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BOXING MEN: IDEAS OF RACE, MASCULINITY, AND NATIONALISM

A Thesis
presented in partial
fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the University of Mississippi's
Center for the Study of Southern Culture

by

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ABSTRACT

Jack Johnson and Joe Louis were African American boxers who held the title of World Heavyweight Champion in their respective periods. Johnson and Louis constructed ideologies of African American manhood that challenged white hegemonic notions of masculinity and nationalism from the first decade of the twentieth century, when Johnson held the title, through Joe Louis's reign that began in the 1930's. This thesis investigates the history of white supremacy from the turn of the twentieth century when Johnson fought and does so through several lenses. The lenses I suggest include evolving notions of masculinity, Theodore Roosevelt's racially deterministic agendas, and plantation fiction. This thesis also traces the roots of American boxing to England before beginning a biographical exploration of Johnson and Louis in their respective careers.

My hope is to sharpen the focus of Johnson and Louis as pioneers for equality by setting the stage in the first two sections. Looking at these boxing champions through the windows of masculinity, race, and nationalism might encourage further scholarship. I view these men as civil rights activists and nothing less. Johnson and Louis fought racism with their fists but also with personalities that challenged myths of white supremacy. These were different men and different kinds of fighters and the comparisons I make are based more on their relationship to an oppressive ruling class than to one another. Johnson was full of bravado and he fought and lived fearlessly. Louis was a study in discipline and a symbol of America. They reflected but also created change in American society in inimitable ways.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my Southern Studies and other graduate school professors: Dr. Ted Ownby, Dr. Katie McKee, Dr. David Wharton, Dr. Jay Watson, and Dr. Paul Polger. A special thank you to Dr. Andy Harper. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Sheila Skemp and Dr. Chuck Ross. Thanks to my classmates who celebrated, and sometimes commiserated with me, in this challenging and exciting program.

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INTRODUCTION

Through the case studies of two twentieth century African American boxers, I intend to investigate changing contexts of two interrelated terms: nationalism and masculinity. I believe an interplay between masculinity and nationalism will crystallize the terms' evolutionary capacity. This thesis identifies Jack Johnson and Joe Louis, America's first and second black heavyweight boxing champions' of the world, as agents for change in a quest for equality in a fight that continues today. I intend to show how they battled for equality as members of a marginalized group both for themselves and other members of their race. They struggled for this elusive equality in and out of the ring and did so in different periods of American history. Boxing through periods of racial volatility, they fought in ideological ways that extended beyond their physical prowess. Johnson, a black prize-fighter, became the first sports celebrity of his race winning the championship in 1908 and defending it until 1915.¹ Positioning Johnson, the first black Heavyweight Champion of the World, in the context of "Rooseveltian" nationalism might be useful in further illuminating how race shaped and was shaped by national discourse.

It was over two decades since whites extricated the championship from Jack Johnson when Joe Louis gained the title. He too became a celebrity but also an ambassador for improving race relations. Joe Louis fought through the 1930's and 1940's winning the championship in 1937 and holding it until 1948.² Understanding Louis's contribution in further expanding the inclusion of African Americans in national and masculine contexts might also

1 Jack Johnson, *Jack Johnson is a Dandy: An Autobiography* (New York: Chelsea House in New York, 1969), 8.

2 Joe Louis, *Joe Louis: My Life* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 271-275.

expand one's ideas about how these constructs evolve. Masculinity and nationalism are constantly changing and these champions are critical to evaluating that change. An interplay between masculinity and nationalism effect a continued study of how these terms change, excite, and reiterate the significance of Jack Johnson and Joe Louis. Johnson and Louis actively participate within these changing social constructs and they, at times, passively reflect change. They are larger than life but remain characters in a great play.

“Historians study sport to understand its internal history and to comprehend how it influenced and reflected the broader society,” says Steven Reiss.³ The United States is built on the ideological premise that all men are created equal but achieving equality remains a difficult proposition for African Americans. At the end of the nineteenth and turn of the twentieth century, African Americans saw their glimmer of hope for inclusion vanquish. The two decades after the end of the Civil War offered a fleeting promise to free persons of color. African Americans assimilated to mainstream life at a slower pace than other groups around the turn of the twentieth century. This study will evaluate Johnson and Louis in the context of how they shaped a response to black exclusion from mainstream society. The first chapter begins with masculinity and nationalism. Race was an inherent idea in the foundation and construction of American society. I will link the term masculinity in a conceptual way to “honor” and “manhood,” which are terms used prior to “masculinity.”⁴ Positioning the themes of masculinity and nationalism within this early American period enhances the following biographical lenses through which to view the fighters' agency more clearly.

3 Steven Reiss ed., *Sports and the American Jew* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 3.

4 For more on these terms and their interrelatedness, see: Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760's-1880's* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), xii-xv.

At the turn of the twentieth century ideas of what masculinity meant were changing. For white men, masculinity often became a term that held within it a degree of oppositional power: men opposite women, white opposite black. The dynamic of this power struggle manifested itself in countless ways. Forces of race, gender, class, and religion were shaking up an older order of white rule. It is not my intention to offer more than a cursory view of how masculinity and nationalism changed in these specific contexts. I rather offer a broad window useful for viewing these sociocultural constructs and in doing so hope to promote further discussion. The first chapter also examines how writers around the turn of the twentieth century attempted to reconcile these changing social constructs of masculinity and nationalism.

Some of these writers shaped their discussions of masculinity and nationalism to envision a past of imagined glory. This fantasy is purely racial as it invokes racial purity as its historical champion. Masculinity and nationalism can be viewed through these prisms of historical race construction. These prisms include “plantation fiction,” politics in the early twentieth century, and pseudo-scientific representations of blacks as an inferior race, representations that precede and inform much of the fictitious and imaginative writings and legislation that I will explore. The second chapter will present a short history of boxing in national and masculine contexts.

These philosophical discussions of nationalist and masculine racial rhetoric in the first chapter and the history of manly prize-fighting and boxing in the second chapter should set the stage for the final biographical chapters on Johnson and Louis. I hope to demonstrate these men as agents capable of publicly interrogating the inherent hypocrisy of the white superordinate class. I will show a window through which to view Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion, as a man who perpetuated and challenged turn-of-the-century stereotypes about

African Americans. The Joe Louis chapter will show how he both challenged and perpetuated various myths of race in his own way. These pugilists should be considered leading activists for the way they challenged a master-class hell bent on maintaining the status quo.

Racism has deep and tangled roots and it is not this study's purpose to offer more than a overview of how racism has developed. This thesis will show how these two men's "fighting spirit" at times both re-calcified and loosened the hold of entrenched racism. I also hope to illuminate the value of exploring lesser known histories that enhance and enrich our national narrative. Before analyzing how Jack Johnson or Joe Louis used their brands of masculinity within their respective nationalistic contexts, an overview of masculinity is in order.

I. RACIAL FOUNDATIONS OF MASCULINITY AND NATIONALISM

The term masculinity, according to Mary Beth Norton who uses the *Oxford English Dictionary* to define masculinity in the preface of *New Men*, means “the assemblage of qualities regarded as characteristic of men; maleness, manliness.”⁵ Before the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation movements, the bulk of historical inquiry was focused on white leaders. Women and non-whites were excluded, or only marginally included, so what it meant to be a man was largely constructed and reinforced by other men. These constructions were nearly exclusive to white men before the twentieth century. Masculinity, like nationalism, is a changing concept. Nationalism is in one sense constant. In a more socially encompassing way, nationalism might be qualified as a constant in context. As such, the patriotic feeling or a tendency to place emphasis on a national culture above cultures of other nations or even supranational cultures has a degree of transiency. The supranational or subordinate cultures within a national context or nation cultures within an international context shape and are shaped by mainstream nationalism.⁶

Another way to look at the changing nature of masculinity is that even if the definition is fairly constant, contexts change. According to Gail Bederman, the noun masculinity “was only beginning to be widely adopted by 1890 and had very specific connotations which have largely

5 Thomas Foster ed., *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011), ix.

6 Supranational cultures included African Americans who were held subordinate to white culture. Merriam Webster defines nationalism as opposed to these “other” groups and uses these groups (as well as other nation's and nation groups) in an oppositional relationship to nationalism. A fanaticism (or fanatic nationalism) occurs in Germany around the time of Joe Louis and I will evaluate how he and America reacted to this in the context of America's changing nationalism.

been forgotten today.”⁷ Masculinity is actually a term that evolved from older terms. The context in which masculinity is employed is both significant to that period of use and to a broader understanding. It may still be instructive to investigate masculinity's predecessors: honor and manliness.⁸

Masculinity in early America was shaped politically and socioeconomically by religious and martial attitudes. These military and religious men were predisposed to Old World notions of race, gender, and class but America provided a blank canvas to incorporate new expressions of manhood. As men adapted to a new environment and facilitated new exchange with new groups of people, they expressed themselves in new ways. America was unique in this way and as older ideas of honor and manliness gave way to new expressions in changing masculinities, some of these older notions prove recalcitrant and capable of retaining strategies more Old World. For instance, one man may hold his spirituality at the center of his belief of honor, another his word, and still another his public image.⁹

Another example might be found in competing ideas of honor or manliness in a military capacity for leadership. Who is qualified to lead might find resistance from “new” American notions of honor or manhood. Old World notions of what qualified one man to lead another were found in birthright.¹⁰ This type of lineaged leader descended from a feudal system of rule but

⁷ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 6.

⁸ Masculinity as a term can be traced back to the seventeenth century. Though this study alludes to older ideas of masculinity, it is primarily interested in the fifty or so year period between the 1890's and the 1940's. Bederman says around the end of the nineteenth century “middle-class men were finding new ways to celebrate men's bodies as healthy, muscular, and powerful.” This emphasizes the point I am trying to make about masculinity's ability to change within different contexts. In its conceptual evolution, the term masculinity has evolved from honor and manliness, terms every bit as complicated as masculinity. Honor, in particular, is understood by different scholars to have different social implications and it is a point of contention to identify exactly *who* is negotiating this perceived change, i.e. elite upper class-men or yeoman farmers in the South prior to the war. For more on competing notions of honor specific to the U.S. South, see Bertram Wyatt Brown's *Southern Honor* and W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*.

⁹ Foster, *New Men*, x.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

came in stark contrast to a new kind of leader with a different sense of entitlement based on new opportunity in a new land. Recovering the stories of lesser known men and women, particularly those of color, has been an endeavor only recently embarked upon with any consistent effort.¹¹ This development challenges one to rethink history. Concepts change as the meanings of nationalism and masculinity change.

What or, more aptly, *who* contributes to the meanings of nationalism and masculinity change from within and outside white society as Jack Johnson and Joe Louis enlarged the idea of what it meant to be masculine by combating the stereotypes of white society. Contributions to the concepts of both masculinity as separate from and conflated with nationalism were reflective of black participation in *innovative* ways.¹² These boxers did not allow themselves to be put in the corner by conforming to the restricted meanings of nationalism and masculinity. Johnson and Louis, as innovators, desired and demanded their country to acknowledge them as men, thereby changing mainstream (white) constructs of what it will signify to be masculine and American in the first fifty years of the twentieth century.

