color is only a difference in pigmentation and has no meaningful correlation to masculinity. And so, next to “foreign correspondents from Britain, Australia,” France, “long-robed Chinamen, ultra-modishly attired Japanese,” and “stolid Germans,” white American men from all over the nation and the social ladder identified with the failure on The Fourth of July.<sup>294</sup>

Wearing an “O! You Jeffries!” pin-back button depicting a white arm labeled “JEFF” punching a bodiless black head into space, the 12,000 visitors joining the 15,000 residents saw Jeffries rushes nullified and receive a broken nose, swollen eyes, and blood-covered legs and torso.<sup>295</sup> By the fifteenth round,

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<sup>293</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.; Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 2, Kindle.

<sup>294</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 2, Kindle.

<sup>295</sup> “O! You Jeffries! Johnson vs. Jeffries, Reno, Nevada, 1910,” The Road West: The Steve Turner Collection of African Americana, Part II, *BIDSQUARE*, last modified December 3, 2020, <https://www.bidsquare.com/online-auctions/cowans/o-you-jeffries-johnson-vs-jeffries-reno-1910-2002254>.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.



Johnson began beating up an exhausted Jeffries, sending him to the canvas three times before the challenger's corner obeyed the white cries of "Don't let the [n\*\*\*\*r] knock him out!"<sup>296</sup> The expectation that a nearly 300-pound man could fight like he once did after returning to 215 pounds after five years of retirement was wrong. Instead, thanks to the preceeding history of black pugilist excellence that left only the official World Heavyweight Championsip as the last and most important division to purport about the exclusive correlation between masculinity and whiteness, Jack Johnson had proven the existence of the black man.<sup>297</sup>



Figure 3. Preserved cartoon button pin. "O! You Jeffries! Johnson vs. Jeffries, Reno, Nevada, 1910." Courtesy of "The Road West: The Steve Turner Collection of African Americana, Part II" from the online auction site *BIDSQUARE*.

But there were no apologies and calls for reconciliation from white men for centuries of disrespect to the black man's manhood. Instead, in white eyes, this is a call to action to remind their so-seen natural-born enemies what

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<sup>296</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>297</sup> Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 117, Semantic Scholar.

demographic American society revolves around. The Los Angeles Times published "A Word to the Black Man" on July 5: "Remember, you have done nothing at all. You are just the same member of society you were last week."<sup>298</sup> An immediate acknowledgment of the black man followed by a reminder of the second-class citizenship that signals their political and social oppression. Plus, the added hypocrisy of telling black men not to feel tribalist pride in Johnson's accomplishments is very thick. Had Jeffries won, celebrations of white manhood would have occurred throughout white spaces for days, just like for Tom Cribb after defeating Tom Molineaux.

The shoving of second-class citizenship in the black man's face was not objectively incorrect when the de jure laws and de facto culture of Jim Crow still stood firm. Only the claims of the color line's legitimacy had been knocked out. In response, white citizens sought to prevent black men from now feeling encouraged to exercise their too-long infringed upon human and civil rights. As race riots broke out in every Southern state and many Northern cities, the Los Angeles Times, on July 7, ran a cartoon depicting a sentient dynamite stick pointing to a large brawl with firearm pieces leaving many whites in critical condition, exclaiming, "I couldn't have caused half so much damage!"<sup>299</sup> With black men as the primary targets, the Chicago American reported fourteen dead in Chicago, and The Bulletin reported "19 negroes and 5 whites" in San

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<sup>298</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>299</sup> Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 106 and 119, Semantic Scholar.

Francisco, six died in Roanoke, Virginia, an abundance of lynchings failed in Wilmington, Delaware, and six stabbed blacks in Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>300</sup> Per the Cleveland Gazette, “The mob spirit seemed to rise whenever a Negro cheered for Johnson after the fight,” much like in Atlanta, Georgia, where a black man publicly celebrating was “saved from death by the police.”<sup>301</sup>

Also, the victory proved bittersweet for black men. In a private railroad car on the Overland Limited with “more than \$65,000 in cash,” Johnson’s contribution to black empowerment and disabusing white supremacists of their warped reality of masculinity did not change the New Negro’s rejection of him as the “best representative or model for black masculinity.”<sup>302</sup> Black newspapers like The Baptist Vanguard announced that black men shouldn’t pursue the masculinity of Johnson: “The prizefighter is not the standard of the man. Don’t lose too much time with Jack Johnson’s victory.”<sup>303</sup> Still, black outlets like Florida’s Pensacola Brotherhood thanked Johnson’s contribution to racial empowerment by proving the coexistence of blackness and manliness.<sup>304</sup> Even further is Professor William Pickens of Talladega College claiming it was better Johnson won and a “few” die than to lose and “all” live, and Washington D.C.’s The Washington Bee printing

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<sup>300</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>301</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 107, Semantic Scholar.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>302</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 108, Semantic Scholar.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>303</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 107, Semantic Scholar.

<sup>304</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 109, Semantic Scholar.

“that the colored man is the equal to the white man in every particular.”<sup>305</sup> As seen on the world stage, any race of man possesses the potential for intelligence, dominance, and virility that post-Victorian white men champion.

So, just as a Chicago Tribune July 4 article unknowingly foreshadowed, came the anti-boxing censorship after the horrifying answer to the “absorbing question of whether a white man or a negro shall be supreme in the world of fisticuffs” suggested the black race shall dominate the governments and resources internationally.<sup>306</sup> Determined to mitigate the film’s effect, anti-boxing moralists came forth with a solid religious front concerned about the Johnson-Jeffries film’s possible incitive effect on black men. Entailing “the United Society for Christian Endeavour and the Methodist Epworth League,” spiritual progressives went nationwide on the state and local levels to warn of the immoral teachings the film poses to children.<sup>307</sup> Much like the July 9 article by the New York Tribune crying “Save the Children,” there existed fear of more race riots outdoing what followed Johnson-Jeffries by black inciters after viewing the “images of black power on-screen.”<sup>308</sup> With mainstream thinking being that black men are as impressionable as children but pose a serious physical danger, stringent measures sought to prevent a black revolution from ending Jim Crow and taking ownership of the color line to subjugate the white race.

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<sup>305</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 109, Semantic Scholar.; *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>306</sup> Streible, “Boxing Film,” 243, 245, and 252, JSTOR.

<sup>307</sup> GRIEVESON, *Policing Cinema*, 127, JSTOR.

<sup>308</sup> GRIEVESON, *Policing Cinema*, 127–128, JSTOR.

In May 1910, in Birmingham, Alabama, the International Association of Chiefs of Police adopted the resolution to condemn and censor all moving pictures misrepresenting police and “all immoral displays” leading “to the encouragement of crime.”<sup>309</sup> Of course, whenever matters included non-white people, the final decision always obeyed Jim Crow sentiment. But, before the Johnson-Jeffries film’s production in 24 hours, the public clamor for intervention in the manly sphere of entertainment consumption was mute. Then, a dramatic shift occurred after white America’s cultural icon lost to the son of freed people, with the white world paying attention. Only a few states officially banned fight films until widespread support for censorship from the white public increased it substantially. Per the Washington Bee, the police and government officials of “nearly twenty states and thirty cities” that include Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans, Louisiana; Baltimore, Maryland; Fresno, California; Richmond, Virginia; and Washington D.C., reciprocated and planned to prevent the film’s screening after the wired results spurred “hundreds of racial fights” that authorities failed to maintain.<sup>310</sup> There was genuine concern for what a screen replay of Jeffries’s defeat could cause.

Although, as is the case for any attempt to base government policies and laws upon any fictitious ideology, there will be inconsistencies. Despite a wave of legislation adhering to mainstream concerns of “race, morality, mobility, and

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<sup>309</sup> Orbach, “100 YEARS THENCE,” 304, NYU.

<sup>310</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 2, Kindle.; Streible, “Boxing Film,” 245–246, JSTOR.

national identity,” cities like New York, Detroit, St. Louis, Kansas City, Hoboken, and Pittsburgh played the Johnson-Jeffries film.<sup>311</sup> And whether black Americans identified with the New Negro Movement or not, the black community disapproved of such focus on a black man they found prolonging the “vain search for freedom” to escape the “common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages.”<sup>312</sup> Deeming Johnson’s lifestyle is hedonistic and treacherous for not caring as their unelected race representative to white eyes, he disrespected white opponents and favored white women. Painting an unideal image as white Americans began formulating erroneously general preconceptions of the black man. Especially when the rise of white women entering prostitution due to economic hardships led to the federal Mann Act of June 25 to end the supposed “white slave traffic” deemed “more horrible than any black slave traffic ever.”<sup>313</sup> Meant to stomp out all routes to miscegenation, the New York Tribune declared the federal government’s granting “police power” to the Bureau of Investigation to vet interstate commerce for all “immoralities” “one of the most significant interpretations of the Constitution.”<sup>314</sup> For the New York Tribune, all of its readers, and any other prejudiced white citizen that doesn’t read said paper, the hope is the Mann Act will make up for all the times anti-miscegenation laws failed to block an interracial couple from enjoying a government-recognized marriage.

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<sup>311</sup> GRIEVESON, *Policing Cinema*, 135, JSTOR.; Streible, “Boxing Film,” 246, JSTOR.

<sup>312</sup> *Souls of Black Folk*, 11 and 55–56, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>313</sup> GRIEVESON, *Policing Cinema*, 138, JSTOR.

<sup>314</sup> GRIEVESON, *Policing Cinema*, 138–139, JSTOR.

Interestingly, the 1883 Civil Rights Cases permitting black citizens to act within their respective state's Jim Crow interpretation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments caused the nationwide lack of uniformity of the color line. The "one-fourth" rule from the 1860s failed so long as a previous judicial official ruled the individual in an interracial relationship a "non-black."<sup>315</sup> Even with the 1896 Plessy precedent helping to harden anti-miscegenation efforts in 1910 to create a "one-sixteenth" non-white blood policy, the color line's interpretation remained differing between states and even localities.<sup>316</sup> Such disconnect enabled interracial marriage even in Southern courts.

Thus, the call to stop the non-white attack on white purity rose. Like the San Jose Mercury–News article titled "CITIZENS PLEDGED TO FIGHT SLAVERY," from October 19, the city's newly formed "Purity Federation," to reach "1,000 members within another month," took inspiration from the nationally acclaimed book *War on the White Slave Traffic*.<sup>317</sup> Claiming that "A Black Business" is responsible for "thousands of new victims every year," the article quotes the work in that the "incredible nightmare" of "black traffic in white girls" throughout all of the Western nations "is a terrible reality."<sup>318</sup> Initially published in 1909, the author Ernest Albert Bell made edits to explicitly state that white sex

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<sup>315</sup> Stephanie Cole and Natalie J. Ring, eds., *Folly of Jim Crow: Rethinking the Segregated South* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012): 18–19, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=1100907>.

<sup>316</sup> Cole, eds., *Folly of Jim Crow*, 19–20, ProQuest.

<sup>317</sup> "Citizens Pledged To Fight Slavery," *San Jose Mercury–News*, October 19, 1910, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SJMN19101018.2.42> (accessed July 14, 2022).

<sup>318</sup> "Citizens Pledged," *San Jose Mercury–News*, CDNC.

slavery is worse than what the late President Abraham Lincoln helped end:

“Verily, the “Black Slave Trade” of other days, was humane by comparison with this inconceivably heartless traffic.”<sup>319</sup> On top of this, Bell wrote that boxing clubs with financially struggling competitors are a leading source of criminal muscle and, throughout the book, implies black American involvement in “the black and ugly secrets of the Under World.”<sup>320</sup>

“Discoveries” so jostling to the mainstream consciousness still wrestling with the recent “Battle of the Century” that cities took a nationwide stand against what Johnson “emboldened.” The November 1 Associated Press article “INAUGURATE CAMPAIGN AGAINST WHITE SLAVES” states nineteen Chicagoan social reformers depart on a “social purity campaign” through “Minneapolis, Seattle, Tacoma, San Francisco, Houston, New Orleans, Memphis,” and Washington D.C.<sup>321</sup> After signing the Mann Act in June, Congressman James R. Mann, the “white slave bills” author, said President William Howard Taft privately told him: “Now that you have a law, lose no time in arresting and imprisoning the men who engage in this traffic.”<sup>322</sup>

As for Johnson, his fortune from the “Battle of the Century” kept him financially free to pursue his theatrical activities. However, his refusal to allow

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<sup>319</sup> Ernest Albert Bell, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls: Or, War on the White Slave Trade* (United States: L. H. Walter, 1911), 98 and 339–340, Google Books, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Fighting\\_the\\_Traffic\\_in\\_Young\\_Girls/A48AAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Fighting_the_Traffic_in_Young_Girls/A48AAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).

<sup>320</sup> Bell, *War on the White Slave Trade*, 186–187 and 251, Google Books.

<sup>321</sup> *Associated Press*, “Inaugurate Campaign Against White Slaves,” *Morning Press*, November 2, 1910, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MP19101102.2.28> (accessed July 14, 2022).

<sup>322</sup> *Associated Press*, “Inaugurate Campaign,” *Morning Press*, CDNC.



anything to hamper this life of pleasure continued to prove detrimental. In a “Special Dispatch” to San Francisco’s *The Call*, on Christmas Eve, police arrested Gaston Le Fort, Johnson’s “18-Year Old French Mechanician” and chauffeur, for attempting to enter the champion’s Chicago home to kill him for hospitalizing Etta Duryea after discovering their secret relationship.<sup>323</sup> Though the champion and Duryea stayed together afterward, Johnson clarified that their “relationship” was open for him only. Then, per the *Morning Press* on December 30, in “Johnson Backs Away From Sam Langford,” history’s first black World Heavyweight Champion continued to use the color line against “The Boston Bonecrusher.”<sup>324</sup> Leaving only the Colored Heavyweight Championship to bounce between Langford, “The Oxnard Cyclone” Sam McVey, and Jeremiah “Joe” Jennette.

What is fascinating about Johnson’s reign is his simultaneous exposing and amplifying of the color line by playing on mainstream America’s ignorant hate and illogical fear of the black man. Johnson was ahead of his time in more than just his boxing skills. He lived too color-blind for his integrated hometown and molded blackness with mainstream masculinity’s pecuniary and dominating values. Nor pausing to reflect on the white anger his actions caused to the detriment of the New Negro’s effort for equal rights between the races.

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<sup>323</sup> “Johnson Afraid Of His Chauffeur,” *San Francisco Call*, December 28, 1910, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19101228.2.49.11> (accessed July 14, 2022).

<sup>324</sup> “Johnson Backs Away From Sam Langford,” *Morning Press*, December 30, 1910, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MP19101231.2.42> (accessed July 14, 2022).

After marrying Etta Duryea in 1911 in Chicago, Illinois, until her suicide in 1912 due to Johnson's long absences and adultery, he quickly began dating the 18-year-old white prostitute Lucille Cameron.<sup>325</sup> Not even when white Chicagoan men began to stalk and threaten him publicly and black outlets like the NAACP's magazine, the *Crisis*, stated, "many colored people have joined in the hue and cry," Johnson refused to let anyone get in the way of his pleasures.<sup>326</sup>

A negative for the NAACP, who believed in marrying within one's race but understood that legalizing interracial marriage was a matter of "martial freedom of choice."<sup>327</sup> If black and white could marry with legal recognition nationwide, it would loosen the color line's segregative and undermining policies on the rights of black Americans. But, unfortunately, they had Johnson as who white Americans believed to define black masculinity. Deemed "a symbol of dangerously predatory black male sexuality," Johnson would marry Lucile Cameron on December 4, 1912, at his mother's Chicago home amidst nationwide publicity thanks to enraged black and white outlets while "police kept a thousand or so sensation seekers at bay."<sup>328</sup> Entering 1913, prominent black Chicagoans met and questioned Johnson at the Appomattox Club on his marriages and escapades with white women, to which he replied, "I have the right to choose who my mate shall be without the dictation of any man."<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Cole etc., *Folly of Jim Crow*, 23–24, ProQuest.; Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 113, Semantic Scholar.

<sup>326</sup> Pascoe, *Miscegenation Law*, 164–165, EBSCOhost.

<sup>327</sup> Pascoe, *Miscegenation Law*, 174, EBSCOhost.

<sup>328</sup> Pascoe, *Miscegenation Law*, 165, EBSCOhost.

<sup>329</sup> Pascoe, *Miscegenation Law*, 175, EBSCOhost.

Seeing no other way to end the foreshadowing of Johnson's reign, a demand rose for the Bureau of Investigation to investigate and defeat him with (abstract) laws.<sup>330</sup> Thus, from November 1912 to June 1913, the Bureau utilized the Mann Act's vague interstate policy against "any other immoral purpose" to investigate and then put Johnson on trial for prostituting Belle Schreiber across state lines in 1910.<sup>331</sup> The white public had given up on beating him in boxing, and now the US government sought to lock him up for being a black man displaying mainstream manliness. Not only as an unbeatable and impressively virile man of color but as the black man who proved the black man's existence. Continuously humiliating white American men for their inability to defeat him and protect white purity before the white Western world. Especially when, according to Ernest Albert Bell, the white slave trade has linked the "house of ill-fame in Chicago or any other American city" to foreign countries like Canada and France.<sup>332</sup>

Bell cites Chicago as the hub of the white sex trade for its status as the nation's railway focus point and marks boxing clubs as a significant site where human traffickers procure the muscle to protect their operations.<sup>333</sup> The combined uproars of Johnson's dominance over white men and women and a supposed international human trafficking business's hotspot being his adopted

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<sup>330</sup> Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 113, Semantic Scholar.

<sup>331</sup> Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 139–140, JSTOR.; Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 114 and 116, Semantic Scholar.

<sup>332</sup> Bell, *War on the White Slave Trade*, 316, Google Books.

<sup>333</sup> Bell, *War on the White Slave Trade*, 186–187, Google Books.

home made him a necessary and ideal target. If guilty and punished, all enslavers of white women and non-white men daring to commit miscegenation would see even the greatest man on the planet cannot avoid the consequences of defying the color line. A bonus is the satisfaction of “defeating” “The Galveston Giant,” at least outside the ring. As W.E.B. Du Bois stated in *The Souls of White Folk*, “Everything considered, the title to the universe claimed by the White Folk is faulty. It ought, at least, to look plausible.”<sup>334</sup> And now, Johnson shall face punishment as an unwilling stark example of what happens to whoever calls attention to the fallacy of racial superiority as justification for displacing natives, mistreating non-white citizens, and hogging resources through force and jobbery. An outcome Jack Johnson knew he could not avoid no matter who he hired to represent him and whatever facts he brought forth to the jury.

Actually, it is safer for Johnson not to point out how white Americans would be touting him as the best heavyweight and man historically if he were white. Anymore calling out early twentieth-century America’s institutionalized racism that dictates all their rulings, policies, and laws could prove damning. The one thing Johnson would never risk is a life sentence by court order or a legalized lynching. An outcome not unlikely as President Woodrow Wilson entered office earlier on April 11 and “ordered the segregation of all federal government offices, lunchrooms, and restrooms” until black Americans were

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<sup>334</sup> Du Bois, “Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater*, 924, AWS.

“civilized.”<sup>335</sup> Amidst this spike of racial intolerance gripping public offices, Johnson submitted to his fate.

Knowing he was guilty without hope for innocence, the heavyweight champion went to one of the few places he could shed Jack Johnson and let John Arthur Johnson despair without judgment. On December 30, 2016, Johnson’s great-great niece, Linda E. Haywood, said to PIX11 news correspondent Jay Dow: “He came to his sister’s house, Mama Janie, my great-grandmother, and he sat at her kitchen table, and he cried, he cried like a baby.”<sup>336</sup> All he could do now was appear before the court and see what would befall him.

While some black outlets, such as The Chicago Defender, sided with Johnson, others, like The Philadelphia Tribune, ran articles titled “Jack Johnson Dangerous Ill, Victim of White Fever.”<sup>337</sup> Or, by contemporary language, accusing him of a “white-wash” hopeful for living as though he were a white man instead of helping end the color line. Regardless of his supporters, it mattered not when Belle Schreiber willingly took the stand against Johnson. Per Colorado’s Herald Democrat on May 10, 1913, she “revealed” that per an agreement, Johnson brought her to Chicago after renting and furnishing an apartment with clothes and

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<sup>335</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, xix and 61, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>336</sup> Jay Dow, “Here’s Why You Should Care About Jack Johnson’s Final Fight,” YouTube Video, 07:13, December 30, 2016, [https://youtu.be/105Fv\\_YZwal](https://youtu.be/105Fv_YZwal).

<sup>337</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 23, Kindle.

jewelry in exchange for pleasure.<sup>338</sup> Accepted as damning evidence, the United States v. John Arthur Johnson concluded with a sentence of “a year and one day in prison with a \$1,000 fine” for the “foremost example of the evil in permitting the marriage of whites and blacks.”<sup>339</sup> Fortunately, government officials gave the first black World Heavyweight Champion the option of becoming a racial refugee so long as he left the United States of America entirely.<sup>340</sup> So he did.