The nineteenth century was complicated by foreign revolution and domestic growing pains. After the American Revolution, black oppression was viewed in a closer relationship to that of American forefathers who fought against colonial oppression by the English.¹³ It seems logical that their new independence forced deeper scrutiny about the conundrum of enslaved African Americans among them. The debate over slavery raged from the end of the eighteenth century through the Civil War. Southerners were viewed as increasingly backward as

11 For more on these changing attitudes, see the different supranational groups based on ethnic make up and/or region found in Thomas Foster's *New Men or Southern Manhood*, an edition edited by Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover. Alternatives to "white history" as seen through the perspective (first hand or secondary) of non whites either assimilating to or adapting to or combating mainstream white history can be found in these collections.

12 Chris Blazina, *The Cultural Myth of Masculinity* (West Port, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 79.

13 Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 6.

industrialization gripped the nation.¹⁴ Movements to abolish prejudice based on skin color provided a glaring contradiction. African Americans were expected to demonstrate a civic worthiness when emancipated but having been denied full access to society they often proved unworthy in the eyes of white critics and patrons alike.

The Southern economy was so dependent on African Americans that it rationalized slavery in many ways. Attempts were halfheartedly made to alleviate the social anxiety of African Americans living among whites in the North. The American Colonization Society was one such attempt.¹⁵ The Colonizationists included Thomas Jefferson in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and many presidents through the time of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. Their platform for relocating African Americans to places outside of the country became, in their minds, a viable alternative to emancipation. Kentucky Congressman Henry Clay was the leading spokesman for Colonization and one of his main defenses for Colonization, and against slavery, was that slavery was a powder keg bound to erupt.¹⁶ The threat of revolt, like the eighteenth century revolts in New York and South Carolina, increased the need for a more authoritarian institution in the mind of the master class.¹⁷ Lincoln, too, was a Colonizationist but eventually decided that the cost of transporting so many African Americans would be too great and by the time of his Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Lincoln had changed his mind and desired to bring about a “new birth of freedom” for African Americans and the nation.¹⁸ As early

14 Ibid., 6. “The 'First Emancipation' began in New England with the beginning of the Revolution and proceeded southward over the next generation as state after state...either abolished slavery immediately or implemented some plan of gradual emancipation.”

15 Ibid., 7.

16 George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 11.

17 Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 42.

18 Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 255.

as 1830, abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison began to rival Colonizationists.¹⁹

Personal self-development was stunted for African Americans and, arguably, whites in the hierarchical system of slavery and sending African-Americans to Liberia was less a solution to slavery and more a way to fulfill various white agendas. One such agenda was to remove free persons of color in order to protect slavery. Another white agenda of Colonizationists was to provide an “outlet for humanitarian feelings at a time when slavery was in fact developing and flourishing in the South.”²⁰ Lydia Marie Childs, a leading abolitionist in the time of Garrison, wrote, “From the moment the slave is kidnapped, the white man's influence directly cherishes ignorance, fraud, licentiousness, revenge, hatred, and murder. It cannot be denied that human nature thus operated upon, *must* necessarily yield, more or less to all these evils.”²¹ Antislavery movements tried to negotiate for African Americans an existence that would also be better for whites. While the evil of slavery is not in question, the suggestion that these movements fostered rather than protected the rise of racism is questionable and worthy of additional inquiry.²²

After a failed Reconstruction and into the last years of the nineteenth century, politicians like South Carolinian Ben Tillman, continued to preach the inferiority of African Americans and demonstrate the measures whites would go to insure their supremacy. Tillman boasted of the time known as Redemption where whites legally and extra-legally excluded African-Americans from the franchise. “We stuffed ballot boxes. We shot them. We are not ashamed of it.”²³

Tillman may have been viciously unapologetic but he was not the only or last politician of that

ilk. African Americans were perceived even at the beginning of the first World War to be inferior

¹⁹ Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²² For an understanding of antislavery groups within a global context, see Seymour Drescher's *From Slavery to Freedom*. Drescher outlines the importance of white (Euroamerican) proximity to slavery and the complex relationship between abolition and slavery in the context of colonial and mainland slave plantations.

²³ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 98.

and unfit for service. Mississippi's governor James Vardaman opposed drafting black soldiers. Black leaders challenged this racist governor, who was elected in 1903 after capitalizing on his platform of racism, and those leaders and members of organizations struggled to be included in the Selective Service process. The struggle remained ironic when the African American labor leader A. Philip Randolph remarked that African-Americans were "...physically inferior for purposes of degrading him; but physically fit and physically superior when it comes to sending him to the front to save the white men's hides."²⁴

Thomas Pierce Bailey, Dean of the Department of Education and Professor of Psychology at the University of Mississippi said in his 1914 book, *Race Orthodoxy in the South and Other Aspects of the Negro Question*, that "Individual Southerners look with approbation and sympathy upon the economic improvement of certain negroes, always provided these negroes are 'white men's negroes,' and know 'their place.' As soon as these negroes begin to 'put on style' and express their social *dignity*, even if this exhibition is confined strictly to their own race, mutterings and murmurings begin."²⁵ Black men have fought in every war the United States has been engaged in including the American Revolutionary War, but their treatment at home has been undeserving of the treatment of a veteran status. The military institution was made by whites and shared many of its characteristics with the system of slavery.²⁶ Joel Williamson points out that Antebellum military patrols enabled whites to police African Americans. "The local police, the state militia, and, ultimately, the armed forces of the United States stood ready to control the

slaves."²⁷ The military South still exists, says Williamson, in the form of *beats*, which are

²⁴ Nancy Gentile Ford, *The Great War and America* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Security International, 2008), 35.

²⁵ Thomas Pearce Bailey, *Race Orthodoxy in the South and Other Aspects of the Negro Question* (New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1914), 30, quoted in Lawrence Friedman, *The White Savage: Racial Fantasies in the Postbellum South* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 99.

²⁶ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

essentially categories of division for policing districts. Beat cops exist within civil administrations and this alliance between slave, military, and police systems can be traced to the Antebellum South where the line between civilization and criminalization is awfully blurry.

Black soldiers were willing to die for their country but this fact did not secure the confidence of many white politicians before or after the Civil War. Following Nat Turner's uprising in 1831, the Pennsylvania Legislature restricted the entry of free African Americans into the state. They also repealed fugitive slave laws from a decade earlier which lifted protection from being sold South into slavery. The threat of overt violence was matched by the perceived social weight African Americans placed on white society. Proslavery lawyers and politicians attacked abolitionists on the basis that blacks when left to their own devices become “indolent, voluptuous and prone to vice.”²⁸ John C. Calhoun defended slavery before the Senate saying essentially that African Americans benefited in the slave holding state from the positive influence of white culture.

In the nineteenth century, masculinity was set in opposition to women and other “dependents.” African Americans, like women and children, were guilty of the “unmanly fault of dependency.”²⁹ Eventual military participation offered a chance to alter that public image of dependency. Lincoln, who by 1864 had gradually decided to extend political rights to blacks, stated his reasons in a letter to the governor of the newly constructed Louisiana. Lincoln asked, “whether some of the colored people may not be let in, as, for instance, the very intelligent, and

28 William Drayton, *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of Northern Abolitionists* (Philadelphia, 1836),

232, quoted in Frederickson., *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 47. Charleston lawyer William Drayton wrote this in an 1836 anti-abolitionists pamphlet.

29 Harry Laver, “Refuge of Manhood: Masculinity and the Militia Experience in Kentucky” in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, eds. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 4.

especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks.”³⁰ It seems black “freedom” was settled and gave black military men a potentially honored status. Black citizenry remained an altogether different concept.

The Civil War struck a sound blow to the development of Southern industry, furthering the social and industrial chasm between the regions. As a consequence, the romantic Southerner viewed himself as apart from Northern history. He became the sole inheritor of a most desirable medieval quality of manhood. *Ivanhoe* was a popular nineteenth century fantasy for Southern boys who played the role of chivalrous knight.³¹ In the book, *In The Ring Tournament in the United States*, horses were often given names from literature.³² In the mid and late nineteenth century these ideas of chivalrous inheritance ran the gamut of expression from lighthearted to desperately dangerous. According to Joel Williamson, “combat between gentleman often enough passed beyond social games into games that were deadly serious. In the South, the code *duello* persisted as a way of life among gentlemen unmatched in intensity elsewhere in America.”³³

Steve Estes explains how honor extended from the community to an individual in “Question of Honor,” which appears in Trent Watt's *White Masculinity in the Recent South*. Estes says that in the first half of the nineteenth century, “a challenge to a Southern white man's honor was a challenge to his manhood, and such slights often necessitated dueling.”³⁴ The tolerance of violence was arguably exceptional in the South as incarceration rates for duelers were lower per capita than in England and other European countries.³⁵ White Southerners

30 Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea*, 255.

31 Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 20.

32 Esther Crooks and Ruth Crooks, *The Ring Tournament in the United States* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1936), 4.

33 Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 21.

34 Steve Estes, “Question of Honor” in *White Masculinity in the Recent South*, ed. Trent Watts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 108.

35 Pieter Spierenburg, “Masculinity, Violence, and Honor: An Introduction” in *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America*, ed. Pieter Spierenburg (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press,

defended threats to their honor with deadly force. The cultural practice of dueling was often viewed unfortunate if necessary. Alexander Hamilton did not wish to kill Aaron Burr but said he would rather end Burr's life than suffer the loss of his own honor which he equated to the loss of his own life.³⁶ Hamilton wrote before the deadly encounter, "All the considerations which constitute what men of the world denominate honor, impressed on me a peculiar necessity not to decline the call."³⁷

Dueling with pistols replaced dueling with swords and both found greater expression in the upper class. Dickson Bruce and Edward Ayers disagree about the exact time period when dueling with pistols lost its masculine appeal in the United States. Bruce puts it at the end of the war, whereas Ayers insists dueling lived on for more than a decade after the Civil War. He says it was common practice after the war and only began to wane as public perception was such that dueling no longer exemplified Southern honor.³⁸ Regardless, the United States Civil War was fought and newly emancipated slaves forged paths achieving, for some time, a greater degree of autonomy.

Williamson in, *A Rage for Order*, recounts the caning of Charles Sumner, who was severely beaten after making fun of South Carolina Senator Andrew Butler, who unfortunately (unfortunate for Sumner as well) spit when he spoke. The South Carolina Senator was older and could not defend his own honor but a countryman, Congressman Preston Brooks from South Carolina, unmercifully caned the unsuspecting Senator from Massachusetts. The act was much lauded by Southerners who claimed a special honorific kinship with the caner Brooks. This

1998), 25.

36 Christopher J. Olson, "Political Culture in the Deep South" in *Southern Character: Essays in Honor of Bertram Wyatt-Brown*, eds. Lisa Tendrich and Daniel Kilbride (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 43.

37 Ibid., 52.

38 Spierenburg, *Men and Violence*, 23.

“fighting spirit” could be provoked as it was by England when Henry Clay suggested an “open and manly war” or it could be brought on by a careless comment directed in such a personal way as to attract retaliation. One might argue that a deeper attachment to honor (an adherence to the understood laws that constituted honor) in a real sense were imagined by Southern men in their Victorian roles.