On February 8, 1915, as Johnson traveled and fought excommunicado, The Clune’s Auditorium in Los Angeles, California, staged the premiere of *The Birth of a Nation*.<sup>341</sup> A film urging Jim Crow supporters to address the increasing black plight on American soil. Reflecting white America’s irrational anticipations of a societal restructuring in post-Emancipation America, where black Americans dominate political and economic institutions. A nation where black politicians of disrespectful mannerisms legislate discrimination against white folk and white women face the constant threat of miscegenation.<sup>342</sup> The latter is a notorious scene where Flora Cameron (named after Lucile Cameron) commits suicide after Gus (a post-Civil War black Union general) proposes marriage.<sup>343</sup> Stating that while white men work to resurrect the Ku Klux Klan to save the US from black

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<sup>338</sup> “Belle Schreiber Didn’t Love Jack Johnson,” *The Herald Democrat*, May 10, 1913, CHNC, <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=THD19130510-01.2.23> (accessed May 19, 2023).

<sup>339</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 23, Kindle.; Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 116, Semantic Scholar.

<sup>340</sup> Halsted, “The Manliest Man,” 116, Semantic Scholar.

<sup>341</sup> Cinema History, “The Birth of a Nation (D. W. Griffith, 1915),” YouTube Video, 03:13:04, April 4, 2020, <https://youtu.be/xiwsAnI3r8>.

<sup>342</sup> Cinema History, “Birth of a Nation,” YouTube Video.

<sup>343</sup> Cinema History, “Birth of a Nation,” YouTube Video.

decay, white women must do their part for the race by preserving their honor by any means and for the current Mrs. Johnson to kill herself.

Also a subtle call to mainstream America to consider what racial progress has led to in the US. Four of the first black World Boxing Champions in multiple weight classes after displaying their fighting and manly prowess, surpassing numerous white and black opponents. With the latest, a black heavyweight, having proven that manhood is attainable by all races of men. A black heavyweight wearing the most significant distinction in sports while flaunting his ability to attract white women throughout the US and the white Western world. Working against the foundational idea of white-dominated nations: "Given the widespread belief that a nation was only ever as powerful as its citizens' individual bodies, the mounting efforts to maintain white men's physical fitness and white women's sexual purity were fundamentally intertwined."<sup>344</sup> A self-made mission in reaction to the rejection from white and black people alike during his title reign, Johnson made praiseworthy progress by proving black manhood and dominating white men and women.

However, the reign of any champion must end. After almost two years of traveling the world and avoiding the violence of World War 1, a twenty-pound overweight Johnson was finally uncrowned in Havana, Cuba, on April 5, 1915.<sup>345</sup> Losing to "The Great White Hope" Jess Willard, initially "The Pottawatomie Giant"

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<sup>344</sup> Runstedtler, *Rebel Sojourner*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>345</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 23, Kindle.

at six foot six inches tall and almost 250 pounds, via knockout in the twenty-sixth of forty-five rounds. So ended the reign of “The Galveston Giant,” one of the most impactful boxing champions in American history and one of the most notorious athletes in sporting history.

At the same time, *The Birth of a Nation*’s message about reinforcing the color line through white supremacy became a world sensation. Per *The Los Angeles Herald* on December 6, 1916, the film played in the Clune’s Theater in Los Angeles to New York City, Australia, and the Fiji Islands.<sup>346</sup> From throughout America, to white-dominated countries across the pond, and colonized lands, the film told white folk worldwide that no matter the advancements non-whites made, vigilantism and racist policy are the answer. Similarly, mainstream Americans continued their de jure policies and laws and de facto enforcement to keep non-white citizens to second-class citizenship. Yet, nothing can bring back the fantasy that masculinity is an exclusively white attribute. An achievement credited to “The Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson, a professional pugilist from the early twentieth century.

### Conclusion

As for “The Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson, his place in American history undoubtedly goes beyond but is attributed to the boxing ring. In early Jim Crow America, when the “religion of whiteness” purported the supremacy of whiteness

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<sup>346</sup> “FLICKERS BY GUY PRICE,” *Los Angeles Herald*, December 9, 1916, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19161209.2.511> (accessed May 23, 2023).



in physicality, intellect, bravery, and morality and attributed all their negatives to blackness, he proved the belief fictional. All from within the country's most popular sport, regardless of its illegal status. Time and again, Johnson emerged victorious on equal grounds, no matter who the White Hope Campaign put before him. And when "The Great White Hope," white America's cultural and racial icon, reemerged, the certainty of white triumph became white despair. From humiliating the white man's fighting ability, repeatedly tarnishing white purity through miscegenation, and his unhumiliated nature that flaunted hard-earned wealth said to be impossible for any of the black race, the objective reality about manhood came forth, where mainstream America finally came to see that race and masculinity are uncorrelated.

However, Johnson's character and actions also came with consequences. Before his high-speed auto death on June 10, 1946, he told a reporter, "Just remember, whatever you write about me, that I was a man."<sup>347</sup> Notably, a man by the mainstream standards not intended for cross-racial applicability and not the New Negro's humble and conservative nature. Johnson's unrelenting strive for financial distinction saw him assert his will on all black and white men on equal grounds and wage war on white purity through miscegenation internationally. Thus, spurring another war on a supposed criminal enterprise and intentionally misrepresentative movie that veiled all non-white men as deprived agents of

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<sup>347</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

chaos. Consequences that came with Johnson practicing mainstream masculinity better than any white man.

Lastly, one consequence to levy against Johnson is continuing the color line in boxing. His avoidance of the top three heavyweights who were black themselves made Johnson the sole prevention of the World Heavyweight Championship returning to white hegemony. After that, an extreme NBF period began, proving far more arduous than what Johnson overcame, all due to white America's memory of what they presumed the first black World Heavyweight Champion taught them to be the character and dangers of all black men.

## THE ROARING TWENTIES: THE SURFACE LEVEL

### The Angst of White Manhood

After boxing's World Heavyweight Championship returned to white hegemony in 1915, the title meant to signify a competitor's manly distinction in fighting ability and skill on equal grounds is again a tool for celebrating whiteness. Reinstatement came as the Roaring Twenties commenced, a period of excessive materialism and demands for sensationalism. During this time, mainstream America, no longer able to deny the black man's existence, sought to place themselves on a pedestal reading: "All white men are the better of all other races of men."

Besides the sensational thrill, physical competition in the 1920s was now a focal point of struggle where whiteness competed with the non-white races for the title of the best race of men. And Jim Crow America was more than willing to implement unsportsmanlike conduct to retain that title for the white race. Plainly speaking, an unspoken culture of coping existed to distract white American men from the plaguing anxieties during the 1920s. This unease encompassed more than reassuring themselves as the superior race of men and holding onto their demographic's status as whom American society revolves around. During the 1920 to 1922 recession due to "converting from a war economy to a peace economy," the rural to urban departers in the 1910s for factory work

predominantly voted for conservative economics and politics.<sup>348</sup> Although, per Niall Palmer's *The Twenties in America: Politics and History*, this mainstream conservatism did not mean "a carefully concocted plot to [replace] the legacy of progressivism" with "key conservative principles."<sup>349</sup> Instead, voters kept transferring the federal government's power to state's rights, "lower taxes, cost-cutting," and reducing industrial and economic regulations.<sup>350</sup>

Amidst the white flight to cities "to work in factories, purchase electrical goods, and dance to the rhythm of jazz," even the poor enjoying the latest conveniences of indoor plumbing, toilets, and electricity felt "the age of permanent plenty" began.<sup>351</sup> An outcome mainstream citizens mired themselves to self-distraction from their increasing pessimism towards the federal government. Throughout the 1920s, voters backed Republican "normalcy" despite the failures of Republican-dominated administrations to foster more civic involvement in national politics.<sup>352</sup> Then, with "the emergence of mass advertising" industry running headlines of President Warren G. Harding "as [a manipulable] bungling incompetent" and then President Calvin Coolidge "as

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<sup>348</sup> William G. Carleton, "The Politics of the 1920's," *Current History* 47, no. 278 (1964): 210, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45311186>; Mark Dyreson, "The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s," *Journal of Sport History* 16, no. 3 (1989): 263–264, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43610285>.

<sup>349</sup> Niall Palmer, *The Twenties in America: Politics and History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 175–176, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=1962057&ppg=8>.

<sup>350</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 175, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>351</sup> Carleton, "Politics of the 1920's," 210, JSTOR.; Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 182, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>352</sup> Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 277, JSTOR.

somnolently indifferent,” a steep deflation of public confidence in government came.<sup>353</sup>

Thus, utilizing Palmer’s findings, white citizens uncertain about the future recalled the recent economic and racial upheaval from the recent past for reassurance that the country’s present state is in better standing, a behavior that leaked into the realm of professional competition.<sup>354</sup> Made into pulling agents of communal solidarity to derive inspiration for controlling “their athletic destinies,” the Golden Age of Sports emerged when white sports athletes became mediums of reassurance.<sup>355</sup> So, alongside the innovations and abundance of goods improving the quality of life, the athlete’s role is to positively suggest the citizenry’s overall bodily health. For the American dominance of boxing, white men interpreted this as their race and nationality will always triumph.

And the fighter made a cultural icon for his high-octane ferocity and historic riches as an athlete is “The Manassa Mauler” Jack Dempsey. A classic rags-to-riches life story, this “former hobo” “fought in a style never before seen—a swarming, hyper-aggressive attack perfectly suited for the sensation-mad Roaring Twenties.”<sup>356</sup> Reigning as the World Heavyweight Champion from 1919 to 1926, the excitement for Dempsey’s boxing matches rivaled the most beloved holidays. Plus, with sensationalizing coverage from the mainstream media

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<sup>353</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 276 and 278, JSTOR.

<sup>354</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 182, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>355</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 261 and 278, JSTOR.

<sup>356</sup> Paul Beston, *The Boxing Kings: When American Heavyweights Ruled the Ring* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), xv, ProQuest Ebook Central.

industry, a “revolution in sports marketing techniques” made “professional fighting into one of the major cultural dramas of the Twenties.”<sup>357</sup>

And so, Dempsey’s losing the World Heavyweight Championship to “The Fighting Marine” Gene Tunney in 1926 and then their 1927 rematch seemingly marked a potential beginning of the end. Losing to the boring “Thinking Man” style can only be taken as the impending conclusion of the Roaring Twenties and a possible return to poverty reminiscent of the Progressive Era.<sup>358</sup> As Carlo Rotella explains in *The Cambridge Companion to Boxing*: “Beyond using [heavyweight title matches] to do the essential fight-world business of assessing boxers’ relative individual merit and analyzing the contest of styles, we rely on them when we frame periods in boxing history concerning broader movements in culture and society.”<sup>359</sup> And for white men hungry for a meaningful drama show, there is no better stage to mark the shift into the Great Depression’s societal and economic despondency than the boxing ring.

So, as part of the NBF period, here lies an account of why boxing’s popularity relies on the pedigree of the heavyweight division and the actions of the World Heavyweight Champion. With the latter being how Dempsey quickened the end of his reign. Falling in love with the good life as the World Heavyweight Champion and happy to obey “instructions from Washington not to

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<sup>357</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 275, JSTOR.

<sup>358</sup> Carleton, “Politics of the 1920’s,” 210, JSTOR.; “Thinking Man” Style: A typically unexciting approach that relies on the fundamentals, avoiding risks, and throwing punches “to hit and not get hit.”

<sup>359</sup> Gerald Early, *The Cambridge Companion to Boxing: Cambridge Companions to Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), Article 6, Kindle.

put on a [mixed race title match]" for fear of more Ku Klux Klan marches, followed by fatal race riots, Dempsey "grew rusty" due to minimal title defenses.<sup>360</sup>

That said, this chapter focuses on the angst of white manhood after decades of economic struggle due to monopolization and the successes of black manhood. It argues that even with the rediscovery of confidence in white masculinity through displays of physical exertion, and the ambivalence of conservative politics in government and business with new liberal sociocultural realities, a need for positive racially partisan reinforcement pertained.<sup>361</sup> Also pointing to the need for validation underlining white anxiety during the 1920s, this chapter focuses on the cultural linkages between government and boxing. For one, as a thesis motivated to prove boxing's special historical significance underappreciated at the college level, the history of other pastimes is minimal. Two, to delve into the mainstream citizenry's increasing loss of faith in Republicanism's dominance in the federal government. From this, a chronology of how boxing became an emotional support spectacle in promising the continuation of white dominance thanks to its men and societal stability as national scandals and recession hardships plagued mainstream citizens.

So, the following chronological sequence describes how boxing reemerged to mainstream white manhood's exploitation and why the violent craft

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<sup>360</sup> Thomas Streissguth, *The Roaring Twenties (Eyewitness History)* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2007), 255, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/roaringtwenties0000stre>.

<sup>361</sup> Omar Agustin Moran, "The Representations of Masculinities in 1920s American Literature: Ernest Hemingway and Willa Cather," *Thesis Digitization Project* (MA Thesis, California State University, San Bernardino, 2001), iii and 38, CSUSB Scholar Works, <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/2029>.

became culturally representative of the rambunctious 1920s and a visual relaxer to white citizens. For assistance, the incorporation of Professor Omar Agustin Moran's 2001 Master's Thesis, "The Representations of Masculinities in 1920s American Literature: Ernest Hemingway and Willa Cather," helps layout and dig into the 1920s white masculinity's firm reliance on "violence" and "ambivalence."<sup>362</sup> As this chapter historically interprets the relations of boxing and white masculinity during the Roaring Twenties, the mainstream culture of jobbery and coping in the politics of government and sport become apparent.

#### The "American" Political Scene and The Test of Heavyweight Stardom

Born on June 24, 1895, in Manassa, Colorado, William Harrison Dempsey grew up in the Mormon community of San Luis Valley as the ninth of eleven children.<sup>363</sup> Before going on a pugilistic venture at 16 years old, Dempsey's "devout Mormon mother," Celia Dempsey, read to him the biography of "The Boston Strong Boy" John L. Sullivan.<sup>364</sup> A fellow Irish descendant who reigned as the World Heavyweight Champion during the Gilded Ages, Sullivan's story inspired Dempsey to leave himself no choice but to become a fighter in 1911. The now-named Jack Dempsey fought across the US without formal record holding, determined to live up to his idol's wisdom: "There isn't a self-respecting American, no matter what tomfool ideas he may have about boxing in general,

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<sup>362</sup> Moran, "Representations of Masculinities in 1920s," 38 and 110, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>363</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 54, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>364</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 1 and 54, ProQuest Ebook Central.



who does not feel patriotic pride at the thought that a native-born American, a countryman of his, can lick any man on the face of the earth.”<sup>365</sup>

Yet, in 1918, just as Dempsey’s nineteen victories, with twelve in the first round, came to reflect momentary dedication, voters did not side with conservative Republicans with the intention of total social commitment.<sup>366</sup> Instead, just like the Republicans in Congress, they grew tired of the Democrats and President Woodrow Wilson’s war powers. Like the Los Angeles Herald on January 1, outlets criticizing government controls ran articles like “Wilson President of World, Is Prediction.”<sup>367</sup> Channeling mainstream voters’ weariness of their Democratic President and his Congressional power base, the negative opinion of Democrat control continued to heighten. On January 8, President Wilson presented to Congress his Fourteen Points with the goals of no more secret treaties, “the removal of international trade barriers, deep cuts in military arsenals,” and foreign governments reflecting the genuine native populace.<sup>368</sup> Suggesting to lessen America’s international influence and make it more accountable to other countries in a League of Nations amidst rising isolationist desire would prove consequential.

Simultaneously, outlets wrote of athletes supporting the war effort to show that at least unelected individuals were using whatever affluence the public

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<sup>365</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, xvi and 55, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>366</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 55–56, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 3–4, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>367</sup> “Wilson President of World, Is Prediction,” *Los Angeles Herald*, January 1, 1918, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19180101.2.97> (accessed June 6, 2023).

<sup>368</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 16, ProQuest Ebook Central.

granted them for the nation's good. At this juncture, mainstream Americans began to look upon professional athletes as unofficial representatives of the nation's trajectory more so than the officially elected amidst diminishing "faith in the connection between the political process and personal power."<sup>369</sup> On August 10, the *San Francisco Call* celebrated Dempsey for bearing the monetary expense to travel to Kansas City, Missouri, to entertain the trainees at Camp Grant and Fort Sheridan while still without "the slightest opportunity to cash in on his assets."<sup>370</sup> However, by August, Dempsey's cross-country volunteering hit a snag at a shipyard in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when outlets circulated pictures of him in work clothes with the caption: "The glossy patent leather shoes, not standard workman's gear, caused trouble."<sup>371</sup> Yet, a massive scandal did not break out for being seen as another opportunist competitor. Dempsey's existing admirers preferred focusing on his positives over throwing them into the pile of scorned Democratic action.

By the unofficial end of World War I in mid-November, mainstream voters frustrated with the progressive wartime powers took the initiative during the midterm elections to award House and Senate control to conservative Republicans.<sup>372</sup> Then, in 1919, alongside enacting Prohibition, President Wilson's

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<sup>369</sup> Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 278 and 281, JSTOR.

<sup>370</sup> Otto Floto, "Jack Dempsey Doing Everything He Can to Swell Funds of War," *San Francisco Call*, August 10, 1918, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19180810.2.93> (accessed June 8, 2023).

<sup>371</sup> Frederick Betz, "'How Legends Are Made': Mencken's Coverage of Dempsey vs. Carpentier," *Menckiana*, no. 227 (2022): 48, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27181058>.

<sup>372</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 15, ProQuest Ebook Central.

minimizing Republican presence at the Versailles peace conferences in Paris, France, and ordering fellow Democrats to reject all amending suggestions and seek no compromise of his Fourteen Points further dwindled public opinion.<sup>373</sup> Through the San Francisco Call on February 4, after garnering word of negative public sentiment, the Associated Press disclosed his planning for a nationwide tour for “public endorsement” to keep the US involved in worldly affairs.<sup>374</sup>

Garnering more sourness against Democrat leadership as Republicans made calls of “Let us be Americans again(!),” the white citizenry found a change of focus in sports.<sup>375</sup> While Dempsey’s work in 1918 did not dominate newspaper headlines, the November Armistice reignited the demands for “The Pottawatomie Giant” Jess Willard to defend his title after only one in 1916.<sup>376</sup> Per the Los Angeles Herald on November 22, 1918, an announcement by the decorated WWI French flying artillery spotter and winner of various European pugilist titles in multiple weight divisions, “The Orchid Man” Georges Carpentier, to enter the American boxing scene brought hope Willard defending his title or retiring.<sup>377</sup> But, after familiarizing themselves with the boxing landscape, if the “French army is demobilized in time” and Willard does not step up, they knew a potential Carpentier-Dempsey match one to “create a [global] wave of interest.”<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 16–17, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>374</sup> Associated Press, “Wilson Plan to Tour Country Stirs G.O.P.,” *San Francisco Call*, February 4, 1919, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19190204.2.159> (accessed June 5, 2023).

<sup>375</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 17, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>376</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 56, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>377</sup> Jack Veiock, “Carpentier to be Big Boost to Boxing,” *Los Angeles Herald*, November 22, 1918, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19181122.2.351> (accessed June 7, 2023).

<sup>378</sup> Veiock, “Big Boost to Boxing,” *Los Angeles Herald*, CDNC.

Then, per the San Francisco Call on March 12, 1919, Carpentier still could “not come to America for at least ten months.”<sup>379</sup> The article’s language reveals a preference for Carpentier’s absence for a Willard-Dempsey match. As the war-tired mainstream voter grew bitter with President Wilson’s anti-isolationist speeches and decrying of the Republican-dominated Congress as betrayers of WWI fallen, the disrespectful language suggests this anti-Europe sentiment leaked into boxing.<sup>380</sup> Echoing mainstream thinking that Carpentier is easily beatable by (white American) “The Rochester Plasterer” Fred Fulton, a victim of Dempsey’s 1918 win run, or (white Englishman) “Bombardier” Billy Wells, the inactive former British Heavyweight Champion knocked out in early-1919.<sup>381</sup> According to fight game culture, stating an elite competitor is better off facing another’s beaten opponents or somebody just knocked down the rankings is the same as belittling their past accomplishments.

As Professor Moran explains, the “ambivalence” of white masculinity that leads to “paradoxical and hypocritical ideologies of patriarchal thought” is why one’s hard-earned “identification” of manliness is not immune to slights.<sup>382</sup> Carpentier’s misfortune with the emerging 1920s white masculinity was the prospect of a foreigner, no matter his whiteness, seeking to claim the World Heavyweight Championship as a non-American man amidst the rise of

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<sup>379</sup> Marion T. Salazar, “Fighting Talk,” *San Francisco Call*, March 12, 1919, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19190312.2.191> (accessed June 7, 2023).

<sup>380</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 17, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>381</sup> Salazar, “Fighting Talk,” *San Francisco Call*, CDNC.

<sup>382</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 54 and 72, CSUSB Scholar Works.

mainstream opposition to the deepening of European political ties. As the cross-board 1918 Republican campaign theme/promise of isolating US government attention hints, the “leftover of the surcharged patriotism engendered” since the “German submarine warfare” in April 1917 created an atmosphere of “100 percent Americanism.”<sup>383</sup> Demanding the national leaders make actual mainstream voters wish to refocus the majority of their attention on its citizens.

Thus, the combination of (white) Americanism and the normalization of hypocrisy meant always favoring the white American man. Even if “The Orchid Man” won impressive distinction as a world-class multi-weight European titlist before willingly fighting in a war, “the embodiment of violence,” and surviving that “arena for masculine legitimization,” his foreigner status meant no sportsmanlike fairness from white America, only the smearing of a “hype job.”<sup>384</sup> In boxing terminology, uttering “hype job” is the beginning of an objective breakdown of why their career is uninspiring. And in disingenuous contrast, in the excessively critical white eyes, “The Manassa Mauler,” who contributed to cross-country shows and irritation for pretending to build ships after requesting exemption on the May 1917 Selective Service Act draft form, is only deemed an opportunist rising celebrity.<sup>385</sup> If not for the cultural jobbery against all possible non-white American title contenders, Dempsey’s justification as the sole provider for his

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<sup>383</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 56, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Carleton, “Politics of the 1920’s,” 210, JSTOR.

<sup>384</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 39 and 64–65, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>385</sup> Betz, “How Legends Are Made,” 47–48, JSTOR.; Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 64–65, CSUSB Scholar Works.

parents, his widowed sister with three children, and Maxine Cates, a piano-playing prostitute who divorced him, his remaining “outside” of the “isolated” “arena” of war should have made him a “slacker.”<sup>386</sup>

It was not an insult but a disclaimer of an unproven male. But, for the newly emerging mainstream masculinity demanding capable and contributive aggression, falling in line with the viewpoints of the white majority, and giving whatever mortally possible to the country amidst conflict or peace, the World Heavyweight Championship took priority. The white man of America needs to know that his demographic has successfully moved past the recent economic, racial, and war upheavals of yesteryears to emerge as the best race and nationality of men. And in early twentieth-century America, during the Jim Crow Era, there is no better symbolic signifier than boxing’s crown jewel, especially when Jess Willard did not make the necessary title defenses.

Thus, amongst the abundant pro-Dempsey public, Dempsey’s management took the initiative and secured a World Heavyweight Title Match with Willard’s people. And so, on the Fourth of July in Toledo, Ohio, “The Manassa Mauler” became champion inside three rounds when “The Pottawatomie Giant’s” corner threw in the towel.<sup>387</sup> Thanks to the sensationalizing promotions of George Lewis “Tex” Rickard, reporters of major

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<sup>386</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 55 and 61, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Betz, “How Legends Are Made,” 48, JSTOR.; Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 64–65, CSUSB Scholar Works.; Cates returned to her profession after supposed marriage from October 6, 1916 to April 2, 1919.

<sup>387</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 53 and 58, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Throwing in the towel means the corner accepts defeat on behalf of their competitor.

outlets like The New York Times described the match as “not a battle, but a slaughter ... a kind of pugilistic murder” granting Dempsey’s big breakthrough in boxing and national popularity under the banners of being “a new type” and “like no other champion we ever had.”<sup>388</sup> Helping to drag the country’s attention back to sports after the dust of WWI settled, Dempsey, aware or not, cleared the way for “professional sports” to become “[central] to both consumption and entertainment.”<sup>389</sup>

However, after fulfilling his purpose of saving the title from Willard’s inactivity, a shameful antithesis to the emerging white masculinity, and Carpentier’s grasp that would deem the white American man not the best of nationality, Dempsey’s manhood came under media fire. Soon after becoming champion, New York Times sportswriter and WWI veteran Grantland Rice explained Dempsey was “the champion boxer, but not the champion fighter” as “He missed the big chance of his life to prove his own manhood before his own soul.”<sup>390</sup> As WWI contributed not to an ideal to pursue but a “more cynical and violent view of the human character” the emerging white manhood is proud to display whenever possible, Dempsey came up short with his draft exemption.<sup>391</sup> For an American man, now the world’s supposed best man, to have not served his country proved an embarrassment American citizens could only for so long ignore.

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<sup>388</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 59, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>389</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 60, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>390</sup> Betz, “How Legends Are Made,” 48, JSTOR.

<sup>391</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 3, CSUSB Scholar Works.

Soon enough, on January 23, 1920, after the June 1919 Treaty of Versailles officially ended WWI, the latest drama sweeping up white eyes begins with Maxine Cates' featured letter in the San Francisco Chronicle article, "Dempsey Slacker, Says Divorced Wife / She Claims to Have the Proofs / Dares Champion to Deny Her Charges."<sup>392</sup> Before white eyes, Cates' accusations of draft dodging and period of financial reliance on her during their marriage risked the "slacker" stigma because, along with alleged criminal cowardice, a past not fitting the mold of the "patriarchally established gender system" in marriage means he "cannot even be socially validated through [present] self-reliance."<sup>393</sup> The latest face of white American manhood had to be financially supported by his former wife during the early years of his career and, by extension, might owe his riches to her, a situation no proud white man can stomach to be associated with through shared race and nationality. Thus, per public demand, for a formal trial to determine whether or not Dempsey lied about being the sole provider to his family and former significant other to avoid military service in WWI, the heavyweight champion "was quickly indicted by the Assistant United States District Attorney for San Francisco" and set for trial on June 8.<sup>394</sup>

The build-up engrossed the white public with revelations and the constant reminder that if he was guilty, Dempsey embarrassed his demographic's men for citing him as how the white American man evolved from wartime. Plus, it

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<sup>392</sup> Betz, "How Legends Are Made," 48, JSTOR.

<sup>393</sup> Betz, "How Legends Are Made," 48, JSTOR.; Moran, "Representations of Masculinities in 1920s," 34 and 75, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>394</sup> Betz, "How Legends Are Made," 48, JSTOR.



provided a distraction from President Wilson's counterintuitive speech tour, hoping and failing to muster voter backing for US membership in a League of Nations. Then, from September 25, 1919, to March 20, 1920, the speaking tour cost President Wilson a stroke, a second rendered him "semi-invalid for the remainder of his term," an amended treaty did not receive a majority Senate vote, same for an unamended version, and then an encroaching post-war recession as the government neared a shutdown.<sup>395</sup> But, by March 1920, with the presidential campaigns commenced, Republican candidate Warren G. Harding delivered speeches keeping to the "key platform themes" that won the Grand Old Party the 1918 midterms: "higher tariffs, aid to agriculture, tax cuts, streamlining of federal bureaucracy, and immigration restrictions."<sup>396</sup>

Alongside Governor Calvin Coolidge of Massachusetts for Vice-President, famous for calling in the National Guard to help control "the Boston police strike of September 1919" and declaring, "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time," Harding's "normalcy" "reflected [the mainstream] mood."<sup>397</sup> What Republican politicians understood with their promised "normalcy" was the application of mainstream voter ambitions for a conservative government that maintains an at-arms-reach but functional relationship with an increasingly liberal white-oriented society. Of the reciprocity between Republican government "normalcy" and the white man's emerging

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<sup>395</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 17–18, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>396</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 24, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>397</sup> Carleton, "Politics of the 1920's," 212, JSTOR.

masculinity approaching the 1920s, the mainstream “ambivalence” influencing government and society was not of disconnect but functional hypocrisy.

Specifically, the new white masculinity is not one of the stringent values that result in a predominantly liberal or conservative civilization but one of “continual flux” “between axioms of normalcy and other.”<sup>398</sup> For the sake of shaping American society, the newly emerging white masculinity focused more on “what it accomplishes rather than [how] it performs,” even if it meant exercising “other” aspects perceived as weak or feminine, to a measured extent, of course.<sup>399</sup>

And in the federal government’s relationship with state governments and the industrial business sector entering a recession from “the shock of converting from a war economy to a peace economy,” Harding’s “normalcy” sought harmony between a return to “pre-war social norms” without reversing women’s “recent social and political gains.”<sup>400</sup> Also, thanks to not advertising his intentions “of speaking out against the political and economic segregation of black Americans,” the weakness Harding, his allies, and his constituency exploited is the excusing of perceived non-masculine characteristics and actions for an “end’s” sake.<sup>401</sup> However, back in the pugilistic world, the scandals of Dempsey’s alleged dishonoring of the new post-WWI white manhood proved too much to excuse.

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<sup>398</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 105–106, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>399</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 100 and 106, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>400</sup> Carleton, “Politics of the 1920’s,” 210, JSTOR.; Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 25, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>401</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 25, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Even close to the June 8, 1920 trial date, breaking news concerning Dempsey's alleged draft dodging reached national to local newspaper outlets, speaking to the sports world's significance. On April 26, 1920, the *Riverside Daily Press* ran "Maxine Dempsey Never Legally Wedded To Dempsey," reporting the admittance of reluctant Special Agent E. M. Blanford on the Department of Justice's two-month back discovery of Maxine Cates' preceding thirteen-day official divorce preceding her October 6, 1916 marriage to Dempsey in Utah.<sup>402</sup> And so, falling within the state's mandatory two-month waiting period before legal recognition of another for life in matrimony sentence, Maxine Cates was never Dempsey's wife officially and, per Special Agent Blanford, "will be called to testify against him in the draft evasion trial."<sup>403</sup> Then, the following day presented a case for celebration as boxing became a legalized sport. Per the *Hanford Sentinel* on April 27, 1920, with Governor Alfred Smith of New York's approval, the Walker Bill mandates all fights limited to fifteen rounds with decisions delivered by two judges and a referee under the officiating of a "license commission consisting of three members."<sup>404</sup>

There was reason for celebration as more states followed in New York's steps. But now, with June 8 among them, the trial's popularity went beyond the United States. Against his former significant other and the white public's scrutiny

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<sup>402</sup> "Maxine Dempsey Never Legally Wedded To Jack," *Riverside Daily Press*, April 26, 1920, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=RDP19200426.2.22> (accessed June 13, 2023).

<sup>403</sup> "Never Legally Wedded," *Riverside Daily Press*, CDNC.

<sup>404</sup> Henry L. Farrell, "Boxing Coming Back With Rush," *Hanford Sentinel*, April 27, 1920, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=HS19200427.2.37> (accessed June 2, 2023).

lasting more than a week, Dempsey left the San Francisco judicial dome an acquitted man after the jury “deliberated for only seven minutes.”<sup>405</sup> According to Australia’s *The Advocate*, on June 17, Miss Cates’ jealousy of the champion’s new riches after filing a pointless divorce is why she set everything into motion, noting her “evident relish” when relating a story of having punched him in the eye once and proven lie of only receiving \$900 in total when Dempsey actually sent her several liveable sums.<sup>406</sup> Although, the one undeniable truth of Dempsey’s resume of manhood was that he never fought in WWI. And in a period when a man’s expected “practicality,” “as a convention of social value and judgment,” is measured in situations when he is most needed, Dempsey became known as “Slacker Jack.”<sup>407</sup>

On the political front, adapting to the emerging culture of consumption for escapism and the media industry’s tactic of only promising what they are without explaining their past actions or goals, the Republican-nominated Harding-Coolidge campaigned as not the party pursuing League membership or responsible for the recession.<sup>408</sup> In late July, veiling themselves and the party as not the ones supposedly attempting to empower Prohibition to fulfill its purpose, unlike “Wilson’s League,” Harding swore to the *Saturday Morning Post* that

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<sup>405</sup> Betz, “How Legends Are Made,” 48, JSTOR.

<sup>406</sup> “Jack Dempsey’s Trial,” *The Advocate*, June 17, 1920, TROVE, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/66570172> (accessed June 13, 2023).

<sup>407</sup> Betz, “How Legends Are Made,” 48, JSTOR.; Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 62, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>408</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 276–277, JSTOR.; Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 22 and 26, ProQuest Ebook Central.

America must be “in perfect order before we attempt the miracle of Old World stabilization.”<sup>409</sup> A bonus is these appeals present “normalcy” as complementary to “The Golden Age of Sports.” When “Americans increasingly understood sport as a vehicle for entertainment,” glorifying consumption, and reaffirming masculinity, unlike “progressivism’s” hope to use sport to “forge a link between activity and contemplation” with “material necessity and moral principle.”<sup>410</sup> Thus, on November 2, by presenting themselves as hopeful public servants democratically obedient and supportive of the mainstream public’s anxieties and desires, Warren G. Harding “won thirty-seven of the forty-eight states” for the presidency.<sup>411</sup>

So are the beginnings of the Roaring Twenties with a refreshing political start of a period experiencing a “sudden acceleration of life, the confounded mobility and voting rights of women, and” Prohibition.<sup>412</sup> With the Eighteenth Amendment, as citizens drank for the sake of drinking with a mirthful rebel-like quality, alcohol poisoning rose “steadily from 1.0 per 1,000 in 1920 to 4.0 per thousand in 1927 and 1928.”<sup>413</sup> A strengthening factor of the Roaring Twenties “party” dimension as the nation “became aware of the cultural transformations [produced by] decades of industrial innovation,” from the rise of economically centralizing megacorporations and the war demands of WWI, and “social

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<sup>409</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 26–27, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>410</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 261 and 264, JSTOR.

<sup>411</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 27–28, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>412</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, xi, Internet Archive.

<sup>413</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 27 and 29–30, Internet Archive.

engineering,” from Democratic “progressivism” to Republican “normalcy.”<sup>414</sup> A new cultural landscape where now the best way to find self-validation and express their gains as individuals was by paying to spectate “oneself” dominate in physical competition. Now attracting “serious attention from the mass public,” as sports consumption “represented the escape from social realities” by identifying “with individuals who had risen above the bleak routines which marked modern life,” sports stars became attractive heroes of consumer culture.<sup>415</sup>

Fans lash out when their heroes fail to meet their expectations and justify the spending of hard-earned money spent on admission tickets, no matter if it was for what occurred inside or outside the battlefield. And for the famous boxers of the Roaring Twenties that white fight fans place on lucrative pedestals as “symbols of the age,” it would take more than another successful performance to work back into their good graces.<sup>416</sup> This bitterness for not returning the favor for glorifying “Slacker Jack” in the recent past extended to mainstream outlets. Just as when Dempsey began preparing to rematch “KO” Bill Brennan, a returning knockout victim from his 1918 win streak. On December 2, the Los Angeles Herald expressed evident annoyance with the subtitle “With Brennan and Jack due to tangle, it won’t be such a fierce wrangle” and disapproving the champion already planning for a more than month-long Los Angeles vacation while still in

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<sup>414</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 271–272, JSTOR.

<sup>415</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 271 and 274–275, JSTOR.

<sup>416</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 274–275, JSTOR.

training.<sup>417</sup> To this day, the expectation of a competitor in camp for a critical contest is to focus solely on preparing for the upcoming fight date and nothing else, much less a vacation. The article carried an irritated tone with Dempsey's "poor policy" of self-conduct for signing a lengthy movie contract "that might interfere with ring engagements."<sup>418</sup> So, on December 14, in New York City's historic Madison Square Garden arena, after knocking out Brennan again in the twelfth of fifteen rounds, the frustrated crowd booed Dempsey for quickly loving the good life more than boxing.<sup>419</sup> Now, Dempsey needed to reaffirm his manhood and patriotism to the best he can, so Golden Age spectators could rest easy about their champion's capability, to whatever degree possible, as a fitting model of white American manhood.

#### Into the Roaring Twenties: Frustration with Some Pugilist Excitement

The year 1921 proved challenging for white America in politics and boxing. With Dempsey slated to fight "The Orchid Man" Georges Carpentier on July 2, any hopes of the World Heavyweight Champion firmly planting his feet to focus strictly on training were quickly extinguished. As early as February 10, per the San Bernardino Sun, the Associated Press lamented in their report of Dempsey's continuing presence in Los Angeles before heading to New York City to begin

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<sup>417</sup> Fane Norton, "Dempsey to Visit L.A. After Brennan Bout," *Los Angeles Herald*, December 2, 1920, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19201202.2.679> (accessed June 14, 2023).

<sup>418</sup> Norton, "Dempsey to Visit L.A.," *Los Angeles Herald*, CDNC.

<sup>419</sup> Betz, "How Legends Are Made," 48, JSTOR.; In 1916, Dempsey knowingly married a divorcee filing prostitute.

training.<sup>420</sup> Until the “representatives of a motion picture company” he contracted with for a starring motion picture caught him a “short distance out of Los Angeles” and convinced him to head to Hollywood to begin “working in the picture” and “light training.”<sup>421</sup> If not already evident, Dempsey failed to prioritize his matters properly. Some readers may consider this an unfair, harsh statement when a rags-to-riches man can finally enjoy early twentieth-century America’s more economically distinguished luxuries. But, it matters not even when this occurred during the Roaring Twenties. In a sport where padded gloves enable the wearer to punch wherever he pleases with little fear of breaking his hand, just one punch can prove fatal.

Luckily for the Golden Age of Sports fans, there remained the ensured deliverance of excitement from baseball. As the “home run” became “enshrined as the centerpiece of the national pastime’s appeal,” there also came the “idol of consumption” and “home run king” for finding balance to his athletic achievements on the field and his financial exploits off the field, Babe Ruth.<sup>422</sup> The team-driven competition of baseball made for a convincing equal of the individual testing contest of boxing. And in “the most important game [during] the sporting craze of the Twenties,” “The Great Bambino’s” celebrity made him “The

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<sup>420</sup> *Associated Press Leased Wire*, “Dempsey Prepares For Carpentier,” *San Bernardino Sun*, February 10, 1921, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SBS19210210.1.12> (accessed June 15, 2023).

<sup>421</sup> *Associated Press*, “Dempsey Prepares,” *San Bernardino Sun*, CDNC.

<sup>422</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 274, JSTOR.



Manassa Mauler's "only competitor for sports adulation."<sup>423</sup> Ever since Dempsey opened the way for the repopularizing of sports in 1919, the "[entrepreneurs], advertisers, and press agents [selling] the national pastime as a form of entertainment and an avenue for escape" made baseball as famous as boxing.<sup>424</sup> So, whenever Dempsey brought the awareness of boxing down, there remained "the college football craze, the rise of professional golf and tennis, and a host of other athletic activities" thanks to the abundance of "newspaper accounts and nationwide radio broadcasts."<sup>425</sup>

Although, for President Warren G. Harding, these escapisms did nothing to ease the stress of his position and mistakes. Remembered as the year when "a depression that grew more severe through the winter and spring," no post-WWI European nations were purchasing from industrial America's surplus of goods, consumer "prices rose sharply with the lifting of price controls," and inflation causing workers "hard-earned dollars" to lose value."<sup>426</sup> So, as the last listed complication became even worse as an already overfilled workforce had an influx of "veterans demanding 'adjusted compensation' for their unpaid services," the first session of the Sixty-Seventh Congress in March led to the Bonus Bill's passing.<sup>427</sup> Which President Harding vetoed.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 60 and 72, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 274, JSTOR.

<sup>424</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 60, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 274, JSTOR.

<sup>425</sup> Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 262, JSTOR.

<sup>426</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 59, Internet Archive.

<sup>427</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 59, Internet Archive.

<sup>428</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 61, Internet Archive.

Then, on April 21, conservative politicians and voters expecting President Harding to decentralize power to the Republican-dominated Congress were blindsided by “a detailed [federal] agenda for action and reform.”<sup>429</sup> This agenda strengthening the President’s “bureaucratic authority” including abolishing the Excess Profits Tax to stimulate investment, increasing “federal support for highway construction,” creating a new Bureau of Budget to now control “the spending and funding of government departments,” and requesting Congress pass an anti-lynching law.<sup>430</sup> The last came the way of more than one hundred black American deaths by lynch mobs in 1920 and then 1921.<sup>431</sup> However, in Jim Crow America during 1921, when “masculinity is not fixed and must always be politically negotiated,” the institutionalized “political structure of white patriarchy” sought to regulate black manhood into a demeaning political, economic, and unprotected social position.<sup>432</sup> All of this was to satiate white concern over black masculinity’s disruptive behavior of the racial status quo that advantages white Americans. As such, though an anti-lynching bill passed the House, “a Southern-led filibuster” doused hopes in the Senate.<sup>433</sup>

Sadly for President Harding, the acceptance or at least tolerance of manly white “ambivalence” did not extend to the President of the United States of America. Outnumbered by voters who wanted an arms-length but functional

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<sup>429</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 35, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>430</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 35–36, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>431</sup> Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 71, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>432</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 115–116, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>433</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 71, ProQuest Ebook Central.

relationship with the federal government, and not the progressive wartime administration hovering over the common folk, President Harding had to obey the mainstream will democratically. As punishment for attempting to expand centralized power and not ignoring racial injustice to focus on critical white matters, President Harding had “to back-pedal on election pledges or seek unsatisfactory compromises” as the House and Senate routinely delayed, filibustered, or tore up bills.<sup>434</sup> And those in place to ensure the federal government obeyed the predominant will were a faction comprised of pro-business Republicans who championed “tax reductions and “business-friendly” reforms.”<sup>435</sup>

With President Harding’s guidance rejected and failing to express and specify what he deemed the most significant reforms, differing factions took the opportune moment of freedom to pursue their narrow interests however possible.<sup>436</sup> For the approaching July, the Farm Bureau Federation garnered mass attention for presenting “a bill proposing payment of cash compensation to war veterans” in a cunning attempt to draw public support in their push for formal government recognition and support in addressing address how “the latest farm technology” is causing “overproduction and falling prices.”<sup>437</sup> In a period when white men who didn’t fight in WW1 are expected to give back in any way possible

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<sup>434</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 36–37, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>435</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 37–38, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>436</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 38, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>437</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 40, ProQuest Ebook Central.

to veterans as a show of proper manly respect, there couldn't be a more suitable time to convince scrutinizers of someone's "100 percent Americanism."<sup>438</sup>

Such is why Dempsey-Carpentier couldn't have come at a better time for "The Manassa Mauler." Set for July 2 in Jersey City, New Jersey, another of George Lewis "Tex" Rickard's "Battle of the Century" promotions made history for attracting "global headlines," sports' first million-dollar gate at "approximately \$1,650,000," the French government prioritizing the results "over all other messages, even diplomatic communications," and more than "300,000 [US] listeners" receiving updates "via telephone" and the "nearby transmitting station."<sup>439</sup> The success of "the first great sporting event of the 1920s" came from "skillful promoters and the national press" highlighting the planned donations of some of the proceeds "to fund-raising efforts by the Fund for a Devastated France and the Navy Club, an organization led by Franklin Delano Roosevelt."<sup>440</sup>

Another consciously hanging factor amongst white Americans is that Jack Dempsey found himself in a position reminiscent of "The Great White Hope" during the 1910 "Battle of the Century." "The Boilermaker" Jim Jeffries's task as the white man's savior was to defeat "The Galveston Giant" Jack Johnson to smite any doubt of white superiority's validity and masculinity's racial exclusivity. Now, a little over a decade after Jeffries's failure, Dempsey's task in the 1921

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<sup>438</sup> Carleton, "Politics of the 1920's," 210, JSTOR.