Nationalism: Roosevelt's Trappings of Masculinity and White Supremacy

Theodore Roosevelt began studying at Harvard in 1876.³⁹ He quickly supplanted a perception others had of him as effeminate.⁴⁰ He mixed an “unselfish, moral manliness-strength, altruism, self-restraint and chastity” indicative of what can be described as a Victorian masculinity.⁴¹ Sports slowly emerged as colleges began adopting sports as recruitment devices. College and secondary schools grew and with them recreation. Athletic teams were prized at the end of the nineteenth century and became a way to attract new students and revenue to these institutions. Anthony Rotundo comments “[t]hat the significance of sport went beyond its growing popularity as a pastime; it was also important as a cultural phenomenon.” According to Rotundo, by the late nineteenth century, “[t]his dimension was what gave athletics its special significance for the redefinition of manhood at the turn of the century.”⁴² Sports became important in the mind of teenage Teddy, but did not threaten to distract him from school where an exposure to philosophy and history often contained a “racially deterministic philosophy.”⁴³

39 Thomas Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 5.

40 Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170. For more on how and why young Roosevelt was ridiculed, see: I.E Cadenhead, Jr., *Theodore Roosevelt: The Paradox of Progressivism* in The Shaper's of History Series (New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1974), 4.

41 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 172.

42 E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. (New York: Basic Books, A Division of Harper Collins Publishing, 1990), 239.

43 Dyer. *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 4.

At Harvard under Nathaniel Southgate Shaler and at Columbia under John Burgess, Roosevelt was fully submerged in racist doctrines.⁴⁴ His background in naturalism with an interest in the rugged frontier would soon be nourished as well. Shaler shared a half Southern ancestry with T.R., whose mother told him about the “good ole days” in her tales of the antebellum South, and impressed upon the future statesman a reverence for a gloried white past while he was at Harvard. The theories of Teutonic superiority meshed with his experience as a child, an experience that seldom involved non-whites. Shaler, who studied at Harvard in the 1850's was a disciple of Lamarckian theory, strong then in the belief that individual characteristics or an inheritance of acquired characteristics enabled offspring greater survivability. This heritability was what enabled descendants of a great *white* race to pass down and build upon environmentally adapted strengths, a main strength being a love for liberty.

Roosevelt made time to box and play other sports at Harvard. Sports were fast becoming incentives for prospective students to flock to schools which formerly had little or no athletic programs. He was now a race warrior proven on the field of battle. He may have early fostered his obsession with manliness as a member of Harvard's boxing team where he claimed to have won a lightweight title. His interest in frontier life mixed with a budding interest in sports contributed to Roosevelt viewing himself in the same conquering terms as his Teutonic ancestors. In the North, where he attended school, sailing and rowing may have doubly appealed to a young Roosevelt in part because of a belief he may have attached to Nordic and/or Teutonic tradition. Like Roosevelt's Harvard professor Shaler, John Burgess had Southern ancestry. Burgess was born in Tennessee but his allegiance, like Roosevelt's, had been to the Union. Burgess hated the English and he sought to connect himself and his students with a Teutonic,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

German tradition. He claimed the English were infused with French blood in the eleventh century during the Norman invasion and lacked the racial purity and strong character of the Germans. His insistent ethnic connection between the Germans and himself appealed to Roosevelt as a young man. Burgess founded the political science department at Columbia and hoped to spread Teutonism to the rest of the nation. Like Roosevelt's previous instructor Shaler, "Burgess also held low opinions of non-whites and called for the Teuton to fulfill his responsibility to eliminate 'barbaric populations' which resisted 'civilized man.'"⁴⁵ Roosevelt's historical and autobiographical writings lent themselves to this emphasis on racial heritage. "In all of his early writings, the young author linked racial matters with the exuberant nationalism which would come to be a Rooseveltian trademark."⁴⁶ Roosevelt in his first critical work *The Naval War of 1812* furthered ideologies of white supremacy.⁴⁷

Roosevelt believed Kentuckians represented the best type of this distinctive American pure blood.⁴⁸ Henry Clay, a United States Congressman and Kentucky son, would have agreed and also believed that "open and manly war" with the British could also energize young Americans through "the reproduction and cherishing of a martial spirit amongst us" which Clay argued in 1812 at the eve of War.⁴⁹ In addition to being a manly Southerner, Clay believed in sending African Americans to Africa. Colonization argued against abolition and one of the central themes was a fear of race mixing or "amalgamation." Colonizationists, like Grady exploited the fears of of racist whites. This glorification of a "martial spirit" had Southern

qualities that were likely attractive to Roosevelt. These qualities did not necessarily extend to

45 Ibid., 8.

46 Ibid., 9.

47 Ibid., 48.

48 Ibid., 6.

49 Harry S. Laver, "Refuge of Manhood: Masculinity and the Militia Experience in Kentucky" in *Southern Manhood*, eds. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 11.

the lesser race. In 1830, at the first African American national convention, the African American speaker said “many of our fathers, and some of us, have fought and bled for the liberty, independence, and peace which you now enjoy.”⁵⁰

Nearly 50,000 planter elites around 1860 were heavily influenced by Victorian ideals of family, ideals which functioned to perpetuate a patriarchal and paternal society in the South.⁵¹ These throw-back elites wielded enormous economic and political power and their allegiance to a chivalric time supplanted feudal ideas of medieval hierarchy with a deterministic social fabric so interwoven with race that to unravel it would not only imperil the region's livelihood but its lifeblood. Somewhat ironically, it was this kind of colonial abuse that later gave Roosevelt ammunition to defend liberty through imperial expansion. Roosevelt conflated a nationalism that becomes America with an idea of masculinity that was influenced by an emphasis on being manly at the end of the twentieth century. This notion of masculinity was informed by older notions, set against dependency which included African Americans, and realized as a national cohesion of racism by the time America entered the Spanish American War.

Imperialism is based on notions of supremacy that necessitate white expansion. Using racially based ideology, politicians justified the theft of one culture and the subsequent imposition of white values that sought to replace that culture with its own in a way that resembled Southern paternalism. Roosevelt was, perhaps, more an American Nationalist than he was a proponent of Aryan supremacy but his patriotism and his belief in the right of white control were two ideologies that expanded white American values and lined up ever so neatly in their ordering of race. Racism is a product of historical fracturing. When whites attempted to

⁵⁰ Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 151.

⁵¹ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 18.

appropriate and recycle a previous culture's beliefs they changed the original context, inextricably linking nationalism to an imagined past in a way that distorts past and present. White manhood still constructed a collective inequality for non-whites after so called emancipation.⁵²

If Roosevelt equally valued the sacrifice of African American veterans he later made some questionable decisions concerning black soldiers. In Brownsville Texas, for instance, three companies of black troops who had recently been transferred to Fort Brown in Brownsville Texas were met by hostility from townspeople whenever they went into town. On the night of August 13 a policeman was wounded and a bartender killed and several witnesses said the culprits were black soldiers. When no soldier would come forward to confess, all of the companies were threatened with corporeal punishment. Roosevelt, who was convinced of the guilt of one or more of the black soldiers, signed an order for the dishonorable discharge of all the black soldiers, totaling 167 men. Six of the men summarily dismissed were Congressional Medal of Honor recipients.⁵³ William Howard Taft, who would be Roosevelt's Republican successor in 1908, was Secretary of War at the time of the Brownsville affair.⁵⁴ Roosevelt mixed his racial determinism with the expansion of the white race. Like politics concerning non-white soldiers, politics concerning the expansion of American soldiery, hence white soldiers, pervaded Roosevelt's imperial agenda. Thomas Dyer says that “it becomes clear that his approach to imperialism was as racially oriented as it was nationalistically inspired.”⁵⁵

This systemic growth of fear of the racial order being upturned became public policy and

52 See Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea*, 253.

53 I.E.Cadenhead, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Paradox of Progressivism* (Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1974), 124.

54 *Ibid.*, 167.

55 Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, Page 142.

Jim Crow was born in the South.⁵⁶ Whites doggedly beat down black advancement by creating black codes in the South. Mississippi governor Benjamin Humphreys was an ex-confederate General and stated, “The Negro is free whether we like it or not...To be free, however, does not make him a citizen or entitle him to social or political equality to the white man.”⁵⁷ These systematic curtailments excluded African Americans from voting much less holding office. They also in most cases excluded African Americans from military service and required of them passes to move freely.

Reconstruction followed and lasted for a decade embittering many Southerners who were deprived their vote by Radical Republicans.⁵⁸ Many African American voters and even office holders were intimidated and killed by militant reactionary Southerners known as the Ku Klux Klan.⁵⁹ The period between the end of the war and Jack Johnson's birth in 1878 held a number of examples that African Americans could, and would if given the chance, contribute to society in meaningful ways. John Roy Lynch was born into slavery and became free in 1863. In 1873, Lynch became the first African American Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives. He, like many other notable African Americans, left the South when black momentum was reversed by Southern politicians and Northerners who withdrew their support effectively returning the region to home rule.

Roosevelt was undoubtedly influenced by racial determinism he received in his education at Harvard and Columbia. In addition to the strong emphasis educators put on Teutonism, race theorists began offering their reasoning for African American inferiority as scientific fact. The

56 For more on Jim Crow, see C.Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

57 Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea*, 256.

58 Ibid., 257.

59 Ibid., 260.

situation for African Americans was made worse by legislation in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that upheld a Louisiana statute of separate but equal accommodations in 1896. The court upheld the constitutionality of separate railroad coaches. In 1903, *Giles v. Harris*, allowed state's to control federally regulated suffrage by giving power to the states, in this case Alabama.⁶⁰ Albert Bushnell Hart attested to the failure of both sections to effect progress for African Americans. He said the North is “less inclined than at any time during forty years to any active interference in Southern relations.”⁶¹ Politicians, like Roosevelt, wanted Southern support and were willing to turn their backs on African Americans to get that support. Theories of black inferiority created a language that gained strength through pseudo-science's practitioners.

Pseudo-science and sexual fears

Jack Johnson was not the first black rebel but it is useful to explore how his reign as boxing champion perpetuated some racial myths while challenging those that positioned African Americans as inferior beings. Based on racially deterministic pseudo-science, African Americans were determined to be sub-human and often described in racial terms that began in the seventeenth century when Europeans began to settle Virginia.⁶² Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some “scientists” assigned African Americans to an inferior racial variety of man subordinate to a racially superior white bloodline. Even worse, some “scholars” went beyond the caste structure to imagine blacks as a wholly separate species. The way race was philosophized, politicized, and religiously applied to African Americans reflected this pseudo scientific racism.

Black sensuality was a major concern for white men who feared a racially mixed society.

60 Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region at Odds* (New York: Harper Perrenial, A Division of Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), 34.

61 Ibid., 35.

62 Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, 17-31.

Pseudo-science's divergent articulations flowed through American society by a theological ordering of race. A polygenetic origin of race theory began to challenge Americans, particularly Southerners, on their readings of the scripture.⁶³ Preserving the social order of paternalism and extending that paternal state (of mind and land) to the expansion of slavery in the South became the argument in the South against the pluralist theory.

These beliefs in mono or polygenesis diverged and conflated at different times. The belief in one God gave way to the belief that God created a separate being inferior to white men and gave white men dominion over these “creatures” just as animals. George Frederickson says Samuel A. Cartwright, a Louisiana physician and proslavery writer, made efforts to combine pluralist theory with scripture. In 1843, the proslavery author had written a book to “show how the anatomical evidence of Negro inferiority could be correlated with the Biblical description of the 'curse on Canaan’- God's condemnation of Canaan and his allegedly black descendants to be 'servants unto servants.’” Cartwright's adherence to monogenesis theory gave way to pluralist (polygenetic) theory when, in 1860, Cartwright decided “that there was no conflict whatever between Genesis and the idea of a separate creation, since the Negro was actually referred to in the Bible as a separately created and inferior creature.”⁶⁴ By 1860, Jefferson Davis had seemingly adopted a polygenesis view. Davis spoke to the United States Senate:

“When Cain, for the commission of the first great crime, was driven from the face of Adam, no longer the fit associate of those who were created to exercise dominion over the earth, he found in the land of Nod those to whom his crime degraded him to an equality; and when the low and vulgar son of Noah, who

63 Ibid., 42. Founding fathers walked a narrow line when ascribing to polygenetics. Thomas Jefferson stopped short of saying African Americans were a different species because that would have been contrary to monogenesis, a belief that all men descended from Adam and Eve.

64 Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 87.

laughed at his father's exposure, sunk by debasing himself and his lineage by a connection with an inferior race of men, he doomed his descendants to perpetual slavery."

According to Frederickson, "Davis's version differed from Cartwright's only in detail, with Davis making Ham as well as Cain guilty of miscegenation, it was basically the same biblical theory of polygenesis. Reconciling creationism and polygenetics would prove difficult but not impossible. The debate on how the races originated became secondary to the accepted fact by whites that African Americans were inferior. The proslavery writer Thomas R. R. Cobb was representative of a vast group of whites when he said, "whether the negro was originally a different species, or is a degeneration of the same, is a matter indifferent in the inquiry as to his proper status in his present condition."⁶⁵ The issue became more socially than theologically grounded.

Fears of sexually sinister black men were heightened with white visions of blacks' large sexual organs and a belief in black men's desires to victimize white women. Polygenesis theory gave African Americans animal qualities such as stronger senses of sight, smell, and sexual capacity. Johnson sometimes made his penis appear larger by wrapping it in gauze. He enjoyed the reaction by whites at his perpetuation of this sexual image.⁶⁶ By allowing himself to participate in a kind of hyper-sexuality, he could enjoy the role as he heightened white fears of black sexual virility. Johnson could also show the absurdity of this superimposition of a white image of black sexuality while entertaining himself and, quite possibly, members of both races.

Of course, Johnson's performance could also be interpreted as negative by members of either

⁶⁵ Thomas R. R. Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1858), 27 quoted in Frederickson, *The Black Image of the White Mind*, 84.

⁶⁶ Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York and London: The Free Press, A Division of MacMillan, Inc., 1983), 74.

race. In the context of white desire for racial homogeneity, the image of black rapists took intermingling to one logical extreme.

The other extreme, the plausibility of white men raping black women, did not carry social significance. White womanhood was at stake only in the scenario where they became victims of black aggression although white women were clearly victims of white men and their sexual appetites. The “protection” of white women may have actually been closer to a “projection” of guilt, guilt of compromising standards of the day in interracial relationships with servants, by the white man. Joel Williamson says, “Perhaps pedestalizing the white mistress of the plantation was an attempt to salve the wound that had been done, and was being daily done deeper, to the Southern lady by husbands, sons, and fathers in liaisons with slave women.”⁶⁷ The psychology of white sexuality and its racial and gendered components is only beginning to develop. The relationship of sex and savagery can be viewed in terms of white savagery.

According to Michel Foucault, “sexual identity was *produced*, not repressed, by burgeoning Victorian discourses of sexual prohibition.”⁶⁸ Manhood was being remade at the end of the twentieth century. The moral restraint and “self-mastery” of Victorian manhood was a strong Protestant quality. G. Stanley Hall, the first president of The American Psychological Association, became a leading proponent for evolutionary theory and a champion of the psychology of man in different stages from savage to civilized. His parents provided the young man a blueprint for a Victorian type of “manly character.” Hall became sexually repressed and obsessed with masturbation, a condition he self-diagnosed as an inability to conform to Victorian standards of restraint. Hall influenced and was influenced by Sigmund Freud and his attention to

⁶⁷ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 28.

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1978) quoted in Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 80.

the savage man is worth briefly analyzing.

When Hall grew up he remembered how “unmanly” the guilt from the feeling that he was not living up to Victorian standards of virtue made him. Hall believed the effeminacy associated with this model ultimately led to a weak society. He wrote, “Teaching Our Sons to Do What We Have Been Teaching the Savages to Avoid: G. Stanley Hall, Racial Recapitulation, and the Neurasthenic Paradox.”⁶⁹ Gail Bederman explores how in addition to Victorian Christian traditions, Victorian medical science posited theories about “nerve energy” that were widely believed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Hall went on to break through his own sexual hang ups and recommend that “savagery” needed to be increased in male young men. Hall's reasoning was based on his predecessor, George Beard's medical condition of “*neurasthenia*.” Neurasthenia or “nervelessness- a lack of nerve force” could describe the over taxation of a modern world with its market demands and technology on a victim of modern civilization. African Americans could not be neurasthenics because they were not civilized.

Hall set out to solve the paradox of Beard's neurasthenia: Civilization required white men with somewhat delicately civilized constitutions to rule but these civilized men were endanger of becoming extinct due to dangerously low levels of nerve force both on individual and societal levels. This was the state of the struggle for manhood when Hall advised teachers to promote savagery in boys. Hall still believed in 1899 that acquired traits could be inherited as in Lamarckian theory and that necessary traits of savagery (in white men the savage would develop past this stage and into the civilized being) could be re-injected into the culture before it was too late. Hall's white professional man walked a fine line because he had to control his limited amount of nerve force while pursuing his inner primordial man. “The more control a man had

⁶⁹ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 77-120.

over his own nervous forces, the more powerful he would be.” Bederman continued, “[i]t was the lack of this manly self-restraint which constructed nonwhite men, like Jack Johnson and the mythical Negro rapist, as weak and unmanly.”⁷⁰ Hall's career was influenced by Darwin's “survival of the fittest” in Darwin's Theory of Evolution that appeared in *Origin of the Species*. Hall focused on child development. Hall said of kindergarten teachers, “All that rot they teach to children about the little raindrop fairies must go.” The Chairman of the Chicago Board of Education replied, “We do not believe it will benefit the public school teachers to attend a convention where the speakers advocate teaching prize-fighting and bullying as an art. The boys will learn that fast enough without being taught.”⁷¹

Roosevelt related to Hall, “Unless we keep the *barbarian virtues*, gaining the civilized ones will be of little avail.”⁷² August Weissman discredited Lamarckianism and Hall began to assert that, instead of a white super man developing from the savage, cultivated from young white boys, a salvation of mankind might be found in lesser “adolescent races” who unlike whites had not yet been corrupted by civilization. At the turn of the century, America's leading psychologist publicly experimented with racially deterministic causes for systemic problems in society.

Architects and Critics of Plantation Fiction

Politicians of the late nineteenth century South set a precedent for twentieth century attitudes that blamed African Americans for the economic state of the South. Fear of African Americans gaining the franchise in 1889, for example, prompted a return to deportation language and began a wave of “anti-Negro writing.” One of the accusations of Southern whites was that

70 Ibid., 117.

71 Ibid., 99.

72 Ibid., 100.

Radical Reconstruction had undermined a sectional reunion. Philip Alexander Bruce's, *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman*, stated that, without white protectors, African Americans would fall into a degenerative state.⁷³ Bruce's brother-in-law, Thomas Page, and other writers of plantation fiction orchestrated tales of white heroism and further mythologized their own race. For African Americans, the South remained entrenched in a brand of racism reflected in literature, politics, and a conditioned culture of white over black.

Accommodationist writers like Joel Chandler Harris and Mark Twain embraced a romantic past to rival the racism of Page and others who neglected black experience in exchange for a pure and righteous white entitlement. These writers were reformist, however, coming after such racially inflammatory authors, they were inevitably and rhetorically defensive by nature.⁷⁴ Southern paternalists joined an army of race writers by placing white experience over black experience and justified their actions through a retelling of the past. In their books, whites were custodians of race relations and African Americans were passive characters. Some authors like George Washington Cable of New Orleans wrote in favor of enfranchisement for African Americans. Cable fought for the Confederacy but his ideological maturation took on a Southernness that found him in the minority of white writers. Sympathetic to non-white cultures but still with a somewhat romantic view of dominant white culture, Cable anticipated later race writers. In "The Freedman's Case in Equity," Cable lamented African Americans' treatment at the polls and argued for greater educational and economic opportunity.

Henry Grady's, "In Plain Black and White" challenged Cable on the issue of "intermingling" by saying "the South will never adopt Mr. Cable's suggestion of the intermingling of the races...the intelligence of both races is moving farther from that proposition

⁷³ Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 259.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

day by day.” This attack on Cable's racial equity was written in 1885 and reflected the consensus view of whites. Two years later, Grady, in a speech he made in Dallas, said the right of Anglo-Saxon rule was nothing new but has “abided forever in the marrow of our bones, and shall forever run with the blood that feeds Anglo-Saxon hearts.” Racial overtones pervaded political, sociocultural, and religious based ramblings. The public oratory of political speeches and pulpit pounding found many preachers, as well as politicians, reiterating the separation of races. A long history of spiritual separateness was necessary in justifying the initial enslavement of a race of people that lasted two centuries. After a short lived Reconstruction, white supremacy became as galvanized as ever. This racial agenda of a separateness based on a “caste system” was arguably stronger in the South.

In studying the ways authors have variously written the South as a region both connected and disconnected from the nation, one builds on an understanding of the South by encountering the different perspectives of its authors. The architects of a romanticized fiction might be separated into groups. The first group includes vehement racists such as Thomas Nelson Page and, later and even less critically, Thomas Dixon. A second group made up of milder kind of paternalism read in the accommodationist racism of writers like Joel Chandler Harris and George Washington Cable and a group that came after that could include William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren and, less critically, Margaret Mitchell.

Thomas Nelson Page began writing around the time Johnson began fighting across the color line. Page wrote *Red Rock* in 1898 but sets the beginning of his novel decades earlier in the first years after the Civil War. The Civil War created a fractured nation and some of the literature following the war was based on the “Old South,” a mixture of real and imagined life

south of the Mason-Dixon line. Whites shared this literature that maintained a spirit of a nation that was not just Southern but American. According to Douglas Mitchell, "Page's view of Reconstruction and its significance is much that of the Redeemers and the later New South advocates: southerners could reorganize the region along radically new lines while acting under the guise of restorers of the true legacy of the South."⁷⁵

History became a device for writers like Page to comment on "present" developments. Page recovers a past that appeals to many white Americans at the turn of the century by excluding non-whites in his myth-making. Through narrative movement, Page turns back the clock from 1898 to 1868 in an attempt to address, albeit indirectly, events that are occurring in 1898. From the perspective of his white paternal Southern family and their "loyal" servants, a way of story telling that John Lowe terms a "fiction of consent," Page casts African Americans as content at the bottom of a "natural order." John Lowe indicates that "[i]n the decades following the Civil War, the United States was awash with the literature of reunion, as writers in both the North and South sought an antidote to the wounds of national struggle in the myths of reconciliation."⁷⁶ African Americans in reality had little chance for voicing an opposition in this literary and literal caste system.