<sup>439</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 61, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 134–135, 254, and 269, Internet Archive.

<sup>440</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 61, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 275, JSTOR.; Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 134–135, Internet Archive.

“Battle of the Century” was to prove to an unsure white American populace his worthiness as its latest choice of their representative for the newest conception of white manhood. Should he fail, Carpentier’s damage to mainstream America’s nationalist self-esteem would accompany Johnson’s destruction of the purported white hegemony on masculinity. Once again, all transpiring under the watchful eye of the Western world focused on the US.

So important this specific title defense was to mainstream American identity that, in the “custom-built wooden [“90,000-seat stadium”] at Boyle’s Thirty Acres,” the likes of John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford, Vincent Astor, William Vanderbilt, Joseph W. Harriman, and George M. Cohan paid \$50 each to sit ringside.<sup>441</sup> Like “The Black Diamond” Tom Cribb experienced in 1811, Jack Dempsey’s countrymen from all over the social ladder came to see if their champion could uphold their nationalist and masculine pride against outsiders. With sports temporarily making class barriers unimportant, failure was not an option.

So, two days before the Fourth of July, the five foot eleven inches tall and one hundred seventy-two pound Carpentier boxed intelligently around the six foot one inch tall and 188 pound champion, backing him up with straight rights to the face and clinching when necessary.<sup>442</sup> To which Dempsey, throughout the entire fight, saw fit to absorb the blows and rely on close-up head and body blows and

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<sup>441</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 62, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Betz, “How Legends Are Made,” 49, JSTOR.

<sup>442</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 61–62, ProQuest Ebook Central.

illegal “rabbit punches” to slow and finally floor the challenger to be counted out in the fourth round.<sup>443</sup> The reason for “rabbit punches” illegality is the potential paralyzing or fatalness of constant blows to the back of the head or where the skull connects to the spinal cord. Officially, without dishonorable partisanship, the American referee should have disqualified his fellow countryman in the name of exemplary sportsmanship and presented the first World Heavyweight Champion from France.

But fairness doesn’t matter in a culture where hypocrisy is a method to secure validation of one’s manhood. As Dempsey didn’t defend his title again until July 4, 1923, he traveled the country, staging hard-sparring exhibitions in 1922 for “enthusiastically partisan spectators” and growing rusty from going so long without serious adversity.<sup>444</sup> And when Dempsey was not training to upkeep and improve his craft, he was in Hollywood with his friends Charlie Chaplin, Rudolph Valentino, and Douglas Fairbanks while periodically being “linked romantically with Hollywood starlets.”<sup>445</sup> Only when the admiration of his fans gave way to bitterness for not fighting for more than a year did Dempsey set aside his true love of “American celebrity” and behave like a champion.<sup>446</sup>

A champion who respects the Jim Crow status quo’s demand that he did not allow another black boxer to fight for the World Heavyweight Championship. Concerned with the elite fighting ability of “The Black Panther” Harry Wills,

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<sup>443</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 62, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>444</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 255, Internet Archive.

<sup>445</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 60, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>446</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 60, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Dempsey's management disclosed their "instructions from Washington not to put on a fight between the races, fearing another outbreak of Klan marches and public riots."<sup>447</sup> Including the loud advocacy by Wills for the champion to exercise good sportsmanship and make a mixed-race title fight, the continuing influx of post-WWI European immigrants angered struggling white laborers. On August 16, the Labor Department reported that alongside "an official estimate of 5,735,000 unemployed," with many being traumatized vets, the foreign-born population reached more than thirteen million in 1920.<sup>448</sup> In response to an influx of Catholics and Jews from southern and eastern Europe, white Americans claiming to be "native-born" motivated the American Federation of Labor campaign for "a two-year ban on all immigration" to preserve "their hard-fought rises in wages and improvements in working conditions."<sup>449</sup>

Instead, back in May, President Harding signed the Emergency Quota Act to set "a ceiling of 357,000 immigrants per year and" a three percent quota "for each nationality."<sup>450</sup> Along with this Republican-administration's successful ending to the US's "open door" immigration policy, its failure to prevent the ever-falling confidence of black Americans in the Republican party came the way of "severe interracial violence" since 1919.<sup>451</sup> Even when President Harding spoke passionately during a segregated political speech in Birmingham, Alabama,

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<sup>447</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 255, Internet Archive.

<sup>448</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 62 and 68, Internet Archive.

<sup>449</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 68–69, Internet Archive.

<sup>450</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 41, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>451</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 41 and 45, ProQuest Ebook Central.

declaring the need for equal educational and economic opportunity with “an end to the disenfranchisements of black voters,” his failure to recognize the entrenched Jim Crow culture did not evade outspoken black leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois.<sup>452</sup>

Undoubtedly, not even halfway into his term, President Harding became his greatest adversary when attempting to keep alive a pro-Harding sentiment among voters. On top of quickly losing popularity among the latest European immigrants for actions with racist effects and the draining loss of support from black Americans through his inactions, President Harding began to upset the foundation that conservative Republican politicians depended on — the mainstream voter.

Similarly, the appealing nature of Dempsey’s exhibitions went from entertaining to increasingly agitating as the champion continued to use them as a safer way of making money while keeping up with his Hollywood work and lifestyle. As such, sports fans flocked to other avenues for spectacle, and boxing lost some crucial luster. However, when boxing’s relevance was hurt due to low activity and poor actions in its most famous division, the lower-weight divisions remained to provide something for the more dedicated fight-seeking fans. While far smaller in number, those who bothered to learn about boxing understand that the “heavyweight division is usually the shallowest in talent” compared to all lower-weight divisions, especially when hoping for “a good fight or cycle of

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<sup>452</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 46–47, ProQuest Ebook Central.



fighters.”<sup>453</sup> And the two light-heavyweights putting on an attractive five-fight cycle of superb skill and will from May 23, 1922, to March 27, 1925, are “The Fighting Marine” Gene Tunney and “The Pittsburgh Windmill” Harry Greb.<sup>454</sup>

### Setting up for the “Fight of the Century”

Sadly, their performances didn’t possess the same clout as when the heavyweight champion fought. Even sadder for Tunney was the spectators pouring into New York City’s Madison Square Garden stemmed from Greb’s “volume puncher” style and his 1920 “sparring exhibitions” against Dempsey “that left [the heavyweight champion] banged up, winded, and bewildered.”<sup>455</sup> On September 2, the New York Times told how a sparring session meant to help prepare the champion for his September 6 title defense against “The St. Paul Thunderbolt” Billy Miske, Greb fought as “the quintessential good little man” and forced Dempsey “around the ring throughout the session,” landing “almost at will,” and countering “with heavy swings to the head and hooks to the body.”<sup>456</sup> After his first title defense, Dempsey never accepted Greb’s request for a shot at the heavyweight crown and is quoted saying, “He makes think you’re in a glove factory, and shelves of them are tumbling down on you.”<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.

<sup>454</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.

<sup>455</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.; “Volume Puncher”: Competitor constantly throws punches throughout the entire fight.

<sup>456</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.; Greb – Member of International Boxing Research Organization (IBRO), 2005, “Sept 2, 1920: Dempsey Satisfied With His Condition,” last modified December 16, 2005, <https://www.harrygreb.com/homepagewithframeset.html>.

<sup>457</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.; Let this avoidance be an addition to Harry Greb’s legend.

So, on May 23, 1922, the consensus hugely sided with Greb to take the American Light-Heavyweight title from Tunney. Per the *Riverside Daily Press*, every betting person put their money on “The Pittsburgh Windmill” because “The Fighting Marine” won the title from the previous “champion [“Battling” Levinsky] that had been ready for a knockout for several years.”<sup>458</sup> And those betting on Greb got their money’s worth as another *Riverside Daily Press* reports a defeated “Tunney left the ring with his eyes puffed and bleeding and his body welted and bumped.”<sup>459</sup> Yet, even if Tunney received an “asswhipping” in front of his New York “hometown” and lost “two quarts of blood,” Tunney displayed more heart than ever before and landed “hard [punches that] shook Greb.”<sup>460</sup> That heart skyrocketed Tunney’s fighting profile among fight fans. Setting him on the path of attrition against Greb in a multi-fight cycle and emerging the victor on March 27, 1925, Tunney grew into an intelligent and robust enough competitor to fight a rusty Dempsey.<sup>461</sup>

### What the Mainstream Deserved: Dempsey’s Rinse and Repeat

After his fourth but uninspiring decision title victory against Tommy Gibbons on July 4, 1923, “Jack the Giant Killer,” his management, and promoter

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<sup>458</sup> “Greb Is Favorite To Beat Tunney,” *Riverside Daily Press*, May 23, 1922, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=RDP19220523.2.120> (accessed July 12, 2022).

<sup>459</sup> “Harry Greb Wins Title From Tunney In Easy Fashion – Made A Show Of Champion In 15 Rounds,” *Riverside Daily Press*, May 24, 1922, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=RDP19220524.2.134> (accessed July 12, 2022).

<sup>460</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.; “Harry Greb Wins Championship By Whipping Tunney,” *Morning Press*, May 24, 1922, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MP19220524.2.31> (accessed July 12, 2022).

<sup>461</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.

George Lewis “Tex” Rickard again located just the opponent to revalidate his championship legitimacy to Golden Age spectators.<sup>462</sup> For a September 14 title defense stood “The Wild Bull of the Pampas” Luis Angel Firpo, a “volatile” Argentinian brawler who fought with an “absence of caution” and stood close to six foot three inches and typically weighed in the mid-210s to low-220s pound range.<sup>463</sup> Against this “rude brawler with no boxing science,” Dempsey knew he had a big challenge in little over two months for redemption.<sup>464</sup>

Remarkably, the timing of Dempsey-Firpo couldn’t have been better for helping Dempsey’s manly image, offering a distraction to politically concerned mainstream voters, obeying the Jim Crow status quo about equal opportunity, and profiting from white America’s anti-immigrant sentiment. First, just as the supposed living “symbol of American masculinity” prepared to restore his honor, Vice-President Calvin Coolidge had to prove the presidency, the symbol of American democracy, and the Republican party had not been undermined by former President Warren G. Harding.<sup>465</sup> In early 1922, a national coal strike of approximately 650,000 miners with over 40 percent wage cuts and operators demanding “three or four-day weeks to compensate” for falling demand received from President Harding the usage of federal troops to keep up wages and established a for miner’s grievances commission in exchange for workforce

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<sup>462</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 59 and 64, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>463</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 64–65, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>464</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 64, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>465</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 27, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 91–92, Internet Archive.

cuts.<sup>466</sup> The “administrations [“hardened”] attitudes towards” labor strikes that saw a federal injunction outlawing picketing and “soliciting support” against railroad strikers amidst a recovering economy resulted in Republicans losing seventy-five representatives and eight senators in the 1922 midterm elections.<sup>467</sup>

Then, President Harding’s administration glaringly began to fall apart due to his “[appointing] members of the cabinet” based on “ability, popularity, and Republicanism.”<sup>468</sup> Like the product marketing of the time, President Harding only concerned himself with projecting adherence to the mainstream voter’s desired attributes of Republican politicians. So the corruption was no surprise when an appointee’s substance was unchecked and accepted. In the case of President Harding’s nepotism, his friends and associates sought to reap their dues from backing his 1920 campaign. Like Harry Daugherty, the campaign manager who went from “nearly bankrupt” for financially supporting his campaign to the “attorney general and head of the Department of Justice.”<sup>469</sup> Whose “accountant and secretary,” Jess Smith, sold “official Justice Department pardon” and “withdrawal permits” “to well-connected bootleggers” to legalize their raiding of “stocks of alcohol set aside for medicinal purposes.”<sup>470</sup> Eventually, the discovery of Smith’s funding of bootleggers from his federal office quickly led to an

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<sup>466</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 60, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>467</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 60–62, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>468</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 62 and 64, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 81, Internet Archive.

<sup>469</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 81, Internet Archive.

<sup>470</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 82, Internet Archive.

indictment, conviction, and jailing “in the Atlanta federal penitentiary.”<sup>471</sup> As for the head of the Department of Justice, alongside his carrying out President Harding’s will against labor strikers in favor of “company-run labor unions,” Daugherty’s pardoning political allies and personal friends and wielding federal investigators against political opponents placed him under Congressional review for impeachment.<sup>472</sup>

Then, director Charles Forbes broke headlines after an investigation discovered his using the Veteran Bureau as “a private, for-profit corporation” to secure personal donations and interest payments and relocating millions “worth of supplies” to Maryland warehouses to sell to the Thompson & Kelly construction company.<sup>473</sup> From late 1922 until early 1923, Forbes’s actions resulted in veteran hospitals facing shortages, its patients not receiving necessary treatment, and President Harding ordering the Veteran Bureau’s reorganizing and, unaware of a nosy reporter at his office door, at his former close friend’s throat.<sup>474</sup> However, President Harding’s failure to publicly admit everything stemmed from his nepotism and was why mainstream voters levied so much blame onto him.

So, as an example of cosmic karma, President Harding’s “Voyage of Understanding” speaking tour, to present himself as not “a weak and indecisive leader surrounded by yes men and crooks” and deliver campaign speeches,

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<sup>471</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 82, Internet Archive.

<sup>472</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 82–83, Internet Archive.

<sup>473</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 88–90, Internet Archive.

<sup>474</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 90, Internet Archive.

concluded after officially dying from “apoplexy” and certainly not “tainted crabmeat” in early August.<sup>475</sup> In a reactionary response across the mainstream subconscious, after only giving enough attention to “the Harding administration [scandals on] the front pages and the radio waves for a brief span,” white voters put even more faith in sports to define the decade.<sup>476</sup> How? Simple. When a demographic allowed their pursuit for entertainment, amusement, and consumption to contaminate their political thinking into the gullible acceptance of mere spoken “ideas and political platforms” most harmonious with the pro-business sentiment, unless it harmed the worker, then the lack of critical speculation about new leadership results with no admittance of foolishness.<sup>477</sup>

Interestingly, the late-Former President Harding’s episode with extreme karma appears to be a similar attempt on Jack Dempsey in the form of “The Black Panther.” In 1923, Harry Wills and his management came the closest they ever did to securing a title challenge against Dempsey. Or so they thought. Dempsey and his advisors tweaked the contract before striking a signed deal for Dempsey-Wills to distract white fans demanding a quality title match with the controversial potentiality of a second black World Heavyweight Champion. The feared and not always respected “Manassa Mauler’s” team presented Wills’s gullible manager Paddy Mullins with a contract promising to fight “The Black Panther” sometime in 1923 so long as the champion could have a few preceding

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<sup>475</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 90–92, Internet Archive.

<sup>476</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 278, JSTOR.

<sup>477</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 277, JSTOR.

“warm up” title matches.<sup>478</sup> However, Luis Angel Firpo is no “warm-up.” Knowing a fight against such a big and powerful brawler could only mean Dempsey sought to take on such an opponent to afterward begin a healing hiatus from boxing, Wills and Mullins took the issue to the New York State Athletic Commission. From the Petaluma Daily Morning Courier on August 22, Dempsey’s team feigned incident in forgetting “the articles of agreement” to make clear if they desired Dempsey-Firpo, and the commission informed Mullins they could do nothing unless he got Dempsey himself to sign a formal contract with a clear fight day.<sup>479</sup> Then, by September 10, the Associated Press reported Supreme Court Justice William F. Hagerty’s declined Wills and Mullins’s application for a writ of mandamus to shut down Dempsey-Firpo just four days before the set date.<sup>480</sup>

Also, by early August, President Calvin Coolidge began reclaiming the mainstream public’s faith in the presidency. A Puritan personifying “the conservative philosophy,” a believer of “government economy, government encouragement to business, and a government hands-off policy with respect to other interests,” who saw the recession’s end approaching and made sure not to let bitter anxiety carry over.<sup>481</sup> His proper and orderly nature led him to fire the scandalous members of the previous administration quietly and, in an appealing

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<sup>478</sup> Mark Allen Baker, *The World Colored Heavyweight Championship, 1876-1937* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers), Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>479</sup> “Dempsey Bout With Firpo Is Up In Air,” *Petaluma Daily Morning Courier*, August 22, 1923, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=PDC19230822.1.1> (accessed June 18, 2023).

<sup>480</sup> *Associated Press*, “Wills Fails To Get Writ,” *Santa Cruz Evening News*, September 10, 1923, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SCEN19230910.1.1> (accessed October 7, 2022).

<sup>481</sup> Carleton, “Politics of the 1920’s,” 213, JSTOR.

progressive fashion, add to his administration “social reformers and activists, many of them women.”<sup>482</sup> Of course, from “autumn 1923 through to the late spring of 1924,” as President Coolidge knew a challenge lay in the quickly approaching 1924 general elections with the ongoing congressional investigations of the previous administration’s crimes, the appeal of conservative officials promising “normalcy” dwindled.<sup>483</sup> After the 1922 midterms brought down the Republican majority over Democrats to “255-205,” 1924 posed the chance for either side to secure “a wafer-thin majority” to become the party with predominantly conservative or progressive ideology.<sup>484</sup>

As for Dempsey, there remained the incentive of profiting his wallet and image by defeating a non-American citizen amidst white America’s intense opposition to incoming southern and eastern Europeans. In the 1920s, the masculinity of white men in support of the Jim Crow Era considered the foreigner or immigrant in the US “as less mentally capable and less manly,” threatening “to dilute the stock of pure American blood.”<sup>485</sup> By “American,” it meant the “native” population of the Anglo-Saxon descendant from northern and western Europe. Plus, even if the visiting foreigner came from the same region, their lack of “Americaness” was pointed out against them in favor of a “native.”

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<sup>482</sup> Carleton, “Politics of the 1920’s,” 213, JSTOR.; Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 92–94, Internet Archive.

<sup>483</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 97, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>484</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 98, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>485</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 115, CSUSB Scholar Works.



There is somewhat of an exception in “The Manassa Mauler’s” case. Per the Chico Record on August 9, concerning the “Battle of the Century” of 1921, “The Orchid Man” Georges Carpentier, “a foreigner, carried the good wishes of the fans” as Dempsey found “himself running second to an alien in public favor.”<sup>486</sup> From the need to point out the Frenchman’s foreigner status to acknowledging his attractive proven manhood through accolades in pugilism and war, and then label him an “alien,” speaks to how 1920s mainstream masculinity judged a man’s traditional “practicality” didn’t always abide the “axioms of normalcy and other.”<sup>487</sup> For the non-Northern or Western European foreigner or immigrant man, the lack of American citizenship or still-fresh immigrant status meant his accomplishments could only lessen the flow of negative sentiment. Because in certified white eyes, American “nativity” mixed with whiteness is supposed to imbue someone with the potential to become the most extraordinary man, such is why white American fight fans still rooted Dempsey against Carpentier and tolerated exhibitions for so long.

Now, in 1923, as the Chico Records article’s subtitle, “Says American Public Anxious to Have ‘Wild Bull of Pampas’ Stopped,” and body text indicates, the anxiousness stems from if Dempsey loses to “a raw, inexperienced foreigner” then whiteness and Americanism will never always best any degree of foreignness.<sup>488</sup> Leaving open to the interpretation that the white American man is

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<sup>486</sup> “Claims Dempsey Will Have Favor of Fight Fans,” *Chico Records*, August 9, 1923, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=CR19230809.2.61> (accessed June 19, 2023).

<sup>487</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 62 and 105–106, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>488</sup> “Favor of Fight Fans,” *Chico Records*, August 9, 1923, CDNC.

not superior to all other men from anywhere else in the world. Although, per the “hypocritical repressive norms” of 1920s Jim Crow masculinity, the success of Dempsey and his partners in crime “shunting aside of Harry Wills” “in favor of Firpo” reveals the greater importance of whiteness over nationality.<sup>489</sup> Even if the formidable and skillful “Black Panther’s” bloodline technically possesses “native” status per the fact there is nowhere else the black demographic sees themselves immigrating to and leaving behind their home country.

Regardless, in the eyes of Jim Crow, what matters is that Harry Wills did not fight for the World Heavyweight Championship. Now, the champion emerging from America’s white race only needs to defeat the foreigner. On September 14, 1923, at the Polo Grounds in Manhattan, New York, the attendees of boxing’s “second million-dollar gate” entailed the typical worker, politicians, Hollywood celebrities, elite baseball stars with Babe Ruth in tow, powerful bankers, and members of the Rockefeller family.<sup>490</sup> Representing the entire white social ladder and hoping to witness their racial and national representative symbolically prove the white American man’s superiority again, just like he did against the foreign Frenchman in 1921.