The jovial and childlike murmurings reveal more than Page intended. The "dual mask" of a black character and the character's author is lifted inadvertently as Page writes into life Mammy Krenda. Using African American vernacular, through his character Mammy Krenda, another possibility for the poor reality of black life rivals that of Page's intention which makes the North responsible for the unhappiness of African Americans. The Cary family's black

⁷⁵ Douglas Mitchell, *A Disturbing and Alien Memory: Southern Novelists Writing History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 86.

⁷⁶ John Lowe, "Re-creating a Public for the Plantation: Reconstruction Myths of the Biracial Southern 'Family.'" *Bridging Southern Cultures*, Ed. John Lowe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 221-253.

mammy has a revealing line as she attests to the condition that scalawags and carpetbaggers have placed *their* family in. She says, *Dem's stirrin' what dee ain' know 'bout, an' some day dee'll heah'em comin' for'em to judgment.*” Page gives Mammy Krenda a voice against her own liberation but in addition to suggesting that it is the North's fault Page unconsciously allows the reader the logical inference that the Cary family and not the North may, in reality, be the one's receiving judgment.

This unconscious voice has been attributed to other white authors including Joel Chandler Harris in his creation of the character “Uncle Remus.” The trickster and bad man characters seen in this period by Southern authors can serve dual and/or opposite reactions by audiences whether or not those audiences were “in on the joke.” The conscious narrative omission of such a seminal event as the Civil War is but one literary device used by an apologist like Page to return to a defensible position. Omission like unconscious voice in “consenting” African Americans work against Page when he is viewed critically. The narrator of *Red Rock* explains that, “it is what took place after the war rather than what occurred during the struggle that this chronicle is concerned with.” To a critical reader, that is very convenient.

Page extends his umbrella of paternalism to encompass orphaned Indians as well as African Americans. The family's lineage is established against Indians but an orphan, Steve Allen, is accepted into the Gray fold. The novel has the white family embrace an extended family of slaves. Allen, part Indian, is the only racially mixed character. He is allowed access in a way no black character could be in Page's racially charged novel.

Quarrelsome African Americans are treated as bad children in Page's paternalistic romance. Their behavior is no fault of their own but the fault of the Yankees. The reader learns

that “Jim was one of the most trusted men about the place...” but “he had never been quite the same since the Yankees came through...He had been preaching a good deal lately, and appeared to be stirring the others up.” The implication is simple: It is not African Americans' fault but the fault of the meddling Yankee who has put unrealistic ideas of independence in their gullible heads. Loyal blacks outnumber the disloyal in Page's dichotomy, but bad black men like Mose, the “trick-doctor,” seem to represent a growing contingency. At times Page attempts humor in his paternalistic order with a characterization of contented African Americans. An example is when a Yankee Lieutenant, amused at the appearance of the Southern gentleman General's old butler, Julius, and in the absence of that Southern General, attempts to ridicule Julius. “You haven't any master now.” Julius replies, “I ain't? Does you think I's a free nigger? Cause I ain't!” The combination of Page's “fiction of consent” and that skillful technique's humorous humanization repackages Southern nostalgia that is both dangerous and deadly into a kind of Southern charm that is at once entertaining and disarming for an audience, perhaps, more susceptible to Page's deceit.

Another example of Page speaking for African Americans and employing humor can be viewed between these same characters, the Southern General and his free but loyal man Julius. Upon making his former master a mint julep, Julius is praised to the General's company. “Julius is the most faithful fellow that ever was on earth; he would die for me!” Another former slave, Jerry, refuses to work when his friend and former master says he will starve before he touches another hoe. The man says, “Jerry, you can keep on; I'll see that you get your part of the crop.” Jerry replies, “Nor- I ain't gwine to hit anur lick, nurr-I'll starve wit yer.” Page's use of humor and “fictions of consent” were at times subtle implementations which furthered his supremacist

agenda. Page wholeheartedly believed in the tenets of white power.⁷⁷

Page knew that popular sentiment involved visions of the “Old South” and those imaginative tales were just what his readership wanted. Page and his compatriots furthered this literary movement and simplified the complex issues of a “New South” by making palatable the historic memory of an older simpler time. In speaking at a commencement day address at John Hopkins University in 1903, Tulane University president Edwin A. Alderman spoke and included many voices of this sort of fiction in shaping national character. His intent, he said was “the 're-nationalization' of his region.” He went on to say, the South has “something high and precious and distinctive in manhood and leadership to contribute to American Civilization.”⁷⁸ These voices anticipated the Renaissance writers of the next generation.

William Faulkner, who chronicled complex race relations in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County two decades after Twain and Cable, quite likely knew of African American authors who wrote at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. These authors like, Pauline Hopkins, Sutton Griggs, and more critically, Charles Chestnutt remain overshadowed by Faulkner and other notable writers of the Southern Renaissance, who came after them, eclipsing their visibility and significance. More sensational constructions of race by racial writers such as Thomas Dixon found a wider and more affluent audience with whites who longed for the old days. African American authors struggled to make a living. Literature that relied on its romantic depiction of racial harmony appealed to those who actually lived in that period but also those who imagined they could have lived in it. A new generation was transported to the “good ole days” through this kind of nostalgic writing. African American authors had a hard time, but nonetheless fought back and challenged Page and other contemporaries with their own novels,

⁷⁷ Thomas Nelson Page, *Red Rock* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898).

⁷⁸ Grantham, *The South in Modern America*, 269.

poems, and stories around the turn of the twentieth century.

Just as white America had their myths and mythic heroes, so too did African Americans. Stagolee was most probably based on Lee Shelton. Shelton, an African American man known as “Stag” Lee, shot William Lyons, also black, in the stomach after the man reportedly refused to return a hat that belonged, or at least had belonged, to Lee. The mortally wounded victim was shot on Christmas night, perhaps, adding to the reputation of the perpetrator as a man both on the margins of society and a man without care. The shooting became a metaphor for African American resistance and in this metaphor it was the hat, a popular Stetson brand, that represented a symbol of manhood reclaimed by Stagolee. The Stetson hat was itself born the same year as Lee, 1865. This incident happened in late 1895 in a saloon on the north side of St. Louis.

Shelton, who was a carriage driver by trade, was born in Texas. Jack Johnson, who was a teenager at the time, may or may not have known about Shelton but he, like Stagolee, gained an almost mythic celebrity by winning the Heavyweight Championship of the World and defending it against “white hopes” while personifying a similar anti-establishment demeanor to that of the Stetson wearing Stagolee. Both men were seemingly fearless of white authority. Johnson also drank and fought and did what he wanted, when he wanted, and to whomever he wished. Stagolee had a reputation as a pimp and nightclub owner and his behavior may have linked him to whites as the kind of “black beast” that Andrew Leiter said reemerged after Reconstruction as “interracial sex receded somewhat from national attention only to emerge again with renewed vigor and a different emphasis.” Johnson, like Stagolee, may have enjoyed this perpetually black image if only to get under the skin of those whites who perpetuated this idea of black men and deviant behavior. Unlike Lee Shelton, Johnson, who also crossed the color line, did it in a very

public way.

Shelton owned a nightclub called the Modern Horseshoe Club.⁷⁹ Both men had a unique sense of style. In an article written in 2009 for the New York Daily News, “The Ballad of Stagger Lee: Politics leads to Murder on Christmas Day 1895,” further mythologizes the memory of a St. Louis pimp. In this Daily News article, the original gangster or “O.G.” wore pointy toed shoes “tricked out with spats and tiny mirrors that shot off shards or reflected lamplight with each stride. He wore a canary-colored shirt, a crimson vest, striped slacks, and a black overcoat. He gripped a gleaming black cane, and a gigantic cigar left a cloud of blue smoke in his wake. The ensemble was topped by a fine Stetson hat made of milky white felt.”

The myth of Stagolee like that of John Henry, a victim of Virginia's black codes who was sentenced to work and die for the C and O Railroad on the Lewis Tunnel, was based on a real man. Both myths have taken form through music and both have period piece adaptations that can be applied liberally to respective periods of racial unrest including the early twentieth century where race and modernity had a powerful relationship. These metaphors hold a powerful lesson as they reveal qualities of folk heroes revered by disenfranchised African Americans and untold numbers of black victims who perished in this alliance between white industry and black pursuit of the franchise.

⁷⁹ Timothy Lane, “The Story of Stagger Lee” (St. Louis: Riverfront Times. June 27, 2007) Also see, “The Ballad of Stagger Lee: Politics Leads to Murder on Christmas Day.” (New York: Daily News. Nov. 28, 2009) 1.413954.

II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF BOXING

The first record of a boxing match is in Homer's *The Iliad*.⁸⁰ Alexander Pope, who was friends with modern boxing's English creator James Figg, translated Homer's poem about a legendary match where Epeus defeats Euryalus: "At length Epeus dealt a weighty blow Full on the cheek of his unwary foe. Beneath that ponderous arm's resistance sway. Down dropped he, nerveless, and extended lay."⁸¹ Boxing had for some time gained acceptance on a street level. These were violent times where an argument could quickly turn deadly and boxing "...also found a home as a reasonable alternative to duelling [sic.] for the purpose of the settling of grudges. Accordingly, as the rich once had to learn to fence, now an education in the finer points of boxing was considered a social necessity."⁸²

Alexander Pope, as well as author Jonathan Swift, became admirers and friends of the fighter James Figg who was an "itinerant, illiterate roustabout who could wield cudgel, back-sword, quarterstaff *and* his fists." The fighting men of this period lead a rough existence. "This was a chaotic, unpredictable time, before men had been trained to respond to the factory bell or alarm clock. They worked in single-minded rushes that might last two, three or even five days...Violence was a way of life."⁸³ The Earl of Peterborough financed an arena for Figg to begin a profitable instruction for pugilists in an amphitheatre in London. This Soho

80 Harry Carpenter, *A Pictorial History*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1975), 8.

81 Ibid.

82 Bob Mee, *Bare Fists: The History of Bare-Knuckle Prize-Fighting* (London: The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishing, 2001), 28.

83 Ibid.

amphitheatre was taken over by one of Figg's students when Figg died.⁸⁴ Jack Broughton, a bare fist fighter and student of Figg's, opened his own school with the financial support of William, Duke of Cumberland. Broughton, who was less straight forward and more of a technician than the others including Figg, added more humane rules in 1743. These rules included not hitting a man who had gone to his knees or grabbing an opponent below the waist. He also used gloves, called muffles, but these seem to have only been used in training and to prevent some of the wealthier patrons from “black eyes, broken jaws, and bloody noses.”⁸⁵

America had an on and off again relationship with the sport which can be traced to 1730's Chesapeake Bay.⁸⁶ The contests then were between so called “gentleman” and were not for money. The prize-fight was brought in with the British occupation during the Revolutionary War. The prize-fight then lost popularity, perhaps, because of its association with the tyrannical English in the eighteenth century some time before America gained its independence.