The official results did not betray their hopes for validation and entertainment. In the first round, Dempsey charged and went down from a punch to his jaw, then Firpo went down five times, Dempsey down again, a quasi-

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<sup>489</sup> “Favor of Fight Fans,” *Chico Records*, August 9, 1923, CDNC.; Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 78, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>490</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 64–65, ProQuest Ebook Central.

wrestling match ensued, and Firpo went down twice more.<sup>491</sup> In the first round still, Firpo landed a series of punches to send Dempsey through the ropes, where an American reporter pushed Dempsey off of him and, intentionally or not, back to the ring.<sup>492</sup> After Firpo ended the first round with more punches to the champion's jaw, the second round saw Dempsey put down the energy-waning Firpo twice more until the referee counted the challenger out.<sup>493</sup> Ending what The New York Times declared "One of the classic fights of all history" in "just 3 minutes and 57 seconds."<sup>494</sup> A win for American whiteness.

Yet, contemporary boxing historians make an irrefutable case for Dempsey's defeat via disqualification and Firpo's crowning as Argentina's first World Heavyweight Champion. The fact being the reporter who pushed Dempsey back toward the ring helped the champion beat the referee's mandatory out-of-ring count. Even if it was likely that Dempsey would have made it back into the ring with or without the support, the rules of boxing state a competitor knocked out of the ring must be disqualified if they receive any aid. But once again, just like in 1921, the challenger was fighting not only Dempsey but also the entire 1920s mainstream culture that excused any dishonorable hypocrisy as a means to an end.

Thus, as Dempsey went into another celebratory hiatus, the "ambivalence" of "normalcy" went on to win on the political front. By early 1924, seeking to

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<sup>491</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 61 and 65, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>492</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 66, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>493</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 66, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>494</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 66–67, ProQuest Ebook Central.

prove himself a solid and righteous punisher of political jobbery, President Coolidge successfully indicted and jailed many of the previous administration's financially driven "cronies" and foiled former Department of Justice official Jess Smith's presidential campaign efforts.<sup>495</sup> Then, keeping to his December 6, 1923 State of the Union urging that "America must be kept American," President Coolidge signed the May 1924 National Origins Act to officially limit yearly immigration to 165,000 with only two percent entry per based on the 1890 census of nationality origin.<sup>496</sup> President Coolidge made himself an acceptably ally to the "normalcy" agenda seeking to foster a society of emerging prosperity where mainstream America cherry picked what from the Progressive Era past crosses over and which conservative government policies to enact. Finally, after the Republican party ran a "Coolidge of Chaos" "scare campaign" of the progressive Democrats' plan to enable Congress the power to veto the Supreme Court, President Coolidge won the 1924 general election with greater Republican domination in both Congressional houses.<sup>497</sup> Overall, a significant win for political conservatism, signaling the mainstream voter's preference for "normalcy."

### The Consequences of 1920s Mainstream Masculinity

To this day, those who find success in expending whatever political ideology onto a professional boxer of the same or "opposing" nationality, race, or

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<sup>495</sup> Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 277, JSTOR.; Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 82, 94, and 122–123, Internet Archive.

<sup>496</sup> Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 100, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>497</sup> Carleton, "Politics of the 1920's," 214, JSTOR.

ethnicity are mistakenly correlating adaptability to compatibility. In the case of “normalcy’s” set establishment in American political institutions during the Roaring Twenties, it is an ideology that excuses the polarization between ideals and actions that functions to the liking of the predominant will of the voters. The intention of the American people in what they accept or reject determines the landscape of American politics. That is their right if the voters overwhelmingly want a government that obeys their desires for how public institutions should operate within itself and in connection to the economy and the citizenry. But, with 1920s America possessing a diverse population with an advantaged racial demographic that works against the disadvantaged they see as “non-American,” it becomes a matter of political struggle.

This chapter shows that if the competitor of professional boxing is not consistent with how they distinguish themselves in the rankings and allows their riches to make them lose focus, then no amount of symbolic importance prevents impending failure. In boxing, consistency in training and challenging opposition improves the chances of longevity in a competitor’s career. What does not help, and is an actual detriment, is using the mainstream culture of masculinity to measure the quality of a competitor’s victories and the duration of a resting period.

In the case of “The Manassa Mauler” Jack Dempsey, the “negative consequences” dealt to him for excessive “ambivalence,” which “encapsulates both the idealizations and realizations of masculine performance,” in celebrating

his manliness through theater is why white fight fans express bitterness after too much ring inactivity.<sup>498</sup> Important to recall is after the 1921 “Battle of the Century,” Dempsey’s fans happily paid to watch his expeditions until his ring hiatus spanned too long. As the author of *The Boxing Rings: When American Heavyweights Ruled The World*, Paul Beston writes after covering the Willard-Dempsey 1919 title fight, “But the former hobo would discover that American celebrity was a hard master.”<sup>499</sup>

In late February 1924, the *Merced Sun-Star* article on the President of the United States of America meeting the World Heavyweight Champion celebrated how the occasion “adds new dignity to that most profitable profession of prizefighting to be officially recognized by the President.”<sup>500</sup> Regardless that WWI vets expressed displeasure that a man who did not serve his country in the deadliest and first world scale war gets to meet the Commander in Chief.<sup>501</sup> This mattered not to quite possibly the biggest sports star in America and maybe the world (sans Babe Ruth) as Dempsey re-entered pseudo-retirement and married his second wife in early 1925.<sup>502</sup>

But as written in length, fight fans can only wait so long until they begin calling out a sports champion’s undisciplined behavior. Especially if it is amidst the Golden Age of Sports that their racial and national representative is doing

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<sup>498</sup> Moran, “Representations of Masculinities in 1920s,” 24–25 and 76, CSUSB Scholar Works.

<sup>499</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 60, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>500</sup> “Dempsey Visits Coolidge,” *Merced Sun-Star*, February 24, 1924, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MSS19240224.2.38> (accessed June 21, 2023).

<sup>501</sup> “Dempsey Visits Coolidge,” *Merced Sun-Star*, CDNC.

<sup>502</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 67, ProQuest Ebook Central.

poorly to represent them through not losing but inactivity. Thus, by December 29, the Associated Press published alongside the celebratory “List of Sport Champions for The Past Year” a timeline titled “Review of ’25 Boxing Events” of Harry Wills’s final pursuit.<sup>503</sup> Throughout 1925, Dempsey announced his retirement in January while in Los Angeles; Wills pressured Dempsey by filling for an official match in February; Dempsey was “placed on the ineligible list by State Athletic Commission” in March; Wills knocked out an opponent in the second round in July; Wills and Dempsey were signed for a “1926 match” in September.<sup>504</sup>

The echoing of fight fan frustration reached outlets like the Morning Tribune with their otherwise celebratory “CHAMPIONS of 1925” piece, reading that “Jack Dempsey still remains the heavyweight boxing champion.”<sup>505</sup> Echoing mainstream alertness, Dempsey “did not don his gloves at all in 1925, but has agreed to meet Harry Wills in 1926.”<sup>506</sup> As much as they wanted to see Dempsey retire for good or fight, boxing’s color line remains crucial. Thus, with the help of racially driven back-door corruption and a desire to continue living as maybe the

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<sup>503</sup> Associated Press, “List of Sport Champions for the Past Year,” *Humboldt Times*, December 29, 1925, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=HTS19251229.2.105> (accessed August 20, 2022).; Associated Press, “Review of ’25 Boxing Events,” *Humboldt Times*, December 29, 1925, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=HTS19251229.2.121> (accessed August 20, 2022).

<sup>504</sup> Associated Press, “Review,” *Humboldt Times*, CDNC.; Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 67, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>505</sup> Paul Menton, “CHAMPIONS OF 1925,” *Morning Tribune*, December 31, 1925, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SLOMT19251231.2.66> (accessed July 13, 2022).

<sup>506</sup> Menton, “CHAMPIONS OF 1925,” *Morning Tribune*, CDNC.

world's "greatest sport star," Dempsey agreed to fight "The Fighting Marine" Gene Tunney on September 23, 1926.<sup>507</sup>

In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Dempsey-Tunney set historical records for boxing, suiting for the Roaring Twenties culture of engrossing sensations: "120,000 people, the largest sports crowd in history at the time" and almost earning the first \$2 million gate.<sup>508</sup> Why the fight exceeded economic expectations when Dempsey was not fighting a dangerous "foreigner" but a fellow American who did join the military is, for one, it's for the World Heavyweight Championship, and, two, it distracted the mainstream public from their political manipulability. As bandwagoning led to a Republicanism-dominated government "with almost dictatorial powers, approximately "39 million listening to the fight on the radio" to oddly cope through the entertainment of athletes as "masters, not victims, of fate."<sup>509</sup> Plus, the two men possessed relatable qualities that defined the decade, as Tunney "the uneasy marriage between the traditions of liberal individualism, scientific efficiency, and" "corporate ethos."<sup>510</sup> Whereas Dempsey held "images of anti-civilization," symbolizing "the untamed energy of the frontier and the desire to mash through the new structures and strictures of mass society."<sup>511</sup> Admittedly, where the fight's societal connotations would have been entirely different if Harry Wills, a well-spoken and inoffensive black man

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<sup>507</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 67 and 69, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>508</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 69, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>509</sup> Early, *Cambridge Companion*, Article 6, Kindle.; Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 278, JSTOR.

<sup>510</sup> Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 275, JSTOR.

<sup>511</sup> Dyreson, "Sport in the 1920s," 275, JSTOR.



fighting for fair and equal treatment in boxing, fought Dempsey, a white man using prejudice and corruption to upkeep his ego-induced and distinguished lifestyle, it makes sense why fighting Tunney so preferable. The Roaring Twenties were a decade where one of many things mainstream white masculinity refused was a self-reflection on their society's abuse of non-white people's civil and human rights.

But this time, the fight results did not go as desired. While Tunney's military discipline ensured his peak condition, "years of easy living" deservedly left Dempsey a shell of himself.<sup>512</sup> In the dangerous and competitive boxing industry, comfort is one of the leading causes of painful failure. Where he failed to land one significant punch, minus an illegal throat punch that led to Tunney coughing some blood, Dempsey's face became "misshapen" with black eyes and "swollen lips."<sup>513</sup>

Dempsey proved to be his greatest enemy. Contributing to what The San Bernardino Sun expressed as the "Boxing World Upset by Surprises During 1926," stating Tunney's "prize upset of the year" was thanks to the fact that "the former champion was not himself."<sup>514</sup> So, their second meeting at the constructed Soldier Field arena in Chicago, Illinois, enjoyed an approximate attendance of 150,000, a \$2,658,660 gate, and "the largest [broadcast] audience" "via radio."<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 69, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>513</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 69–70, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>514</sup> Sparrow McGann, "Boxing World Upset by Surprises During 1926," *The San Bernardino Sun*, December 31, 1926, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SBS19261231.1.17> (accessed July 13, 2022).

<sup>515</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 72, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Yet, even with so many in attendance and listening, Dempsey's blunder cost him a victory that was at one point at his fingertips.

Remembered as "The Long Count," the referee made sure both Dempsey and Tunney knew that in the case of a knockdown, the mandatory 10-count would not begin unless the standing opponent went to a neutral corner.<sup>516</sup> As long as Tunney or Dempsey is not far away, the one on the floor gets more time to rest and recuperate. At first, the fight played out as the first, Tunney fighting as he moved backward and Dempsey missing him.<sup>517</sup> Then, in the seventh round, a lucky Dempsey landed a painful seven-punch combination to the champion's face and chin, Tunney sagged awkwardly on the ropes, Dempsey stood over him, the referee had to move Dempsey away, and Tunney got up after fourteen seconds.<sup>518</sup> After this, Tunney sent Dempsey to the floor, swell his eyes again later on, and won the decision.<sup>519</sup> Headlines of "DEMPSEY'S MANAGER PROTESTS LOSS" meant nothing when Dempsey took account of himself and decided to retire.<sup>520</sup>

### Conclusion

Before retiring to his dressing room to cry as his childhood inspiration did after losing the World Heavyweight Championship, "The Manssa Mauler" Jack

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<sup>516</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 73, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>517</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 73, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>518</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 73–74, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>519</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 74, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>520</sup> "DEMPSEY'S MANAGER PROTESTS LOSS," *The San Bernardino Sun*, September 24, 1927, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SBS19270924.1.21> (accessed July 12, 2022).

Dempsey echoed the retiring words of “The Boston Strong Boy” John L. Sullivan: “I have no alibis to offer. I lost to a good man, an American—a man who speaks the English language.”<sup>521</sup> In a time when ignorant mainstream citizens judged the “fluency” of someone’s American English as a scale of their “Americanism,” Dempsey won for the judgmental citizen a sense of legitimacy. When “Americanism” stood for the blatant championing of “whiteness” as the central attribute to judge black citizens or southern and eastern European immigrants as people deserving equal civil and human rights, Dempsey ensured it would go unchallenged by fighting the “whitest” opponent. While also defeating non-Americans to upkeep nationalist pride when white citizens looked to professional athletes of the same skin color for reassurance that the white citizenry was of sufficient mental and bodily health to match the ongoing economic pace of the Roaring Twenties. The white citizen believed the federal government had done poorly in promising and proving to them their leaders could keep the nation’s future on a promising trajectory like then.

Whether or not Jack Dempsey carried any discriminatory feelings towards his country’s black community and the incoming southern and eastern Europeans is unknown. What is certain is his convenience as a proponent of the mainstream “normalcy” agenda of US institutions only caring about resolving the concerns of its white citizenry. Those issues did not include the swift end of the color line’s current political and economic interpretation in early twentieth-century

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<sup>521</sup> Beston, *The Boxing Kings*, 70, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Jim Crow America. Doing so would mean the white citizens contributing to the continuation of the Jim Crow Era would need to reflect on their de facto culture of racism communally. But something so abnormal did not happen in Jim Crow America during the 1920s.

As for the present-day boxing fanatics of “The Manassa Mauler,” this chapter merely points to and breaks down the glaring injustices Jack Dempsey’s actions supported, his poor conduct throughout his reign, and, in retrospect, the excessive highlighting of his positive contributions to boxing, and sports in general. Despite his annoying break periods, did Dempsey play a significant role in taking boxing and sports to new heights of wealth and popularity in America? Yes. He also contributed to the color line’s continuation in boxing and, by extension, American society by pursuing the path of least resistance. An injustice that makes Sparrow McGann’s December 31, 1926 review of the legacy of “The Black Panther” Harry Wills agreeable: “The reluctance of Dempsey and other heavyweights to meet to him brought him more credit in the past two or three seasons than he really deserved.”<sup>522</sup> Sadly, Wills’s failure to secure a mixed-race title fight stemmed from the memory of “The Galveston Giant” and the entrenched NBF sentiment.

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<sup>522</sup> McGann, “Surprises During 1926,” *San Bernardino Sun*, CDNC.

## THE BLACK PANTHER: THE BLACK HOPE

### The New Negro: Pre-1920s

During Jack Johnson's extrajudicial trial in 1913 for "violating" the Mann Act before its passing, Booker T. Washington commented to the UNITED PRESS ASSOCIATION: "[N]o one can do so much injury to the Negro race as the negro himself."<sup>523</sup> A credible statement as mainstream America considered Johnson the "new picture of black masculinity" and the typified example of what the New Negro pursues when "elevated from slavery to a position of potential power."<sup>524</sup> Important to note, though, is the comment's general applicability.

In and out of the ring, the New Negro recognized their actions could hinder racial equality. Accordingly, the "New Negro ethos" pushed for a "Negro Improvement" to prove to mainstream America that blacks are "racially responsible" by "sticking to one's race" and "worthy of respect" as an admirable self-sustaining demographic.<sup>525</sup> Viewing "race relations as a moral struggle" solvable only by "bringing moral influences" to make "black people more civilized" to earn "more democratic and more just" attitudes from white Americans.<sup>526</sup> That civility is religious piety, sexual discipline, hard work, economically prosperous,

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<sup>523</sup> Devyn Halsted, "The Manliest Man: How Jack Johnson Changed the Relationship of White Supremacy and Masculinity in America," *Footnotes: A Journal of History* 2 (2018): 114, Semantic Scholar, <https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/uahistjrnl/article/589/galley/576/download/>.

<sup>524</sup> Halsted, "The Manliest Man," 117, Semantic Scholar.

<sup>525</sup> Wilson J. Moses, "The Lost World of the Negro, 1895-1919: Black Literary and Intellectual Life before the 'Renaissance,'" *Black American Literature Forum* 21, no. 1/2 (Spring–Summer 1987): 63, 67, and 71, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2904421>.

<sup>526</sup> Moses, "Lost World," 71, JSTOR.

and education. So, the New Negro Movement pursued mainstream expectations embedded “by flinty old black nationalists preachers who had come of age before or during the Civil War.”<sup>527</sup>

Innately, all of what the New Negro strove to embody is what Jim Crow America expected blacks to pursue. But even then, those who threw the color line on all equality matters actively undermined the New Negro’s efforts. As “white teachers [were paid] two or three times” more than black teachers, the state-built black institutions “seldom had more than a seventh or eighth-grade education.”<sup>528</sup> Plus, the “teacher-training institutions that did exist seldom provided more than high school-level courses,” and state and public universities refused blacks.<sup>529</sup> But still, the Tuskegee and Hampton institutes acted with limited teacher training and a “philosophy of education” to instill hard work through economic development, moral discipline, and “job-training skills” to “improve the image of their race in white eyes.”<sup>530</sup> An inoffensive “productive” black man can tread the color line while promoting racial equality.

Yet, as this final chapter reveals, after “The Galveston Giant” Jack Johnson proved there is no correlation between race and masculinity by putting into practice post-Victorian ideals as the “black villain,” the chances of a second black World Heavyweight Champion were virtually nill. As expected when

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<sup>527</sup> Moses, “Lost World,” 67, JSTOR.

<sup>528</sup> Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 40, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=946701>.

<sup>529</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 40, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>530</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 40–41, ProQuest Ebook Central.

recalling “The Black Panther” Harry Wills began pushing for a mixed race title match against “The Manassa Mauler” Jack Dempsey not even a decade after Johnson’s reign of “black villainy.” Strategically speaking, Wills, his team, and media supporters arose too early in their march against the white hegemony of boxing to prove the black man as not an inherently dangerous being to weaken the color line’s grip on American society. Hoping to officially win the world title against the celebrity champion to hopefully capture the admiration of 1920s mainstream masculinity, which praises violence and success, as an upright man and impressive boxer born of African descent. Then, after becoming the second black World Heavyweight Champion, act as a champion with consistency in title defenses and victories and quietly argue for eradicating the color line politically, economically, and communally.

Ultimately hoping to inspire the foundational de facto culture of prejudice the Jim Crow Era stands upon to be more fair and just to the black community, Wills’s respectable self-conduct in the public and eye-catching fighting pedigree in the ring made him the ideal New Negro’s representative. However, as already stated, failure resulted due to the recency of Johnson’s terminal racialized reign. In general, what was sure for the black man post-1915 was the frustration of always bearing de jure and de facto racist injustices amidst efforts to prove himself and his community as not the white demographic’s natural enemy. Sadly, as W.E.B. Du Bois explains in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the end goal “to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture” is burdened by the “second-sight in this

American world.”<sup>531</sup> The “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of [an] others” “amused contempt and pity,” “double-consciousness” is living in “a great modern nation, and sharing, although imperfectly, the soul-life of that nation” as the “Negro Problem.”<sup>532</sup> Whose political and economic involvement is made minimal by the Jim Crow status quo shaping American society to be as partisan for white supremacy, the evolution of white masculinity, and white purity as possible.

### The NBF Period: Pre-1920s

While his life before professional boxing is virtually unknown, what is sure of Harry Wills is the necessity of labor motivated him to fight for a better life. Born on May 15, 1889, in New Orleans, Louisiana, “The Black Panther” developed his six-foot, three-inch and shifting 205 to 215-pound frame through dock labor as “a jockey and stevedore.”<sup>533</sup> At around 21 years old, he entered the fight game in 1910. Soon winning “Draws” “at the National Baseball Park in New Orleans” in 1914 against “The Boston Bonecrusher” Sam Langford on May 1 and then Jeremiah “Joe” Jeannette on June 9, both times before “over 2,000 spectators.”<sup>534</sup> Indeed victories as both legends dominated the upper echelons of heavyweight boxing for years. Per the *Harrisburg Telegraph* on November 26 in

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<sup>531</sup> *The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. du Bois: With a Critical Introduction by Patricia H. Hinchey (Bloomfield: Myers Education Press, 2018), 9–10, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=5377984>.

<sup>532</sup> *Souls of Black Folk*, 9 and 152–153, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>533</sup> Mark Allen Baker, *The World Colored Heavyweight Championship, 1876-1937* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers), Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>534</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.



Vernon, California, multiple knockdowns of both boxers occurred before Langford's superior skill and experience won him a knockout in the 14 of 20 rounds.<sup>535</sup> Even then, the 25-year-old recognized his skills were developing significantly.

At the same time was the Ku Klux Klan resurgence in 1915. As Johnson defended his title excommunicado to avoid his Mann Act sentencing, the Clune's Auditorium in Los Angeles held the *Birth of a Nation's* February 8 premiere.<sup>536</sup> Reaching New York City's Liberty Theater, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People staged nationwide protests at theaters and called to censor what "would likely lead to a breach of the peace."<sup>537</sup> Noting the civil disturbances of rightfully upset blacks, for example, egging the Liberty Theater screen at a black-on-white rape scene, "cities such as Cleveland, Ohio; Wilmington, Delaware; St. Louis, Missouri; Topeka, Kansas; Louisville, Kentucky; and San Antonio, Texas" and the states of "Illinois, Michigan, Kansas, and Ohio" banned the film.<sup>538</sup>

However, in late February, in *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*, the Supreme Court ruled the First Amendment did not extend to films, allowing state and local boards to selectively censor Johnson's

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<sup>535</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>536</sup> Cinema History, "The Birth of a Nation (D. W. Griffith, 1915)," YouTube Video, 03:13:04, April 4, 2020, <https://youtu.be/xiwsAnI3r8>.