Boxing's favor ebbed and flowed in eighteenth century England. Wealthy patrons were responsible for minor resurgences but corruption and deaths in the ring left boxing to be viewed, often, as unfashionable. A legendary trainer and friend of Byron's, John Jackson, had an epic battle with a fighter of Jewish descent. Daniel Mendoza, also known as “Light of Israel,” had long flowing hair and stood just over five and a half feet tall. He weighed around one hundred sixty pounds and was one of the first “scientific fighters” who beat larger men.⁸⁷ A reviewer of that time said, “[h]e is deficient in the strength of his blows, and this proceeds from his attitude,

84 Tom Sawyer, *Noble Art* (Wyoming: Unwin Hyman Limited, 1989), 21. Sawyer in *Noble Art* mentions Jack Broughton and another student of James Figg's named George Taylor. Apparently, Taylor ran Figg's amphitheatre before Jack Broughton opened a neighboring school which overshadowed the first.

85 *Ibid.*, 21.

86 Michael T. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988)*, 76.

87 John Whale, “Daniel Mendoza's Contests of Identity,” *Romanticism* Volume 14, No. 3, (2008).

which is too much in the defensive.”⁸⁸

Concurrent with Mendoza's appearance on the boxing scene, America gained its independence and British general, Earl Percy, returned to England with a fourteen year old son of a slave named Bill Richmond. Richmond eventually fought and lost to champion Tom Cribb. Richmond sought a livelihood through boxing and, though smallish, was very successful before becoming a trainer, fighting the likes of Cribb and Mendoza. Opportunities for African Americans and other minorities such as Jews existed in the prize-ring in eighteenth and nineteenth century England.

This study of nationalism and masculinity through the lens of these champions should include a great African American fighter and pioneer who came a century before Jack Johnson. The first black prize-fighter to reach legendary status was Tom Molineaux. His father Zachary won his freedom through manumission as a soldier of the American Revolution but Tom Molineaux's quest for freedom has been the subject of much speculation.⁸⁹ Tom Molineaux boxed in the early nineteenth century and may have won his freedom this way. One report is that his master's son bet a large purse on Tom in a fight against a rival plantation and Tom gained his freedom upon winning.⁹⁰ In this same tale, Molineaux was seventeen years old and uninterested in fighting but began to train in earnest when learning of this prospect for freedom.

Traveling abroad, Molineaux who had heard at port of Bill Richmond, the African American transplant to England, sought out the man. Molineaux developed an alliance with

88 The reviewer was Thomas Fewtrell and he worked for *Boxing Reviewed*. For specifics on Mendoza and how his style was received in terms of national masculine English perception, see “Daniel Mendoza's Contests of Identity,” by John Whale. Also see 1822 *The Fight* by William Hazlitt, which has an interesting view into race and nation when it speaks of fighter Jack Randall using the local paper to advertise that he is “Not particular to weight, colour, or country.”

89 Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 35.

90 For more on Molineaux's life, see Bill Calogero, *Tom Molineaux: From Bondage to Baddest Man on the Planet* (New York: J.C. Publishing, 2015).

Richmond once he reached England. The two men set out to win the championship and Molineaux fought the English champion, Tom Cribb, and was robbed of the championship.⁹¹ In his rematch with Cribb, twenty-five thousand spectators- the largest crowd recorded up until that date in 1811-watched as an Anglo-American rivalry was established.⁹² In Tom Sawyer's 1989 book *Nobel Art*, the "Dedication" is "to the three great Toms" but there is no mention of a fourth Tom, Tom Molineaux. The African-American pugilist convincingly bested Tom Cribb, the immortal English Champion, who could only be saved by the crowd and his corner. Molineaux managed, like his black trainer Bill Richmond, to remain in the public conscience of fight fans long after their deaths. The most detailed writing on Molineaux involves a great deal of speculation but the numerous paintings, lithographs, and writings immortalize this pugilist.⁹³ Thomas Rowlandson's painting depicts Cribb knocking out Molineaux in the second affair that took place at Thistleton Gap and Theodore Gericault's *Boxeurs* is a lithograph that seems to borrow from the frontispiece of Pierce Egan's *Boxiana*. Prize-fighting hit a low period only forty years after its refinement by Broughton. It became corrupt and lost its major benefactors. These elites were replaced by gamblers who would rather win a bet than ensure a fighter's safety.

Elliot Gorn, author of *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, recounts Molineaux's heroic triumphs and global conquests. Gorn's assertion that Molineaux likely fought his way out of slavery is instructive.⁹⁴ What form of "freedom" was possible and what measure of it could come to a black man in a slave holding society? There are several scenarios if one is

91 Cribb, the English champion, had a corner man who accused Molineaux of hitting Cribb with a foreign object. This bought Cribb valuable seconds to "get up to scratch." The rules at this time stated that a fighter had thirty seconds to recover and return to center stage.

92 Richmond, Molineaux's black trainer, actually fought Cribb several years earlier. Some consider his fight with Cribb to mark the first World Championship or Anglo-American rivalry. One problem with this is that Richmond was not a heavyweight and another is that they fought once. Molineaux's fights are more likely to be considered as the first real heavyweight rivalry involving an American fighter.

93 Sawyer, *Noble Art*, 43.

94 Gorn, *Manly Art*. Page 34.

prepared to envision Molineaux fighting his way out of forced labor. Ira Berlin's, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* explains how different societies varied in dependence on enslaved African Americans. Berlin explains the terms “slave societies” and “societies with slaves” as early American societies that evolved and devolved into one another.⁹⁵ There are, indeed, several scenarios for the enslaved to gain their freedom within this blueprint. Due to a lack of historical record, the exercise is based largely on conjecture. The Upper South including Virginia and Maryland was likely enough a place where the elder Molineaux could have gained freedom fighting for or against independence in the new nation.

According to Bill Calogero in, *Tom Molineaux: From Bondage to Baddest Man on the Planet*, Molineaux may have won money and been set free or bought his freedom. Possessing such physical prowess, it is possible he was rewarded his freedom to find a niche in the artisan community which was much the same in the Upper South as it was in the North except it was larger therefore more accessible to African American runaways.⁹⁶ He did not join the barbers, cobblers, or craftsmen, however, traveling instead to Europe, he fought for the Heavyweight Championship of the World. James Weldon Johnson does not contend that Molineaux won his freedom fighting but does say that Tom did not run away.⁹⁷ So while it remains unclear exactly how Tom Molineaux secured his freedom, the larger question is what that concept meant at the onset of the nineteenth century.

Despite fighting the English Champion and being immortalized abroad, in an ascendance from plantation to global fame, Tom Molineaux returned to obscurity.⁹⁸ His fight with Cribb was

95 Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 7-13.

96 Ibid., 287.

97 James Weldon Johnson, “Black Manhattan” (New York: Knopf, 1930).

98 Calogero's essay “Tom Molineaux: From Slave to American Heavyweight Champion” and Aycock & Scott's *The First Black Boxing Champions* add to the validity of Calogero's book but many of his assumptions seem hard, if not impossible, to prove. Much of the creative process Calogero embarks upon is instructive if only to remind the

a fight Molineaux clearly won, though he did not return with the title. Molineaux knocked Cribb out but Cribb's corner man falsely claimed a foul and in doing so allowed Cribb time to recover from being knocked out by the American contender, thus saving a badly wounded Cribb who recovered and won.⁹⁹ Tom Molineaux should have been awarded the heavyweight championship and become not only the first African American but the first American to hold the world title.

Georgian and Victorian England and early American sport is not the focus of this study but it is a fascinating undercurrent for themes developing in this study. Molineaux's exploits tell the value of masculinity in broader culture at this time and foreshadows the prize-ring as a medium for the mobility of future African American fighters in private journeys toward domestic freedom through public freedom abroad. Writers of boxing and otherwise remembered Molineaux and his memory seems to be stronger in England than in America. An English writer said, "Molineaux was illiterate and ostentatious, but good-tempered, liberal and generous to a fault. Fond of gay life, fine clothes and amorous to the extreme..."¹⁰⁰ Molineaux appears to have been somewhat of an American curiosity.

A prize-fighter's reputation takes time to develop but there is only scant evidence that Molineaux had some notable fights before leaving for England to seek out champion, Tom Cribb. The validation Molineaux received is hard to trace but it was likely as much a validation of his management as the fighter himself as it is likely he fought across the color line only when abroad. His first "recorded" fight was against an older experienced slave from another plantation.¹⁰¹ If he did fight whites in America, he did not gain the fame he did abroad which also speaks to the complexion of prize-fighting in America in the early nineteenth century. Prize-

reader of just how invisible African-American existence was at the time Molineaux lived.

99 Gorn, *Manly Art*, 20.

100 Sawyer, *Noble Art*, 82.

101 Calogero- Again, highly speculative. This book is not well sourced.

fighting ebbed and flowed both in the United States and England and often did not share consistent patronage in concurrent periods. At the time Molineaux competed in England, there was a great national obsession with boxing in England.¹⁰² The author of *Noble Art*, Tom Sawyer, argues that Cribb, Molineaux's opponent, was one of the first working class heroes. "Previously, heroes who could boast no lordly genealogy very swiftly had one invented for them."¹⁰³

Molineaux, who was illiterate, allegedly wrote a letter to Cribb in Pierce Egan's *Boxiana*:

Sir, My friends think, that had the weather on last Tuesday, the day upon which I contended with you, not been so unfavourable, I should have won the battle; I therefore challenge you to a second meeting, at any time within two months, for such a sum as those gentlemen, who place confidence in me, may be pleased to arrange. As it is possible that this letter may meet the public eye, I cannot omit the opportunity of expressing a confident hope, that the circumstances of my being of a different colour to that of the people amongst whom I have sought protection, will not any way operate to my prejudice. I am, Sir, Your most obedient, humble servant,

T. Molineaux¹⁰⁴

African Americans were continually subjugated through violence and the threat of violence in the South. the culture of honor and violence fits well into the prize-ring where Molineaux displayed prowess in a way that was identifiable as an expression of manhood in the Old South and in Europe where it existed leisure and the rowdy commoner found themselves at once together rooting for these fighting sportsmen. The fact that the Cribb/Molineaux rematch was a match that created much memorabilia, some popular with the lower sort like "Staffordshire beer jugs and mugs, transfer-printed with scenes from what was a great national victory," as well

102 Sawyer, *Noble Art*, 42.

103 Ibid., 28.

104 Ibid., 124

as paintings and poetry, suggests the importance of this particular fight in the context of nationalism in England in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Lord Byron included the image of Molineaux on his dressing screen in 1812. Charles Dickens, born that same year, “perceived pugilism from the standpoint of emergent Victorian respectability” as a barbaric endeavor.¹⁰⁵

Molineaux's career and life ended, as it started, in utter obscurity. He died before the age of forty. He should be remembered for possessing a physical prowess equal and superior to that of the best fighters of the early nineteenth century. Like Jack Johnson and Joe Louis would later establish, men of African ancestry would represent America at pivotal moments in its history. The first modern sportswriter said of Molineaux in a lesser known fight with English William Fuller, a fight that lasted well over an hour, that Molineaux “fought without parallel” and should be remembered as a great American boxer. At least to some, the emphasis was on American.