<sup>537</sup> Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2004): 193, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pq05z>.

<sup>538</sup> Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 193–194, JSTOR.

image while the depiction of “a nation reborn from the ride of the white-robed Knights of Christ against black political and sexual revolution” received permittance.<sup>539</sup> Then, after Johnson’s April 5 uncrowning, widespread “interest in a Klan revival was given an even stronger boost” as *Birth of a Nation* displayed Flora Cameron committing suicide to protect her honor and the new Klan killing the guilty Gus, an emancipated black Union soldier.<sup>540</sup> Urging white viewers that if this occurred right after the Civil War, they must reflect on the present, which includes four black world champions. The latest “revealed” black manhood’s joy in dominating white men and women (differently). Thus, alongside film promos, the newspapers advertised the second KKK as a “HIGH-CLASS ORDER FOR MEN OF INTELLIGENCE AND CHARACTER,” meaning white men ready to claim masculine supremacy over black men.<sup>541</sup> That said, the KKK’s development lacked with only 2,000 members until 1920 and “severe financial problems.”<sup>542</sup>

In mainstream eyes, the too-recent memory of “The Galveston Giant” proved black pugilism an endangerment to the peace and functionality of a white-oriented society defined by unequal segregation. But even then, knowing the chances of white fans and “The Pottawatomie Giant” risking another black world

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<sup>539</sup> Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 194 and 197–198, JSTOR.

<sup>540</sup> Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 20, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=471774> (accessed June 19, 2022).

<sup>541</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of Ku Klux Klan*, 20–21, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>542</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of Ku Klux Klan*, 21, ProQuest Ebook Central.

titlist was nil, Wills competed. Identifying with the New Negro and following Johnson's path, Wills sought to be the best black contender. Per the *San Francisco Call*, "at the Atlas Athletic Club in Boston," Massachusetts, on September 7, 1915, Wills entered the cycle of the Colored Heavyweight Championship changing of hands after defeating "The Oxnard Cyclone" Sam McVey.<sup>543</sup> Then, per the *San Francisco Call*, on January 3, 1916, from New Orleans's Tulane Athletic Club, after "twenty rounds of hard fighting," won a second victory over Langford.<sup>544</sup>

By early 1918, fight papers wrote little of his success even after solidifying himself as "the principal Black heavyweight contender" without a loss since February 7, 1917.<sup>545</sup> Instead, focusing on Wills's work as "The Rochester Plasterer" Fred Fulton's sparring partner, the July opponent for the rank-climbing Jack Dempsey. Per the *Norwich Bulletin*, a bout between the near six foot five inch and 216-pound Fulton and the 26-year-old Wills is unlikely due "to the color line being drawn by practically all states these days."<sup>546</sup> Such pieces reminded Wills that mainstream America couldn't look past his skin color, problematizing and citing why he must not have a chance at the world title. As *The Souls of Black Folk* reads, "the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land,"

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<sup>543</sup> *International News Service*, "Harry Wills Is Given Decision Over McVey," *San Francisco Call*, September 8, 1915, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19150908.2.181> (accessed September 3, 2022).

<sup>544</sup> "Harry Wills Is Given Decision Over Langford," *San Francisco Call*, January 4, 1916, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SFC19160104.2.152> (accessed September 3, 2022).

<sup>545</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>546</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

their “disappointment is all the more bitter because the unattained ideal was unbounded save by the simple ignorance of a lowly people.”<sup>547</sup> A “freedom” that meant the promised commitment to ensuring equal opportunity for all Americans.

That said, manager Paddy Mullins declared “The Black Panther” a world title contender. From the *Washington Times* on September 12, Wills’s challenge to the champion Willard or contender Dempsey included “any number of rounds” and “the entire receipts go to any war fund designated by the committee.”<sup>548</sup> But, per the *El Paso Herald* on October 1, Dempsey’s management insisted white fighters are just as skilled as black boxers and that “Jess Willard squelched the Black peril when he knocked out Jack Johnson, so why resurrect it?”<sup>549</sup> Dempsey permitted the insinuation that all black competitors are immoral dangers to keep clear of the big, strong, and technical Wills for the path of least resistance, a tactic that enabled Dempsey to secure a July 4 title shot. Speaking to the sheer ignorance and hate for this tactic to work and Johnson’s role in strengthening the color line. A steadfastness of Jim Crow that, in 1918, a black Mississippi mother urged her son to bear: “There is nothing we can do about it. Because if we do anything about it, they will kill you.”<sup>550</sup>

By the late spring of 1919, Jim Crow’s subversions proved impossible to bear for returning black World War I vets. Throughout WWI, returning black vets from 1914 to 1918 exercised “an increasing unwillingness to respond passively to

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<sup>547</sup> *Souls of Black Folk*, 11, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>548</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>549</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>550</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 57, ProQuest Ebook Central.

abuse and violence” that trademark the “ethics of living in Jim Crow.”<sup>551</sup> Especially after sacrificing and losing loved ones as any patriotic man would for the Union, to which Jim Crow responded with “blood spilled in the many lynchings” of a “primarily a rural phenomenon” and “primarily urban” race riots, where “many were not reported in the press.”<sup>552</sup> So, as the Great Migration that saw “more than 1,750,000” blacks “move north to escape the Jim Crow system,” race riots broke out “from the White House to the Pacific Coast.”<sup>553</sup> By early July 1917, this increase of black workers escaping “debt peonage” led to vigilantism, and the black Twenty-Fourth US Infantry’s armed response to a white cop slaying a fellow black vet resulted in 19 deaths and 63 life sentences in late August Houston, Texas.<sup>554</sup>

So, as the Great War’s conclusion signaled the impending return of all black vets, Jim Crow America sought to secure segregation—culminating in the Red Summer of 1919. From July 19 to 21 in Washington D.C., white vet’s response to the fallacy of black vets assaulting white women resulted in four black and three white deaths “and more than seventy injured.”<sup>555</sup> So, as “over forty urban race riots” entailed Chicago, Omaha, and Knoxville, the KKK

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<sup>551</sup> Barbara Foley, *Specters Of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 13, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=3414258>.

<sup>552</sup> Foley, *Specters Of 1919*, 12–13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>553</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 59–61, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>554</sup> Foley, *Specters Of 1919*, 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Tischauser, *Laws*, 63, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>555</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 64, ProQuest Ebook Central

“established branches in almost every state in the Union.”<sup>556</sup> With the *New York Times* printing “Planned Negro Uprising,” “Increase in Mob Violence,” and “The Negro is ‘seeing red,’” the KKK grew nationwide despite remaining financial troubles.<sup>557</sup> Indicating the deep-seated mainstream desire to return to when black Americans knew and stayed “in their place.”

In Chicago, a race riot claiming the lives of “23 blacks and 15 whites, and destroyed large sections of [black] neighborhoods” broke out after a black teen crossed the white beach.<sup>558</sup> On July 27, white Chicagoans chose to ensure that the increased black population would not cross the line again. So for three days, white mobs crossed the color line to burn down black homes and businesses and beat blacks in the streets until the Illinois National Guard spent a day restoring peace.<sup>559</sup> Also, seeing an opportunity to capitalize on the fervent white concern, the KKK secured “a large presence” in Chicago, reaching “more than 50,000 members” by 1927.<sup>560</sup>

But still, black vets fought against these infringements of their community’s civil and human rights. On September 30, near Elaine, Arkansas, in rural Philips County, “some sixty sharecropper organizers and their families” got lynched after their church meet-up for fair wages from white landowners attracted white sheriff

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<sup>556</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 64, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>557</sup> Foley, *Specters Of 1919*, 13, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>558</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 64–65, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>559</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 65, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>560</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 65, ProQuest Ebook Central.

deputies to open fire on their “communist conspiracy.”<sup>561</sup> Obviously, the resulting respect for the men who answered the call of duty during WWI did not extend to black vets. While the previous chapter dug into how a culture of white-on-white hypocrisy took shape during the Roaring Twenties, it is important to note now that it is a mere broadening of the Jim Crow Era’s earlier set culture to call upon the support of black men and then, after the uniting circumstance ends, a total societal return to white partisanship. With vigilantism as the routine method to conduct or ensure a retransition is successful. Only this time, over six dozen black sharecroppers returned fire. Cruelly, on October 1, word of “a communist-inspired black revolt” attracted “more than one thousand whites” to Elaine, resulting in at least 15 dead blacks in the streets and an estimated 100 to 300 more in the town outskirts.<sup>562</sup>

Mournfully, the NAACP’s push for their community’s contribution to the war effort failed to open the way to equal opportunity beyond the homefront. Across the pond, in France, W.E.B. Du Bois’s task to document black bravery led to him discovering blacks largely staffing “menial positions” and much racism from white servicemen and highly ranked military commanders.<sup>563</sup> With the young black vets entering the 1920s proving to be the most outspoken against the superiority of the white race and its men, the “old darkies” dangerous

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<sup>561</sup> Foley, *Specters Of 1919*, 12–13, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Tischauser, *Laws*, 65, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>562</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 65–66, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>563</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 67, ProQuest Ebook Central.

replacement prompted many pro-segregationists to view black patriotism as a mistake.<sup>564</sup>

Notably, the culmination of reinforced white supremacy and vigilantism leading to the Red Summer of 1919 prompted the New Negro to transition into a more tempered campaign for racial equality. Though outraged, a new homogenization of “black folk” emerged upon their mass resettlement in Northern cities. A people pursuing cultural nationalism to express their black and American identity as interlinked and non-threatening to “the racism of the dominant culture” that stigmatizes black men.<sup>565</sup> So, instead of open disgruntlement and “repaying in kind” to Jim Crow enforcement, the Roaring Twenties witnessed the New Negro conduct a calculated but tempered political campaign headed by racial representation.

#### The New Negro and NBF Period: 1920s

Where WWI strengthened the New Negro’s resolve for undeniable “Americaness” and self-defense, the Great Migration altered what the New Negro prioritized. Pushed into Northern city ghettos, a homogenization of the “militant and self-assertive” spirit with the rambunctious younger black vets and the upcoming descendants of a generational gap led to a “postwar radicalism” of American and black political nationalism through representation and

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<sup>564</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 68, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>565</sup> Foley, *Specters Of 1919*, 203–204, ProQuest Ebook Central.



“aesthetics.”<sup>566</sup> Separate but not entirely safe from Jim Crow supporters, this isolation pushed the coming-of-age black citizens to closely organize and find more communal and less “incentive” campaign methods for their civil and human rights. Since Jim Crow America wished for the black community to improve themselves along the mainstream standards set for the victims of Jim Crow, then adaptation and quiet advocacy is the answer. Plus, considering the pro-segregationists’ reactionary nature leading to the Red Summer of 1919, the *new* New Negro’s campaign goal is for mainstream acceptance. So, what better way than through representation?

To begin, the 1920s New Negro formulated a new ideal of black masculinity. To counteract the mainstream decree of the white man’s comparable greatness, no matter how that title is retained and the black man’s worth and distinction, the New Negro celebrated an outspoken but reserved, educated, and humble man.<sup>567</sup> The movement’s people sought to capture what white America enjoyed from 1830 to approximately 1865 in *The American Renaissance*, an engrossing “expression of vaguely shared values through literature” by a race “systematically limited to the ghetto.”<sup>568</sup> Thanks to inner-city proximity fostering a more communal identity, black writers and other artisans saw “two themes recur with remarkable regularity: birth and rebirth.”<sup>569</sup> Signifying “a new style and a new

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<sup>566</sup> Foley, *Specters Of 1919*, 3 and 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Moses, “Lost World,” 62, JSTOR.

<sup>567</sup> Foley, *Specters Of 1919*, 204–205, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>568</sup> Gregory Holmes Singleton, “Birth, Rebirth, and the ‘New Negro’ of the 1920s,” *Phylon* (1960-) 43, no. 1 (1982): 30–31, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/274597>.

<sup>569</sup> Singleton, “Rebirth,” 30 and 35, JSTOR.

direction in black life,” “birth” points to a person seeking personal improvement by meaningful action with “a spirit of exhilaration”; “rebirth,” along with “rejuvenation” and “resurrection,” is the desire to learn more about the black American’s African-diasporic history beyond the contemporary.<sup>570</sup>

Fundamental is the underlying motivation to take ownership in defining black masculinity. From “losing” their manhood in the Transatlantic Slave Trade to recently having it “reinstated” with the caveat of “proven” virile and aggressive immorality, the best start in “moralizing” black masculinity to white eyes is a communal face in a popular racially mixed space. Such made the rising “Black Panther” an ideal representative for his success within a dramatically dangerous combat sport in the decade defined by a consumer culture for material and spectacle. Harry Wills stood to showcase the black man’s humble and ethical classiness against the memory of Johnson. Also, wishing to assure invested white fight fans that any mixed-race match isn’t a warning of racial civil war.

So, in a way, 1920 proved to be Wills’s “birth” as the 1920s New Negro’s representative and an undeniable world title contender. At the First Regiment Armory in Newark, New Jersey, on July 26, Wills knocked out Fred Fulton in the third round to win \$30,000 and become a top contender for world champion Dempsey.<sup>571</sup> Now, as “one of the most popular and famous [black] athletes at the time when sports began to play an increasingly important role in [black and white]

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<sup>570</sup> Singleton, “Rebirth,” 35–36 and 38–39, JSTOR.

<sup>571</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

American popular culture,” Wills stood at the precipice of overcoming the color line to become the second black World Heavyweight Championship.<sup>572</sup> In service of proving black men can enjoy financial and social distinction without being led astray by passionate pursuits.

So began the New Negro’s effort within America’s cultural forefront in boxing, with Wills and the black press versus the NBF mainstream powers in the media, boxing, and public institutions. Supporting “The Black Panther,” black outlets sought to disassociate Wills from the example of Johnson as the admirable and faultless man all should aspire to become. Luckily for Wills, the 1920s marked “enormous growth for the black press” as several publications earned “substantial national audiences,” and their sports coverage proliferated.<sup>573</sup> Now with a gentleman as their community’s face, the black press shamed the usage of Wills’s color as a reason to deny him a title shot. For example, the *Baltimore Afro-American* article “What a World!” sneered at racial superiority’s reliance upon “any immorality from packed juries and disenfranchisement to restricted spelling bees and white champions.”<sup>574</sup>

Yet, the drive to strengthen Jim Crow proceeded. Per *The Souls of White Folk*, the running hypocrisy was desiring a “World Safe for Democracy” and “I am

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<sup>572</sup> Brian D. Bunk, “Harry Wills and the Image of the Black Boxer from Jack Johnson to Joe Louis,” *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 1 (2012): 64, ProjectMUSE, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/485347>.

<sup>573</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 65, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>574</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 72 and 79, ProjectMUSE.

white” to be “the one fundamental tenet of [US] practical morality.”<sup>575</sup> To make it so “the devil is black,” “Southern state legislatures and governors had passed more than 350 segregation laws” on gathering sites like cemeteries, hospitals, factories, and theaters to form “sundown towns.”<sup>576</sup> For any black Americans still within a specific area’s limits at a designated time, it became de jure excusable to beat and lynch under the de facto expectation of white citizens helping uphold segregation.

Thus, black frustration in the 1920s was immense as the “separate but equal” clause did nothing to deter systematic oppression and vigilantism in black spaces. Then, there are the ignorant presumptions of black citizens getting “along with their superiors” and drinking “common whiskey, dance jigs,” “make apes of themselves,” and routine criminal activity.<sup>577</sup> So, any campaign to prove otherwise had to endure constant belittlement and smearing.

In 1921, an early January *El Paso Herald* article titled “Boxing Experiences Banner Year, Two Champs Lose Titles and Game Much Advanced” praised American, French, Australian, and British boxers.<sup>578</sup> But nothing of Harry Wills’s won over Langford and McVey, only that Fulton lost to him. Undeterred, Wills remained active each month in 1921, never losing his colored title and

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<sup>575</sup> W.E.B Du Bois, “W.E.B. Du Bois – The Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920) (New York, NY: Library of America, 1987): 926, Amazon Web Services (AWS), [https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du\\_Bois\\_White\\_Folk.pdf](https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du_Bois_White_Folk.pdf).

<sup>576</sup> Du Bois, “Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater*, 933, AWS.; Tischauser, *Laws*, 68–69, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>577</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 70, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>578</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

newly earned contender status. Yet, as the black press used his career of “black achievement” to promote equal opportunity in boxing, Dempsey, in the *New York Tribune* on July 9, used the rumored Wills-Johnson match to claim the “public” will not allow Dempsey “to fight Johnson or any other Colored man.”<sup>579</sup> Smearing black men by conjuring Johnson’s notoriety as a caution against risking another black world titlist. The “fact” was succeeding black men “become” a natural consequence of not “staying in his place.” As for the referenced “public,” this meant white America, not black Americans wishing to see true equality in boxing. Another point is that as champion, Dempsey had a right to fight anybody of contender status. The only determining factor was if he wished to defend his title against the contender, but in the case of Jack Dempsey, he would rather reciprocate the prejudices of Jim Crow America to avoid a serious challenge to better the longevity of his reign.

As explored in the third chapter, the mass governmental corruption during the Golden Age of Sports pushed many white citizens to put greater relevance on sports as what determined the prosperity of their country and the competitors as figures for deriving self-worth. Such importance is why sports coverage during this decade flourished alongside product advertising. Also, placing mass advertising next to sports influenced voters to incorporate “escapist and entertainment qualities” in their viewpoints to make politicians appear “as

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<sup>579</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.; Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 68 and 70, ProjectMUSE.; Jack Johnson’s upcoming release led to a rumored Wills fight for the right to fight Dempsey.

consumer goods” of a specific type and supposed results.<sup>580</sup> So, as Republicanism promised business-friendly policies in the 1920 and 1924 presidential campaigns and received corruption and depictions of indifferent leaders, white citizens “turned to other forms of communal solidarity.”<sup>581</sup>

So, boxing’s way of “revealing” which race of men reigned supreme received the tempered but firm tone of hate in the 1920s, making Wills grit his teeth against the implications of not being up to par and “better denied than sorry.” On January 6, 1922, he drew against “Big” Bill Tate, a black boxer standing six feet and six inches tall and weighing 230 to 240 pounds, resulting in mixed claims over who deserved the colored title.<sup>582</sup> Where prints like the *Daytona News* and the *Washington Times* sided with Wills, one *San Diego Union and Daily Bee* article titled “Wills’ Poor Showing Puts End to Talk of Go With Heavy Champ” claimed his inability to defeat Dempsey’s sparring partner disqualified a potential mixed-race world title fight.<sup>583</sup> While also reminding readers of Johnson’s reign as the only reason necessary as to why there must never be another black world champion.

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<sup>580</sup> Mark Dyreson, “The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s,” *Journal of Sport History* 16, no. 3 (1989): 276–277, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43610285>.

<sup>581</sup> Dyreson, “Sport in the 1920s,” 277–278, JSTOR.

<sup>582</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>583</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.; Franklin B. Morse, “Wills’ Poor Showing Puts End to Talk of Go With Heavy Champ,” *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, January 13, 1922, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SDDU19220113.2.159> (accessed September 4, 2022).

However, Dempsey's Johnsonesque indulgence in the good life and securing the easiest possible fights for the most money frustrated his fans. Even now, when star athletes lose discipline, the fan "majority" becomes more lenient about specific "rules." The *San Diego Union and Daily Bee* noted how "this desire [to forgo the color line has] been getting the better of the sounder judgment."<sup>584</sup> Even if mainstream fans expect a sure victory for "The Manassa Mauler," the idea of a black man officially fighting for the World Heavyweight Champion should never come to fruition. It was poor judgment ever to risk another Jack Johnson.

Ironically, poor judgment proved to be the downfall of the New Negro's representative. By mid-1922, amidst publicized bids ranging from \$200,000 to \$500,000 to host Dempsey-Wills, manager Paddy Mullins stressed patience as Dempsey's management claimed the 33-year-old "Wills is not nearly the man he was a year and a half ago."<sup>585</sup> Effectively "aging out" Wills by letting accumulated bodily punishment and age wear down his quality as a fighter. Usually, a tactic utilized by an unconfident competitor hoping to make an unavoidable match easier for themselves. In Dempsey's case, the "aging out" method made an excuse for why a Dempsey-Wills match is a waste of time and money.

Then, in dire need of proving himself the heavyweight champion after no activity in 1922, Dempsey used Wills's name for a smokescreen of racial

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<sup>584</sup> Morse, "Wills' Poor Showing," CDNC.

<sup>585</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

sensation to set up an easier title defense. Signing to face Wills next year, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, on May 12, published “Harry Wills matched to fight Jack Dempsey July 1<sup>st</sup>; No Asst. Superintendent to Be Named for Schools; Mob in Texas Burns Three Men and Hangs a Fourth.”<sup>586</sup> Jubilant that their man was finally getting a world title match, the black press made the news their front page, to the black community’s enthusiastic reception. Black America saw in this the chance the beginning of freeing black manhood of socially limiting presumptions and holding the mainstream to its word of an impartial formal process. Wills now stood as a high-profile black gentleman whose hard-earned opportunity the mainstream-dominated institutions cannot justify undermining.