Tom Sawyer chronicles well the obsession the late Georgian and early Victorian period had on men of all stations. The author says that George Byron and John Evelyn Denison, also known as Lord Byron and Lord Althorp, were students of John Jackson at Bond Street and, on the eve of the John Gully/Hen Pearce fight, the teacher and students ate together. Lord Althorp recalled in 1840 the fight which had taken place early in the century and proclaimed the contest worthy of Homer.¹⁰⁶ Sawyer finds it appropriate that Lord Althorp, who was heir to a “one of the world's finest classical libraries, should consider the occasion on which a pair of English bruisers battered each other for sixty-four bloody rounds in a prosaically damp Sussex meadow as subject matter worthy of the greatest among ancient authors.”¹⁰⁷

105 Sawyer, *Noble Art*, 53.

106 Ibid., 15.

107 Ibid.

The reason boxing lost its appeal in England after the 1820's was the sport lost its wealthier patrons. Boxing's appeal depended on sporting men and in the past the sport had galvanized a nation through its appeal to different walks of life. Rich and poor joined one another to cheer on their fighter. That collective support also united the classes.¹⁰⁸ This loss of its appeal is evident in the quality of art and lack of quality writing devoted to the sweet science for most of the rest of the century in England.¹⁰⁹ The sport found a revival in America where it had two lives: one of sport that promoted a healthy manhood, and a life of prize-fighting. According to a biographer of John L. Sullivan, also known as “The Boston Strong Boy,” boxing “fitted youth to be 'fair-minded, confident, courageous, peaceful and patriotic citizens: and it “took the English stock and improved it.”¹¹⁰

Sullivan's father worked as an Irish laborer in Boston's sewer system. Though John was not adverse to an honest living, he soon viewed boxing and “pugnacity as a key to manhood.”¹¹¹ It gave him, also, a sense of upward social mobility. John L., which he was often called, became the first celebrity of the American prize-ring. Sullivan represented the working class as did most of his successors and he was a thick, hard living, Irish fighter. He also represented the meeting of past bare-knuckle boxing and the new gloved boxing. Sullivan and Irish Jake Kilrain fought the last bare-knuckle match in Richburg, Mississippi, a match Sullivan won in seventy five rounds. Sullivan ushered in a new age for the sport, but he was reminiscent of a rougher immigrant and, at times lawless, generation. His refusal to “cross the color line” and allow black fighters to fight for his title is reflective of a general attitude towards black exclusion around the

108 For more on class unification through prize-fighting, see Bob Mee, *Bare Fists*.

109 Sawyer, *Noble Art*, 48. The notable exception to this is a brief resurgence found in the Anglo-American rivalry of English Tom Sayers and the “Yankee” John C. Heenan.

110 Michael Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America*, (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 33.

111 Ibid.

turn of the twentieth century. If Sullivan was a wild character, a rough one but hardly political, he was also a personal friend of Teddy Roosevelt's. Sullivan's nephew went AWOL and Roosevelt pardoned him.¹¹² This is the same Roosevelt who had summarily dismissed African American Congressional Medal of Honor winners, arguably, due to the color of their skin one year earlier.

Jack Johnson shared some of the vices of the ex-champ but he did not share the affection of whites. In 1894, Johnson was attacked by Sullivan supporters and mercilessly beaten for offering unpopular opinions about Sullivan.¹¹³ Johnson, nor any other black fighter would face Sullivan. Caribbean born Peter Jackson never got a chance. Neither did George Godfrey, who was waiting for Sullivan when he reached San Francisco. Sullivan said he would fight him if the money was right regardless of Godfrey's race. Like Jackson, Godfrey never had a chance to fight Sullivan, who later commented that he would never fight a negro. "I never have and I never shall."¹¹⁴ It seems no whites demanded he fight top contenders of color. When it came to Sullivan's drinking and cavorting, fans were ready to forgive him if not laugh about it. Johnson, on the other hand, was perceived as a public menace for conducting himself this way and steps were taken to remove him from society.

Black fighters found the prize-fight ring a medium for displaying their manhood and appropriate as a place to expose the inherent contradictions of a racial hierarchy based in falsehood. The prize-ring as an arena for evaluating honor is quite compelling as it exposes not only the complex nature of the term in its different forms but the contradictory stance of some of honor's architects and antagonists. In studying Jack Johnson and Joe Louis, one can find

¹¹² Isenberg, *John Sullivan and His America.*, 360.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 293. Isenberg credits Al Tony Gilmore with this quote from Gilmore's book *Bad Nigger!*

assertions of manhood and patriotism that both embrace and reject the meanings found within mainstream America during their respective rules as Heavyweight Champion of the World.

Boxing had no central commission and was not as cliquish as say golf or horse racing. The fact that it often flirted with illegality made it conducive with blacks movement toward enfranchisement. As these fighters legitimated themselves in a quasi-legitimate business, they fought the color line in this tenuously respectable profession. So, as the profession gained political support, public interest largely fostered by the press, so too did these boxers. Johnson and Louis were racial representatives and symbols of progress but first they were fighting men. Jack Johnson and Joe Louis fought with physical and emotional tenacity and fortitude against the color line, a division created and maintained by whites. The fact that there was a certain fluidity or flexibility in the fight game in respect to the law enabled black fighters to participate in some instances. Their participation, though limited at times, made it possible for competition at legal venues and eventual widespread visibility.

III. JACK JOHNSON: PERPETUATES AND CHALLENGES MYTHS IN 1900

Jack Johnson was born either John Arthur Johnson or Arthur John Johnson on March 31, 1878 in the port city of Galveston, Texas. Galveston, with a population of 25,000, was Texas's biggest city and though it was geographically about as Southern as it gets, it was ideologically more like a New Orleans with its multinational commerce and multicultural influence. His father was born a slave in Maryland and, according to biographer Randy Roberts, Henry Johnson entertained his master and his master's company by bare-knuckle fighting. Henry secured a small piece of land after moving to Galveston and started a family with a woman considerably younger than himself. Henry and his wife Tiny were pious and instructed their first son Arthur, who was nicknamed "Jack," and later his five siblings to be pious and learned. His mother implored young Jack to fight back when school yard bullies beat him up. Tiny told the then "cowardly" Jack that he better fight back or a worse beating would be waiting for him when he returned home.¹¹⁵

Johnson fought more than once around Galveston as a teenager and even participated in "Battle Royals." These events served more as entertainment for white patrons than they served as legitimate sporting events. Essentially these were free-for-alls where the last man standing won. Handicaps like double teams where two black fighters would beat out a third black fighter and eliminate him from competition or more blatant handicaps as blindfolds were not uncommon. These bizarre contests even involved fights pitting one legged opponents against one another or little people referred to as midgets against each other. The common theme

¹¹⁵ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 4.

involved black entertainers and white crowds.

Minstrelsy appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century and evoked a romantic delusion for a white audience nostalgic for an imagined romantic past. Black face white performers entertained white audiences while promoting and reinforcing a racial hierarchy. These black fighters were less admired for their skill and, not unlike minstrels, these fighters were entertainment for white audiences. Before African Americans subjected themselves to events such as these, they often experimented with smaller games like the “dozens” with members of their own race, often siblings or friends. Lawrence Levine in, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, discusses the game which was played in black culture between peers. The game which involved dishing out and receiving insults conditioned young blacks to have tough exteriors. Later when Johnson entered the world of prize-fighting, this conditioning would prove essential to his ability to withstand the verbal assaults of whites. Young Jack participated in this racially evocative culture, he also participated in helping his father with his work as a janitor. “The picture of the Johnson family that emerges from official records is one of solid respectability,” says Roberts. A flood “ended Johnson's family life” when the security once offered by a home proved impermanent.¹¹⁶

Before the flood of September 7, 1900, Johnson called Galveston home. He had participated in several boxing events before meeting an individual of world class caliber. Johnson received training from Joe Choynski, a Jewish prize-fighter. Johnson was arrested with Choynski after an exhibition in Galveston resulted in Choynski knocking the young pugilist out. Choynski commented that at the time the bout was only allowed as an exhibition. Exhibitions at this time were friendly affairs that exhibited the art of boxing without demonstrating the more

¹¹⁶ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 3.

brutal side. A rule of the exhibition was that neither performer could hit the other hard enough to knock him down. The exhibition between the Jewish Choynski and the African-American Johnson was deemed illegal when Choynski hit Johnson hard and floored him. He hit Johnson with a hook that Choynski admitted he “could not resist throwing.”¹¹⁷ Johnson claimed he was not stopped but by the police who threw him and the Jewish fighter in jail for thirty days.

It seems clear that the younger Johnson improved after this period of close contact with the older proven Choynski but the degree of influence of this possible mentor is left out in Johnson's autobiography. What is clear is that this contest between Johnson and Choynski happened and that inter-racial matches were taking place around the turn of the twentieth century. This is crucial for evaluating turn of the century notions about changing nationalism and about how a challenge to hegemonic masculinity could be presented by men outside normative constructs.

The world of boxing, a “manly world seemingly antithetical to the Old World Jewish ethos” not to mention the Old South world of men where blacks were denied acceptance into individual and communal notions of manhood, offered a chance at equality. Also boxing became available to marginalized national groups as it “required little space or equipment, and fit well with an inner city environment.”¹¹⁸ This was not just physical equality. These fighters represented social groups on the margin of society. Choynski came before other great Jewish fighters like Max Baer and Harris Krakow, also known as Kingfish Levinsky. Choynski and Johnson represented groups seeking to achieve some sense of political solidarity. Boxing was a medium that allowed for individuals seeking acknowledgment; they sought some semblance of

117 *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, directed by Ken Burns. Perf. Jack Johnson, Keith David, Samuel L. Jackson. PBS, 2005. Film.

118 Reiss, *Sports and the American Jew*, 21.

equality for not only themselves but their communities. These communities felt pride in their fighters and identified with those fighters as representatives of a larger quest to be included in the American franchise.

The combination of cultural conditioning and tutelage made Johnson into a shrewd defensive fighter. If he did learn from Jewish Joe Choynski, who was a small (at least small for heavyweight) crafty fighter, he also learned cultural conditioning extended from the fighters themselves to the spectators. These fans were paying to enjoy sport but only sport that conformed to racial norms. Culture conditioned spectators as much as fighters to demand a more defensive style for blacks. Black fighters, who may have grown up playing smaller games like the “dozens” to gain preparedness for what lay in store, viewed the object of the “inner-ring” much as they viewed the world. The ring belonged to the white man who was aggressive. The trick for Johnson would be how to counter that white aggression. Herein lies what defined Johnson’s greatness. Most fighters with knockout power do not develop the refined skill set of Johnson nor do most technically and defensively sound fighters have the one punch knock out ability of Johnson. He simply had to out think his white opponent and walk a fine line between carrying his opponent and protecting his own investment, namely his person. The fans would not pay to see him destroy white opponents and with them their own fantasies of superiority.

Boxing was one of the only sports that saw participation across the color line at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Isaac Murphy became somewhat of a black celebrity in horse racing but the long tradition of non-whites in horse culture was overshadowed by a white Southern tradition of horse racing, a tradition that African Americans like Murphy figured little into.¹¹⁹ Murphy reportedly drank and Russell Wiggington, in *The*

¹¹⁹ William Rhoden, *\$40 Million Dollar Slaves*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 67.

Strange Career of the Black Athlete, said that “he probably contributed more to the demise of African American jockeys than any other black rider in history.”¹²⁰ Southern gentry found equestrianism as appealing as Northern elites found sailing and traced their white ancestor's horsemanship before the antebellum period back to Victorian England. Johnson's boxing career was nearly ended when he was kicked by a horse and his leg shattered as he worked in a stable in Galveston. Maybe it was around the stables that his own ideas of equality were fomented. One can only speculate as records of his early life are incomplete but understanding his environment as a youth is a good first step to understanding how Johnson's character developed.