Approaching July, on February 9, 1923, the *Baltimore Afro-American* conflated the pending match date as “another Dred Scott case.”<sup>587</sup> Hoping that, unlike in the 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sanford* decision, when freedpeople faced denial of citizenship in antislavery states and Congress’s inability to ban slavery, a government-sponsored state athletic commission overseeing the boxing industry would ensure fairness for at least one impeccable black American. As 1923 saw the New Negro enter judicial battles and communal soul-searching in rejection of the second-class citizenship that deems the black community unprotected from institutional oppression and discrimination. With a “South-led filibuster” in the Senate killing a 1922 “federal anti-lynching” bill, the first week of 1923 witnessed

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<sup>586</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 72–73 and 79, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>587</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 73 and 79, ProjectMUSE.



a race riot of “a mob of two hundred whites” burn down the black town “of Rosewood, Florida, killing at least 8 and possibly as many as 26 residents.”<sup>588</sup> The result of a “probably false” report of a violent black home invasion on a white woman, the NAACP continued “its fight against legal segregation and disenfranchisement in the courts” that enabled vigilante-motivated white Americans to cross the color line without repercussions.<sup>589</sup>

As the previous chapter explains, 1920s white Americans needed sports as a quasi-replacement of the federal government for confidence in the nation’s future, black Americans needed hope for colorblind humanity. And they received a significant sign of hope from one of their nation’s darkest domestic events. Stemming from the Red Summer of 1919, the Elaine, Arkansas mass killing that ended with hundreds of dead blacks became a long, stretched-out legal battle to prevent a lynching via the death sentence. The NAACP represented the appealing six of the Elaine Twelve black farmers extrajudicially found guilty of murder to overturn their 1920 death sentence, leading to “three years of appeals in the lower federal courts” to “the Supreme Court” hearing “oral arguments in January 2023.”<sup>590</sup> In *Moore v. Dempsey*, the NAACP’s strategy of arguing the black “eyewitnesses” used to condemn the black farmers were first off tortured by police secured a February retrial that then won “their release from prison” with a

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<sup>588</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 71, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>589</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 71, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>590</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 66, ProQuest Ebook Central.

proper “due process of law.”<sup>591</sup> Sadly, this was not a crucial victory but necessary progress as six remained in prison to await a “due-process lynching.”<sup>592</sup>

Progress that accompanied the New Negro’s cultural enrichment efforts for themselves and to project to mainstream America disarmingly, striving to secure some claim to the nation that is as much their home as white Americans. As “the formerly white, middle-class uptown neighborhood of Harlem” “became an oasis” for black renters of “the overcrowded San Juan Hill neighborhood” and Brooklyn, Caribbean islanders, WWI vets, and the Great Migrators since 1915, black diasporic descendants “discovered a freedom not experienced when living as a minority among the whites.”<sup>593</sup> From black-owned theaters showing “films made by and starring” black Americans, “prospering nightclubs and cabarets,” libraries, schools, and new flourishing black churches, with the grandest being “the 8,000-member Abyssian Baptist Church,” the black community formed beyond the struggle for equality.<sup>594</sup>

Their treasuring of community developed in creating and operating educational facilities to foster intelligence and hubs of artistic culture for expressive genius. Chief amongst the 1920s New Negro was Alain Locke, a student at Harvard and Oxford who mentored first years and then became a Howard University professor and “principal contributor to *Opportunity* magazine,

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<sup>591</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 66–67, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>592</sup> Thomas Streissguth, *The Roaring Twenties (Eyewitness History)* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2007), 110, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/roaringtwenties0000stre>.

<sup>593</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 112, Internet Archive.

<sup>594</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 112, Internet Archive

founded by the National Urban League in 1923.”<sup>595</sup> Plus, Locke historically “edited *The New Negro*, a leading journal of Harlem Renaissance writing, art, and society.”<sup>596</sup> Locke demanded that black America’s “contributions” “in the questions of race, art, and cultural traditions” be equally accepted as “works of those of European ancestry.”<sup>597</sup> Hoping to foster “cultural pluralism” for a sense of unity between the white demographic and the black community for a focal point founded in artistic expression. To hopefully collaborate and see the artistic value across the color line, and maybe then begin referring to each other as “American.”

Sadly, calls for “cultural pluralism” proved ineffective as race remains an innate divider which causes Americans today to believe manhood differs by color. A pervasively historical issue that Chris Mead noted during the 1930s as “The Brown Bomber” Joe Louis attempted to become the second black World Heavyweight Champion. In *JOE LOUIS – Black Champion in White America*, Mead notes that in 1935, after Louis “quickly became the most famous black in America” after being set to fight “The Ambling Alp” Primo Carnera, an Italian, in Madison Square Garden, the “white press [realized their ignorance of] substantial black leaders.”<sup>598</sup> After disposing of Carnera in June and then “The Livermore Larupper” Max Baer in September, the following white press knew no black figure

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<sup>595</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 112–113, Internet Archive.

<sup>596</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 113, Internet Archive.

<sup>597</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 113, Internet Archive.

<sup>598</sup> Chris Mead, *JOE LOUIS – Black Champion in White America* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2019), 47–49.

to tie Louis's image to like A. Philip Randolph and W.E.B. Du Bois, "almost unknown to the white public," because of never visiting black spaces.<sup>599</sup>

As is what occurred during the 1920s when the "writers of the Harlem Renaissance — in many ways the first generation of college-educated blacks — found a valid thematic expression for their own experience and the spirit and aspirations of their people."<sup>600</sup> When the mainstream press only introduced Harry Wills to the white public as the latest colored threat to white masculinity, they conjured the memory of Jack Johnson to warn why the black man must never prove himself "more than" any white man again. Especially if Wills winning the World Heavyweight Champion suggested his community possesses the best race of men, so merit be damned. Wills was not the late Booker T. Washington. "The nation's most prominent [and known] black citizen" at the turn of the century, long after the federal government abandoned blacks "to a culture of violent intimidation and segregation," "Washington's gospel of black self-help urged blacks to prioritize education and economic advancement over social and political equality."<sup>601</sup> In his Atlanta Compromise "speech at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895," Washington asked "the white captains of industry" to employ black Americans, promising they "will run your factories" while forgoing the claim "to a

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<sup>599</sup> Mead, *Black Champion in White America*, 49 and 299.

<sup>600</sup> Singleton, "Rebirth," 44, JSTOR.

<sup>601</sup> Paul Beston, *The Boxing Kings: When American Heavyweights Ruled the Ring* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 32, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=5059904>.

classical education” “the growth of the black middle class depended.”<sup>602</sup> His call for black Americans “to accept white rule and the supremacy of the white race” and demonstrate “their ability to work hard and prosper” to convince white Americans to “support them in achieving their goals of political and social equality” won him mainstream points.<sup>603</sup>

Unlike Washington, Wills knew his position in black America’s push for true equality within the context of the *new* New Negro Movement was to symbolically exhibit the black community deserving of equal standing to the white demographic. A threat to the existence of Jim Crow’s social fabric of “separate and unequal,” Wills sought to prove black men are not of a beastly type but entirely human, just like the white man, nothing more, nothing less. This prompted the color line’s enforcement per subversion by the coordinated efforts of the mainstream judicial system.

On August 22, 1923, per the *Petaluma Daily Morning Courier*, Dempsey and his team intentionally confused the potentiality of a Wills match by agreeing to a match with “The Wild Bull of the Pampas” Luis Angel Firpo and failing to properly sign the license and contracts for a fight with Wills on any day.<sup>604</sup> When Mullins finally recognized Dempsey was only saving face in white eyes and letting time kill the potential of another mixed-race world title defense, he and

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<sup>602</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, “Gender and Jim Crow: Sarah Dudley Petkey’s Vision of the New South,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 68, no. 3 (1991): 276–277, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23519483>.

<sup>603</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 28, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>604</sup> “Dempsey Bout With Firpo Is Up In Air,” *Petaluma Daily Morning Courier*, August 22, 1923, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=PDC19230822.1>. (accessed June 18, 2023).

Wills took action too late. On August 26, the *Merced Sun-Star* blamed Wills's gratitude to Mullins for housing him in the late 1910s when other managers "avoided" a black heavyweight with potential.<sup>605</sup> Unfortunately, the correct consensus was Mullins's too good-natured for the politics of boxing, riddled with lies and back door conspiring, something Wills knew too well and attempted to prevent. On September 7, the *Daily News (Los Angeles)* reported that Wills and Mullins's effort for a writ of mandamus temporarily halted the Dempsey-Firpo fight as Supreme Court Justice William F. Haughtery considered how the gullible Mullins got Wills to allow Dempsey other title defenses before Dempsey-Wills.<sup>606</sup> But, by September 10, the *Santa Cruz Evening News* reported Wills's application for a writ of mandamus failed, and the Dempsey-Firpo clash occurred four days later.<sup>607</sup> Silencing widespread disdain for Dempsey's lack and poor activity, leaving Wills on the chase again.

Dempsey and his management succeeded in ducking Wills due to the efficient relationship between Jim Crow institutions and the public. Where the white public couldn't enforce Jim Crow, the institutional prejudice commonplace in early twentieth-century America persevered. The *New York Amsterdam News*, a black outlet, ran "GOV. KILLS WILLS BOUT," accusing the Governor Alfred Smith of New York of appealing to Southern sentiments for greater chances in

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<sup>605</sup> "Gratitude Has Kept Wills From Fortune," *Merced Sun-Star*, August 26, 1923, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MSS19230826.2.69> (accessed October 7, 2022).

<sup>606</sup> *United News*, "Judge Holds Big Fight Up," *Daily News (Los Angeles)*, September 7, 1923, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=DNLA19230908.1.20> (accessed October 7, 2022).

<sup>607</sup> *Associated Press*, "WILLS FAILS TO GET WRIT," *Santa Cruz Evening News*, September 10, 1923, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SCEN19230910.1.1> (accessed October 7, 2022).

the 1924 general election, that the Governor's refusal to sanction the bout within New York as part of the plot that killed the Dempsey-Wills match.<sup>608</sup> What is certain is the constant infringement on Wills's rightful opportunity was due to the white public support for Jim Crow extrajudicial practices, such is what the New Negro endured. Endless disappointment and frustration for their fellow Americans failing to act on their country's principle of equality and justice for all simply because of skin pigment, bleeding into the reflexed prejudice of sticking to black Americans' second-class citizenship status and meager or hand-down "rewards" of education and living spaces.

A reoccurring theme of US society the New Negro continuously bore, an October *Opportunity* magazine bemoaned this in reflection of housing. Stating black housing "is bound doubly by the housing for the whites" due to their community's lesser "capital for building and" lower loan access that makes them reliant on trickle-down real estate.<sup>609</sup> As white flight to the suburbs "is most noticeable in the larger northern cities," the black inheritor's restriction to the inner-city "holds [them] within prescribed residential areas too crowded for further building, and in buildings too old to keep up."<sup>610</sup> Legal segregation made unequal housing a predisposition to black America. Backed by the mainstream-dominated courts that helped ensure Jim Crow's survival against the continuing and evolving New Negro resistance.

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<sup>608</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 73 and 79, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>609</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 125, Internet Archive.

<sup>610</sup> Streissguth, *Roaring Twenties*, 125, Internet Archive.

With a legal system working against the more significant interests of black Americans under the guise of official legality, the New Negro's grind for human and civil rights necessitated taking whatever chance to prove said designation unjust. For the black press, this came from Wills and his high-profile career as the most deserving heavyweight contender, regardless of race. Using his ring achievements as examples of black success and his widely appreciated generosity to display black morality. Since 1920, the *Baltimore Afro-American* and *New York Amsterdam News* made known Wills's donations to *Opportunity* magazine, "the building fund of the New Zion church," and the church's "distribution to the needy."<sup>611</sup> On May 4, 1923, the *New York Amsterdam News* ran "Young America Greets Pugilist Harry Wills," where the boxer visited New York's Ebbets Field to show support for "a youth athletics carnival" and "was so mobbed by fans that policemen were needed to restore order."<sup>612</sup>

However, as black outlets used Wills's positive traits for positive black representation, they tried to represent his black manhood as an ally to other mainstream concerns. Since the late nineteenth century, white America grew weary of the influx of non-Anglo-Saxon Protestant whites from southern and eastern Europe. The black community noticed white employers preferred the presumed "cleaner and happier" and "more apt and skillful" semi-homogenous

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<sup>611</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 71–72 and 79, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>612</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 72 and 79, ProjectMUSE.



black Americans over “the alien white races.”<sup>613</sup> Plus, as one significant distinction is the “alien white” immigrant’s failure or struggles with the “English-speaking-races” “official” language, a “very occasional blanket preference for [black workers] over immigrants surfaced, as at [the Packard Automotive Plant in Detroit, Michigan] in 1922.”<sup>614</sup> As “common speech” “and “popular understanding” were to be the new tests for whiteness,” Congress in the 1920s was “flooded with appeals for racially based restrictions on” southern and eastern European immigration.<sup>615</sup>

Such fervent concern enabled the black press to take advantage of the momentary preference for the black community against the hyphenated foreigners immigrating to the US. Something Wills’s supporters beyond the press knew and sought to exploit for the sake of another mixed-race title fight. Notable in the September 7 *Daily News (Los Angeles)* article when the Dempsey-Firpo fight was “temporarily” halted: “Attorneys for the colored boxer assailed the action of the state boxing commission in granting a license for a fight to Dempsey and a “foreigner,” when Wills “was already contracted for a fight with the champion.”<sup>616</sup> The attorney’s calling attention to the hypocrisy of a “foreigner” fighting for the heavyweight crown and not an American man culturally and socially homogeneous with “native” whites was blatant. Attempting to use the current

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<sup>613</sup> Dave R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White – The Strange Journey From Ellis Island To The Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), Chapter 3, Kindle.

<sup>614</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, Chapter 3, Kindle.

<sup>615</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, Chapter 3, Kindle.

<sup>616</sup> *United News*, “Judge Holds Big Fight Up,” *Daily News (Los Angeles)*, CDNC.

wave of anti-“alien whites” in the mission to prop Wills as the ideal American man, regardless of skin color.

And what a time to do so by the mid-1920s, particularly in 1924. The KKK enjoyed a “high point” as their “leaders of state organizations” worked “to identify the “100 percent American” candidates” in local, state, and national-level campaigns.<sup>617</sup> As many candidates throughout the US “jumped on the Klan’s bandwagon” “to increase their appeal,” the general election ended with Republican victories in representatives and the presidency and the KKK claiming success against those accused of seeking “office through combinations of un-American influences.”<sup>618</sup> Most troubling was President Calvin Coolidge declined to condemn the white supremacist organization. In fact, the two were ideological allies. Contributing to nativist laws that ensure the “Nordics” may continue propagating “themselves successfully” without deterioratingly “blending” with “other races,” President Coolidge signed the notorious Johnson-Reed Act to disproportionately “set quotas based on the origins of the population in 1890.”<sup>619</sup>

The KKK’s “advocacy of immigration restriction was appealing to so many” unaffiliated white citizens, their involvement became a necessity for whatever official functions “took place in the nation’s capital” and the town hall.<sup>620</sup> But, supportive of the KKK or not, whole sections of white America throughout the US subscribed to the fear that “alien whites” threatened white purity just like black

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<sup>617</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of Ku Klux Klan*, 26–27, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>618</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of Ku Klux Klan*, 27 and 29, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>619</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, Chapter 5, Kindle.

<sup>620</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of Ku Klux Klan*, 110, ProQuest Ebook Central.

and white miscegenation. Concurred by the country's best-selling magazine, the *Saturday Evening Post*, warning that unchecked immigration will lead to "a hybrid race of people as worthless and futile as the good-for-nothing mongrels of Southeastern Europe."<sup>621</sup> On this unique wave of anti-"alien white" sentiment, Wills's supporters tried to make a black man more of an ally to "Nordic" Americans than the Catholics and Jews of southern and eastern European descent arriving without little or no English or significant skillset.

In tandem, as Dempsey pursued Hollywood parties and theatrics, his management used Wills's name to simmer down the champion's frustrated fans. Per an *Evening Star* article from January 13, Dempsey's management reported talks with Mullins to determine how much cash Wills deserved for a fight against Dempsey or Firpo.<sup>622</sup> At this moment, Dempsey's lack of urgency to fight made white fight fans more willing to watch a mixed-race World Heavyweight Championship match. Even if it meant defending the heavyweight title against the formidable "Black Panther." Then, a few days later, Wills suffered a right-hand injury that put him out of commission. Fortunately, a mid-1924 tune-up fight for a recovered Wills clarified that Dempsey's fans wanted to see him fight more than anything else. So, to transpire at the Boyle's Thirty Acres arena in Jersey City, New Jersey, on September 11, the black media sought to paint Wills as, first and foremost, an American man before his racial makeup throughout his

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<sup>621</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, Chapter 5, Kindle.

<sup>622</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

August preparations against “The Wild Bull of the Pampas” Luis Angel Firpo.<sup>623</sup>

Given a chance to fight another heavyweight contender to prove himself the most deserving of a title match, black outlets matched Wills’s intensity for this historic opportunity to project himself as an ideal manly role model for the young of black and white America.

Of course, the black media strove to paint Wills as a respectable man whose values contrasted with Johnson’s. Where Johnson enjoyed fast and costly living with white prostitutes, Wills is traditional and modest. Observing his training, the *Baltimore Afro-American* reported Wills as a gentleman in and out of the ring, rejecting the vices of drinking and smoking in favor of a “clean liver” and physical fitness.<sup>624</sup> Then there are the joys of being happily married to an intelligent and caring black American woman seen by all attendees. Like the August 9 *Chicago Defender* “Wills Gets Ready for Firpo Bout” and the August 16 *Pittsburgh Courier* “Wills’ Wife His Partner In Training,” this “great lover of home life” enjoyed the motherly soothings of Sarah Wills, his wife, her collection of entrance fees, and appreciated the acknowledgment of her intelligence on “a wide variety of historical subjects.”<sup>625</sup> They were a marital team working together to ensure the husband’s preparations for a major upcoming boxing match go smoothly.

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<sup>623</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>624</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 66 and 76, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>625</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 65–66 and 76, ProjectMUSE.

Of course, there remained the issue of mainstream institutions attempting to hinder a mixed-race World Heavyweight Championship fight on the grounds of morality. This included the Brooklyn minister and head of the Civic League, a group of “anti-boxing moralists,” William S. Chase urging for Firpo’s deportation.<sup>626</sup> Caught in the religious teachings they interpret as demanding the violent pugilistic craft’s abolishment. Failing to understand that Wills’s high profile as a black boxer made him an ideal representative against the still prevalent color line. Wills made it hard to deny that black manhood is unsuitable for the functions of American society through his gentlemanly qualities that the Jim Crow status quo claimed impossible for the animalistic sub-nature of the black man. Thus, wishing to “minimize the racial connotations of the” fight and hopefully make Wills “a national symbol who transcended race,” an August 23 *Chicago Defender* article read: “Quit saying this is a battle between WHITE and BLACK. Not so. This is a battle between MEN.”<sup>627</sup> Be they against mixed-race fights or boxing in general, black outlets badly needed white Americans to consider Wills-Firpo a demonstration of how black men are admirable to all black and white Americans alike.

Dropping Firpo with a “rigid right to the jaw” in the second round before 80,000 and earning “a flat sum of \$100,000,” the *Evening Star*, on September 12, reminded readers of Wills’s tactile nature and “superb condition” that snuffed and

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<sup>626</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 70 and 78, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>627</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 69–71 and 78, ProjectMUSE.

outdone his opponent's offense.<sup>628</sup> Then, on September 20 from the *Chicago Defender*: "The Wills-Firpo meeting was more than a prize fight, as you see. Two civilizations not two men met. Two ideas as well as two pairs of hands were in that ring. YOUR idea, that of your country, Mr. Wills stood for, fought for. He whipped Mr. Firpo with it."<sup>629</sup> The article asserted that Wills's demonstration of American society's superiority integrated what is typically herald as exclusively attributed to white supremacy by mainstream outlets—a value the *Chicago Defender* did not denounce in this instance but instead said has an ally to thank in their darker compatriots.

But sadly, black outlets had to denounce notions that Wills symbolized a potential black uprising against all fair-skinned people. From the *New York World* on September 20, in "Wills Toys with Firpo; Smiles through 12 Rounds to Victory," well-meaning ally Heywood Hale Broun claimed the "race memory" of bondage prompted Wills to use all 12 rounds to punish Firpo for his whiteness.<sup>630</sup> In response, *Messenger* magazine published an editorial section titled "Wills-Firpo Fight" in October, deeming Broun's writing "distasteful and called it more prejudiced than most things written about the fight."<sup>631</sup>

In the effort of immediately securing Wills-Dempsey, though, these articles proved ineffective as two days after Wills-Firpo, the *Evening Star* reported that Dempsey's management was unimpressed by Wills and "made no plans" for a

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<sup>628</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>629</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 69 and 78, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>630</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 71 and 78, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>631</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 71 and 78, ProjectMUSE.

mixed-race world title defense.<sup>632</sup> What Dempsey, his management, and the supporting institutions employed is the latest and chief mainstream tactic to undermine black progress and success: stretching out the matter until motivation wanes and dies out. A tactic utilized against the remaining six of the Elaine Twelve continuously appealing their lynching via the death penalty. Finally, in 1923, NAACP lawyers and “three years of appeals in the lower federal courts” led to the Supreme Court decision of *Moore v. Dempsey* to order the Arkansas Supreme Court to free the first six.<sup>633</sup> While the last “six men remained under sentence of death,” it took two years of drawn out “negotiations with state authorities” by Scipio Africanus Jones, the lawyer the NAACP hired to represent the Elaine Twelve from 1920 to 1925, to secure their freedom.<sup>634</sup> After the almost-retired Governor of Arkansas, Thomas Chipman McRae, authorized their release from the guilty verdict, this “decision represented the first major victory for the NAACP in its long campaign against Jim Crow justice and violence.”<sup>635</sup> Finally, a sign in post-Reconstruction America that there is hope for the black man and his community of a future with the rights of fairness and justice. This historical moment can be made sweeter by an official Dempsey-Wills fight. Potentially through sports first, there is a future America where black men can enjoy equal opportunity without fears of racial upheaval afflicting Jim Crow white minds to cause a hostile reaction.

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<sup>632</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>633</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 66–67, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>634</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 66–67, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>635</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 67, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Yet, when the New Negro Movement for once emerged victorious in the mainstream-dominated institutions that long condemned them, much remained working against the black community. Mainly when it came to the cultural forefront of which race's masculinity is deemed greater and reliant upon the downplaying or "defeating" of any non-white manhood. For Wills, black pugilism only fueled the frustration of mainstream Americans observing his victories over white opponents as a threat to repeat the actions of Jack Johnson throughout his championship reign. Especially with Dempsey's management continuously "suggesting" Wills could feasibly outpoint Dempsey for a victory, like in the January 5 *Evening Star* article.<sup>636</sup> Because they knew that pointing to how Wills could defeat Dempsey would deter the overwhelmingly influential pro-Dempsey white fight fans from feeling less tolerable of a Dempsey-Wills match. In a period when white masculinity exercised hypocrisy to ensure their societal distinction as the demographic society revolves around and when sports are now what foretells the nation's prosperity and societal shaping, the last thing needed is a black man reign supreme in boxing. Thus, after Wills's June 19 stay-busy victory, subsequent three-month hand injury layoff, and "no inviting ring offers," the Wills couple sailed to Europe to vacation on July 8, per the *Baltimore Afro-American's* "Notables Sail on the SS Berengaria."<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>637</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.; Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 68 and 77, ProjectMUSE.



While overseas, black outlets would use Wills's downtime to display that the black man is not so susceptible to lavish and unethical spending whenever reaching economic distinction. Papers like the *Baltimore Afro-American* "showed Wills as a financially secure consumer with modern tastes and interests who enjoyed contemporary products and pastimes within an appropriately domestic setting."<sup>638</sup> Also serves as a role model to his community and, hopefully, white admirers. Thus, while demonstrating "that successful and wealthy black athletes could and did consume products according to middle-class ideals," Wills's image "gave [black] consumers a way to evaluate their own social status" "and to mark their own advancement."<sup>639</sup>

After returning from his dual-purposed overseas vacation, Wills heard Dempsey fired his management on August 1 for free agency and was willing to fight anyone.<sup>640</sup> Then, after pointing to his well-documented desire to face the world champion, they signed the contracts and checks on September 28 to battle in South Bend, Indiana, where "Wills receives a \$50,000 advance" and "Dempsey's advance is \$25,000": "The Following Day, Dempsey's check bounces. The fight never takes place."<sup>641</sup> The idea of the World Heavyweight Champion not having sufficient funds to prevent the embarrassment of a faulty check during the Golden Age of Sports is ludicrous. Even if the said champion

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<sup>638</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 68, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>639</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 68, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>640</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>641</sup> Ironbar Boxing, "Harry Wills vs. Luis Angel Firpo.HW.1924.09.11," YouTube Video, 11:08, August 21, 2020, <https://youtu.be/QxZ5wx-VUc>.

were nearly bankrupt, no bank would turn down the opportunity to loan the money necessary to profit from another “Battle of the Century.”

Be it the clashing of two physical specimens or the anxiety of another “Negroes’ Deliverer” versus “Hope of the White Race” repeat, Dempsey knew he could buy time for the easiest possible opponent by exploiting his fan’s racial anxieties and Wills’s desperation for a world title match. Although, after being inactive for more than two years now, any fight fan would accept any fight from their favorite fighter so long as it promises to be exciting, regardless of any controversy. Thus, from the *Morning Tribune—Morning Herald’s* “CHAMPIONS of 1925” from December 31, amidst celebrating another year of white sports champions, it read: “This has been the greatest year of sports,” “Jack Dempsey still remains the heavyweight boxing champion,” and “He signed to meet Wills in 1926.”<sup>642</sup> Alongside the nationalist pride in the country’s dominant champions, the exasperation at Dempsey’s inactivity meant even the mainstream media began to accept a title defense against Harry Wills. So long as the fight ends with Dempsey’s victory, of course.

However, knowing better, the frustrated Wills could only continue to agree with Dempsey’s “offers” while aware the champion was using “The Black Panther” as a distraction. Such behavior does not reflect how contemporary boxing historians tell of “The Manassa Mauler’s” legacy. Spoken of as a world

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<sup>642</sup> Paul Menton, “CHAMPIONS OF 1925,” *Morning Tribune—Morning Herald*, December 31, 1925, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SLOMT19251231.2.66> (accessed July 13, 2022).

champion who fought everybody, there is never the additive of Dempsey's role in upholding the color line in boxing against worthy black contenders and, by extension, the New Negro's representative campaign against the stigmatization of the black man as innately immoral and hostile to the white race. A contributor to the new predominant mainstream justification for the segregation of black man and their community to "their place." As carried out in *Corrigan v. Buckley* regarding "the question of segregated housing," a Supreme Court case the NAACP fought from January to May and lost.<sup>643</sup> Centered around a neighbor suing another for selling their house to a black family, the court ruled no violation of the Fourteenth Amendment because the "equal protection of the laws" applied only to government actions, not to private actions."<sup>644</sup>

Ultimately, Jim Crow proved too stringent for 37-year-old Wills and the supporting black press to overcome as Dempsey roadblocked another agreed Dempsey-Wills contest by signing with "The Fighting Marine" Gene Tunney for September. Per the *San Bernardino Sun* on August 13, Paddy Mullins called Dempsey a "big rat" to his face, and an altercation almost broke out in the State Boxing Commission's hallways in New York City after the committee voted in favor of Dempsey-Tunney.<sup>645</sup> Then, after Dempsey lost to Tunney on September 23, a battered Wills was disqualified against "The Boston Gob" Tom Sharkey on

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<sup>643</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 71, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>644</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 72, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>645</sup> "New York Commission Approves Dempsey-Tunney Title Fight," *San Bernardino Sun*, August 13, 1926, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SBS19260813.1.16> (accessed March 10, 2023).

October 6 in a contest to face the new world champion.<sup>646</sup> Three days later, Marcus Garvey's *Negro World* magazine rhetorically asked in "The Case of Harry Wills, Black Pugilist," if a black gentleman cannot even fight for the World Heavyweight Championship on equal grounds, then how can white-dominated America "accept blacks as statesmen, industrialists, and merchants?"<sup>647</sup>

Well, the answer for the New Negro Movement and its representative campaign came way in 1927. From April to May, the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 revealed "a great deal about the South's entrenched racism" as the refugee camps of more than 300,000 blacks and New Negroes became concentration camps.<sup>648</sup> Operated by local and state governments closely connected to or headed by surrounding plantation owners, law enforcement coerced black citizens to stay put, work at the plantations, and make do with meager necessities.<sup>649</sup> Leading to the New Negro realizing that their self-help efforts in providing limited aid to the victims were indicative that with segregation from the greater resources in possession of the Jim Crow American government and industry, black America's self-reliance could only do so much. Especially when it means working against said mainstream, not just despite it. So much effort in a near decade, for all of the New Negro's efforts to appease their fellow Americans to see hundreds of thousands of their brothers and sisters systematically put into

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<sup>646</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>647</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 73 and 79, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>648</sup> Claudrena N. Harold, *New Negro Politics in the Jim Crow South* (University of Georgia Press, 2016): 121 and 123–124, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19x3jxw>.

<sup>649</sup> Harold, *New Negro Politics*, 124, JSTOR.

a slave practice, made it clear that the slave-era color line continues to reign supreme. As W.E.B. Du Bois raged that summer against the violation of his folk's civil and human rights that the "American of Negro descent is still a slave in the United States."<sup>650</sup> Because a Western country with a Pledge of Allegiance ending with "liberty and justice for all" should only have citizens with equally respected and defended rights amongst themselves and the government. Not possessing a rating of citizenship that places and treats black Americans as second-class citizens.

The last bit of hope for the 1920s New Negro's efforts in boxing also came to a sad conclusion. Losing again on July 13, 1927, to "The Basque Woodchopper" Paulino Uzcudun, "The Black Panther" Harry Wills completely lost relevance as a heavyweight standout.<sup>651</sup> And so the NBF period stood firm as the *San Pedro Daily News* signals on December 30, 1928, noting Tunney's 1928 title defense wouldn't be against the "latest black menace," "The Leiperville Shadow" George Godfrey.<sup>652</sup> So continued what black papers like the *New York Age*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *New York Amsterdam News* call the crown of the "white heavyweight champion" when Tunney won the title in 1926.<sup>653</sup> A *New York Age* letter to other black outlets explained there will never be a World Heavyweight Champion because of the divide between "the white and the

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<sup>650</sup> Harold, *New Negro Politics*, 127, JSTOR.

<sup>651</sup> Baker, *Colored Heavyweight Championship*, Chapter 11, Kindle.

<sup>652</sup> *Associated Press*, "Yankee Plans Play Part In Tex Rickard'S," *San Pedro Daily News*, December 30, 1927, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SPDN19271230.2.92> (accessed July 13, 2022).; "Latest black menace" meaning the Colored Heavyweight Champion.

<sup>653</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 72 and 79, ProjectMUSE.

colored, only when two holders meet will there be a single champion.”<sup>654</sup>

Unfortunately, one side’s hypocrisy of claiming to possess the best race of men accepts this reality, while the disadvantaged other side’s goal to prove there are only men always falls short.

### Conclusion

Somberly, the foreword from Alain Locke’s 1925 scholarly journal *The New Negro: An Interpretation* reading the New Negro had “slipped from under the tyranny of social intimidation” for “spiritual emancipation” is but an unrealized declaration.<sup>655</sup> From Jack Johnson to Harry Wills, Jim Crow emerged more socially, economically, and politically defining than ever from its late nineteenth-century beginnings. In all his inoffensiveness and “Americanism,” Wills never fought for the world title. Where Johnson somberly endured death threats and deprecating jeers, Wills grit his teeth against the preventions of another black World Heavyweight Champion. Connected through Jim Crow America’s veiling of black men with ignorant presumptions of innate rampant immorality as a race of men who must not be American society’s most influential and defining demographic. So though the color lines “dictating” who was a man by race gave way in Johnson’s time, men of African descent are still seen as an immoral hazard. Just as the *Birth of a Nation*’s 1915 fear-mongering warning of societal

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<sup>654</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 72, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>655</sup> Alain Locke ed. *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (United States: A. and C. Boni, 1925): 4–5, Google Books, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_New\\_Negro/B1QOQAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_New_Negro/B1QOQAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).

decay will run its course and the nation into dystopia should black Americans become the racial demographic disproportionately advantaged economically and politically.

But even then, acting to maintain his community's diligence, W.E.B. Du Bois made the following statement at the NAACP's 1929 national convention in reflection of the ending decade: "The significance of what we done is not so much the advancement made as the foundation we have begun to lay."<sup>656</sup> As the black community and the New Negro considered the "victories" in the judiciary system and cross-nation communal building in the inner-cities and black-operated institutions amongst the "defeats" in the judiciary system, federal and state governments, and Jim Crow vigilantism "for historical perspective and navigational guidance," they knew their greatest achievement in the 1920s is "the creation of a black political infrastructure and the formation of a black nationality."<sup>657</sup> With a foundation found in the uniting goal of equal civil and human rights to end their second-class citizenship, the New Negro Movement gave way to a new era of black unity.

As for the struggle to give white fight fans a glimpse of genuine equality between the races in boxing to show the racially ignorant and frightful that black excellence, through black masculinity, is not aggressively and degeneratively decaying. Offering acceptance and fairness to black pugilism without any hidden

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<sup>656</sup> Harold, *New Negro Politics*, 127 and 136, JSTOR.

<sup>657</sup> Harold, *New Negro Politics*, 135–136, JSTOR.

undermining intent will bestow evolution to the craft and prosperity of the boxing industry to benefit all spectators, business people, and competitors. In quite possibly the grandest hint, if the white demographic embraces the black community, the same is promised for American civilization. Oddly, this pugilist campaign for properly treated black competitors to represent their race's quality rhymes with what Booker T. Washington pledged to the business leaders influencing the future of an industrializing America in his 1895 *Atlanta Exposition Speech*.

However, the New Negro and the supportive black community now know the erasing of boxing's color line is not possible when so many pro-Jim Crow white folk invest so much in the world titles—most importantly, the World Heavyweight Championship. Still seen as symbolic of the health and societal status of the white race, thanks to the supremacy of white masculinity. Only the distraction of a negative miracle afflicting all American citizens can make for as little white outcry as possible when even the real possibility arises about a second black World Heavyweight Champion.



## CONCLUSION: BOXING AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS EFFORT

### Only The Truth

Among “The Galveston Giant’s” accolades in and out of the ring is the end of the imposed fantasy that the grandeur of whiteness is the first crucial key to attaining American manhood. Before his death via high-speed crash after a North Carolina diner denied him service on June 10, 1946, John Arthur Johnson told a reporter: “Just remember, whatever you write about me, that I was a man.”<sup>658</sup> A reality made undeniable for not just himself but all black men thanks to his exercising post-Victorian mainstream masculinity better than any white man could as the quintessential “black villain” white men failed to defeat on equal ground to prove white definitively always reigns supreme over black. So valuable this recognition of manhood that American author Stanley Lawrence Crouch observed, “I think that Johnson-Jeffries fight was more or less the boxing version of Gettysburg actually. Very poorly thought out, and the impact on Jim Jeffries was very obvious.”<sup>659</sup> Then, American author Randy Roberts said, “There’ve been two major events [precipitating] widespread racial rioting. One was the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the other was Jack Johnson’s [1910] victory.”<sup>660</sup> Thus, in retrospect of the ensuing nationwide white-on-black assaults

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<sup>658</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, directed by Ken Burns (2004; Public Broadcasting Service, 2005), Documentary, <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/unforgivable-blackness-the-rise-and-fall-of-jack-johnson>.; John Arthur Johnson is the legal birth name of the first black World Heavyweight Champion.

<sup>659</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.

<sup>660</sup> *Unforgivable Blackness*, by Burns, Documentary.; Three when recalling the Red Summer of 1919 upon the return of all the black vets from World War I.

and lynchings, fearful of the black man's undeniable existence and a supposed black-on-white overthrow for mainstream standing, Jack Johnson is due the same level of recognition and celebratory thanks as Martin Luther King Jr. from all Americans for his titular consequential win in progressing the fight for civil and human rights and equality in the US.

However, there was no complete victory as a discriminatory mainstream influence on America's government, economy, and media proceeded. Considering the historical roots of the contemporarily known Replacement Theory, "The Black Panther's" failure to prove the black man is not an innately immoral being causing social deterioration speaks to the deeply entrenched fear within the mainstream mind-frame of a black uprising. Plus, considering Johnson made it worse by winning and defending his historical distinction and his glaring pursuit of pleasures made available to the World Heavyweight Champion, it is no wonder why boxing's color line hardened alongside the accompanying stigmatization of the black man as a beastly entity with a contagious deteriorating degenerate nature. So, with Jim Crow America's relief at the fact Harry Wills's "reputation suffered because of his inability to overcome boxing's color line," the success in veiling black people in any interracial profession as "black menaces" is but a new tactic of a white practice since the chattel slavery era.<sup>661</sup> Much like

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<sup>661</sup> *Associated Press*, "Yankee Plans Play Part In Tex Rickard's," *San Pedro Daily News*, December 30, 1927, CDNC, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SPDN19271230.2.92> (accessed July 13, 2022).; Brian D. Bunk, "Harry Wills and the Image of the Black Boxer from Jack Johnson to Joe Louis," *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 1 (2012): 74, ProjectMUSE, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/485347>.

when mainstream news outlets printed a noteworthy black competitor's name with the notorious Johnson's last name instead of "black menace."

Studying the near decade-long peak of Wills's fighter profile amongst all heavyweight white and black competitors showcased the color line's successful readaptation to the sport and throughout postbellum twentieth-century American society. Its solidification partly but significantly in reaction to Johnson's reign, the 1920s New Negro image campaign was doomed to fail. Undoubtedly when in 1914, the publication and wide circulation of Thomas Pearce Bailey's *Race Orthodoxy in the South: And Other Aspects of the Negro Question* articulated the twelve rules that shaped the "racial thinking" behind Jim Crow laws.<sup>662</sup> For perspective, the coordinated efforts to prove the black man capable of respective masculinity and deserving cross-the-board equality went against these rules, summarizable with "11. Let the lowest white man count for more than the highest Negro" and "12. The above statements indicate the leanings of God."<sup>663</sup> So, with another black boxer capable of defeating the latest symbol of white masculinity during the Golden Age of Sports, there was never a chance for a Dempsey-Wills world title match. Not when the recent Johnson-Jeffries title defense brought white and black men closer to human equality when the black man's existence finally attained acknowledgment.

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<sup>662</sup> Leslie V. Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 37, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=946701>.

<sup>663</sup> Tischauser, *Laws*, 37, ProQuest Ebook Central.

As W.E.B. Du Bois explains in *The Souls of White Folk*, the “religion of whiteness” emerging in the early twentieth century makes white skin “an extraordinary dictum” to claim a manifest destiny on any desire.<sup>664</sup> Be it God’s favorite, “discovering” and taking ownership of foreign lands, racially partisan economic and government policies, and, formerly, manhood, “the title of the universe is claimed by White Folk.”<sup>665</sup> A universe where white Western men believe the non-white is beneath them. Still, the efforts of Wills and black outlets produced an invaluable contribution to the continuation of using boxing, and sports in general, as a civil and human rights medium.

#### Where and How to Proceed

The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 concluded the New Negro Movement as the New Negro learned their movement failed to achieve a single fundamental victory that went towards ending the color line’s influence that prevented government and judicial fairness and fostered institutional racism.<sup>666</sup> The hovering status of second-class citizenship pushed these black civil rights fighters to prioritize making American civilization one where white and black could civilly live, work, and compete amongst each other. Per W.E.B. Du Bois at the NAACP’s 1929 national convention, “The significance of what we done is not

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<sup>664</sup> W.E.B Du Bois, “W.E.B. Du Bois – The Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920). (New York, NY: Library of America, 1987): 924, Amazon Web Services (AWS), [https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du\\_Bois\\_White\\_Folk.pdf](https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du_Bois_White_Folk.pdf).

<sup>665</sup> Du Bois, “Souls of White Folk,” *Darkwater*, 924, AWS.

<sup>666</sup> Claudrena N. Harold, *New Negro Politics in the Jim Crow South* (University of Georgia Press, 2016): 122, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19x3jxw>.

so much the advancement made as the foundation we have begun to lay.”<sup>667</sup> It is time to approach Jim Crow America’s color line through the push for de jure desegregation and de facto integration.

From the realm of prizefighting, what Harry Wills brought to the black civil rights effort was not a win against white supremacy but strategic progress. After his traditional male image lost popularity as mainstream culture altered to value a man who reached the end goal and less for effort, the black press became experienced in presenting a promising black heavyweight boxer as an individual posing no anarchist prelude to the white demographic.<sup>668</sup> To win respect or at least tolerance among the white citizenry to ease the struggle for equal civil and human rights, the black press moved “away from sensationalist reporting towards a greater emphasis on race advocacy through the celebration of individual achievement.”<sup>669</sup> That way, white and black citizens can support a competitor together and hopefully form a connection and dialogue through sports.

Thus, per historical sequential order, *Black Pugilism – The Second Act In Twentieth America* will trace the origins, career, and struggles of “The Brown Bomber” Joe Louis. In Louis lies the story of a black man competing during the Great Depression to become a cross-racial hero during and after World War II. A win followed by the ending of the color line’s influence on boxing and, by extension, the colored championships—a historical accomplishment made

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<sup>667</sup> Harold, *New Negro Politics*, 136, JSTOR.

<sup>668</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 74–75, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>669</sup> Bunk, “Image of the Black Boxer,” 75, ProjectMUSE.

possible by Harry Wills. Through Wills, the black press formulated a precedent image for the black community's sports stars as men proving race meant little in physical competition and a person's character as a "God-fearing, Bible-reading, mother-loving, clean-living, humble" American celebrity.<sup>670</sup>

The peak of Joe Louis's reign as the second black World Heavyweight Champion came with promotion as a black man all Americans should be proud of as the country's representative amidst the period of World War II. Believing it would make the beginnings of a convincing case for him and his community to demand the mainstream government and pro-Jim Crow citizens to make good on the American values they preach by ending the color line and proceeding without any conniving to keep the black community regulated to second-class citizenship.<sup>671</sup> To finally live where there is little to no disrespecting or disparaging of a man and his people because of skin color but on the objective judgment of an individual's value and contribution to the United States of America.

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<sup>670</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 75, ProjectMUSE.

<sup>671</sup> Bunk, "Image of the Black Boxer," 64, ProjectMUSE.

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