The seemingly cosmopolitan community of Galveston upon closer examination reveals sectional attachments to a racial ideology or an equality largely rooted in race. It is instructive to take as an example the Turnverein Movement and one of this German immigrant groups settlements in Galveston. According to K.B. Wamsley, prior to Johnson's birth in 1878, a mid-nineteenth century Turnverein gymnastics club came from Germany where its members were politically vibrant. Once in Texas, the now “Turners” aligned themselves more closely with pro-slavery factions and eventually participated in the Civil War on the side of the confederacy.¹²¹ The Turner gymnastics clubs had dwindled by the time Johnson was born but it is worthwhile to note that prior to the war these Galveston clubs actually went against the writings of their national movement's anti-slavery tenets. Many of the German “Forty-Eighters,” named for their participation in the mid-nineteenth century European revolution, fought for the North but those in Texas were pro-slavery and aligned themselves with the Confederate cause.¹²² This illustrates

120 Wiggington Russell T. *The Strange Career of the Black Athlete* (Westport and London: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 8.

121 Handbook of Texas online.

122 K.B. Wamsley, “A Home in the South: The Turners of Galveston Texas, 1840-65” in *Ethnicity and Sport in North American History and Culture*, eds. David Wiggins and George Eisen (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 43.

the sectional attachment powerful enough to override their national organization and further demonstrates the atmosphere of Johnson's birthplace. The confederate identity of this physically fit group, who strove to promote physical and spiritual harmony in Johnson's birthplace, is interesting when contemplating his relationship to Galveston.

Johnson's formative years, which came just before the dawn of the twentieth century, coincided with some of the darkest days in the aftermath of a failed Reconstruction. In an effort to recapture imagined past glory and to remove gains made by a perceived inferior race, Southern whites, with the help of weakening national support, regained political power and from there organized and reinforced a dominant order.¹²³ According to George Frederickson, the “New South,” with Henry Grady leading the way for Southern industrialization and a “reunion with the capitalistic North,” cannot be viewed apart but must be viewed in “relation to larger social aspirations of a dominant group.”¹²⁴ The “old order” did not push white supremacy into mainstream politics the way the new would. By the 1890's “lower class whites had become restive, not only because they were sometimes denied the full racial exclusiveness many craved but also because the characteristic practices which kept the blacks in subservience during the “Bourbon” era- such as the crop lien, verbal contracts between croppers and landlords, the convict lease system- were not strictly racial policies; poor whites could be caught up in the meshes of the same exploitative system.”¹²⁵ The whole nation was swept into a fever of racism. Racial reconciliation was not a conscious dialogue between the races but another white monologue. Leaders like the *Atlanta Constitution's* Henry Grady maintained the idea of the superiority of the white race.

123 For in depth detail, see Williamson, *A Rage to Order*.

124 Joel Chandler Harris, *Life of Henry W. Grady, Including his Writings and Speeches* (New York: 1890), 305 quoted in Frederickson. *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 204.

125 Ibid.

Sports, particularly boxing, allowed blacks to participate in this “mock war” against whites. Blacks acquiesced to a white run game, and even if pitted against a white opponent, blacks furthered the social understanding of traditionally white games as both white and *potentially* bi-racial. Johnson crossed the color line in a way that is useful to studying nationalism and masculinity at a pivotal period for race in both masculine and national identities. David Wiggins in “The Notion of Double Consciousness and the Involvement of Black Athletes in American Sport,” says “much of what Johnson did, however, was merely an expression of the American way of life.”¹²⁶

The way Wiggins employs W.E.B. DuBois term “double consciousness” is instructive. Wiggins employs DuBois's term to invoke the idea that African Americans, who participate in black organizations such as Black Leagues and Negro Leagues, desire to maintain black identity while pursuing the franchise.¹²⁷ Johnson is a curious study because in some ways he conformed to racial models prescribed to him through a history of blacks as a subordinate, even degenerative group, but he also dispelled turn of the century notions of not only race but nationalism and masculinity. Johnson in ways straightforward and tricky, straddled the worlds of white and African American consciousness. Remarkably, he expanded African American consciousness in a way that exceeded DuBois's limited definition by performing in new ways that left whites outside or, for those who dared to enter, inside a new world where a black man controlled the outcome. This was ideologically expansive as Johnson consciously dictated the terms of engagement through his style and a kind of dozens for grown-ups, some of whom did

126 David Wiggins, “The Notion of Double-Consciousness and the Involvement of Black Athletes in American Sport,” in *Ethnicity and Sport in North American History and Culture*, eds. Wiggins and Eisen, (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press), 140.

127 *Ibid.*, 133.

not enjoy the lesson.

The ways in which Johnson expressed his masculinity included fighting but fighting in a way that incorporated a racial component that could be considered an affront to racially deterministic prescriptions. Johnson aggravated the establishment of the boxing world which was precariously balanced on notions of white superiority. His style was for the most part defensive as he waited for his white opponent to make a mistake. He used his defense in methodical ways. Before he won the championship, he often did just enough to win. It is important to evaluate his style as an extension of “double consciousness.” Johnson, as a performer, began to travel and compete across the color line in Chicago and California often winning on points as opposed to knock outs.¹²⁸

Johnson was gaining a reputation as a defensive fighter. His style contained feints and movement and as a *Los Angeles Times* reporter in 1904 called it “pretty.” Johnson fought repeatedly with Sam Langford and Sam McVey, two skilled black boxers. He became very active in the first years of the twentieth century. He beat Jack Jeffries, brother of the champion Jim Jeffries. He defeated Klondike Haynes in Memphis, Hank Griffin in Los Angeles, and Mexican Pete Everett. Johnson traveled by rail and fought Sandy Ferguson in Boston before returning to California. The East was not as liberal as California and Progressive Reform on the east coast objected to the monied aspect of the sport and made prize-fighting illegal with the Lewis Law.¹²⁹ Roosevelt who called boxing a “first class sport” said that “when money comes in at the gate, sport flies out at the window.” There was also a hidden meaning in Roosevelt's “first class” as Roosevelt believed the money to be a source for demoralization. “The money prizes fought for are enormous and a potential source of demoralization in themselves, while they are

¹²⁸ For more on African American defensive fighters, see Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 29.

¹²⁹ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 41.

often so arranged as either to put a premium on crookedness or else to reward nearly as amply the man who fails as the man who succeeds.”¹³⁰ Michael Isenberg states the opposition to prize-fighting succinctly in his biography of the late nineteenth century bare-knuckler John L. Sullivan. “A solid phalanx of opposition thus convoyed the sport on its ignominious passage through American life in the nineteenth century. On grounds of morality, evolution, legality, and commercialism, boxing, especially in its prizefighting variant, stood tried and condemned by every segment of middle and upper-class opinion and by many in the lower orders as well.”¹³¹

Johnson returned to the west coast and won the the black heavyweight Championship against Denver Ed Martin who outweighed him considerably. He remained active and fought African Americans and whites but seemed to be content to showcase his skill without going for the knockout. For several years Johnson managed himself, having parted ways with white manager Frank Carillo. Carillo was upset at being fired and charged Johnson with stealing his watch. Johnson had become stylistically refined outside of the ring as well. He talked in an accent that he picked up from a West Indian boxer and traveling companion, he parted his hair, and wore flamboyant outfits. Most of all, with a new reputation as a skilled boxer and with a new desire to show he could “put opponents away” Johnson began calling out the champion, Jim Jeffries. Jeffries must have recognized Johnson's ability because, even though he had fought African Americans before, he refused to fight Johnson.

Johnson formed an alliance with a new white manager, Sam Fitzpatrick, and used that management to great advantage. Johnson was beginning to become a draw and demanding real money. He lost a fight with a Southerner named Marvin Hart. Hart said, “What has this coon

130 Ibid.

131 Isenberg. *John L. Sullivan and His America*. Page 73.

ever done that should make him a favorite over me?”¹³² The fight was close but the referee awarded it to Hart saying Hart was the aggressor. Johnson said he was robbed. A year later Hart was the champion. Jim Jeffries had vacated the title retiring undefeated and hand-picked Hart to fight Jack Root. Root became nominated by Jeffries who was a close acquaintance with Root's manager, who also wrote for the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*. Hart defeated Root but lost the title to Tommy Burns on his first defense.

The title had lost much of its nineteenth century luster and the new champion, Tommy Burns, went abroad to find bigger paydays. Johnson's manager Fitzpatrick had global connections and the ability to create purses large enough to bring many white fighters across the color line. This was the case when after chasing Burns across three continents over the course of more than a year, Burns agreed to fight Johnson. The fact that the title and prize fighting in general was less regarded in the states was surely an opportunity for Johnson. Burns was called “money mad” by John L. Sullivan and a “man who upsets good American precedents.”¹³³ The significant purse was the deciding factor as Burns had avoided other black contenders such as George Godfrey, Sam McVey, and Peter Jackson, who incidentally died destitute in Australia several years before that location was picked for the Burns/Johnson title fight.¹³⁴ Elliott Gorn calls Peter Jackson “the most formidable challenger of all” to Sullivan's 1892 title.¹³⁵ It is Johnson's physical ability, but also his shrewd use of, and at times bold abandonment of, “double-consciousness,” that has made his legacy all the more intriguing. Johnson's ability to defeat the best of the white fighters over the next decade places him at the top of many

132 Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 36.

133 Isenberg. *John L. Sullivan and His America*, 357.

134 Ibid.

135 Gorn, *Manly Art*, 238.

sportswriter's list as the most influential black athlete in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹³⁶

The legality/illegality of prizefighting in this time offered a language tightened by reformers but invariably loosened by promoters who could pull the purse strings of white fans bent on seeing their white fighter uphold the racial superiority of the white man. This was certainly true of Australian fans in the Tommy Burns/Jack Johnson World Heavyweight Championship Fight. Hugh McIntosh, a fight promoter who had been a fighter himself and who had made a fortune as a pie salesman at Australian parks and sporting events, built an open-air stadium and enticed champion Burns to defend his title there, first against some of Australia's contenders, and then against Jack Johnson. Burns could not resist the thirty thousand dollars offered him by Hugh “Huge” McIntosh and, after beating Bill Squires and Bill Lang, he agreed to defend the Heavyweight Championship of the World against Johnson.

Social Darwinists exclaimed the virtue and survivability of their race through their skin color. This society was increasingly reliant on technology and technology promoted competition. In Darwinian terms, survival of the fittest had class implications. The upper and new middle class saw sports as a testing ground for affirming manliness, an idea that was increasingly relevant with new external pressures from immigration. White men relied on science and their understanding of scientific suggestions for maintaining or reinvigorating racial and masculine dominance. Their participation in manly sports remedied the potential loss of force due to a newly modern and effeminate society.¹³⁷ The fight with Tommy Burns was supposed to prove white dominance. White Americans waited for press releases of the result (some just hoped Johnson would lose and stay in Australia) and confirmation of there “scientific”

¹³⁶ Dan Burley, “The Top Ten of the First Fifty Years,” in *The Uneven Playing Field*, eds. David Wiggins and Patrick Miller, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 224.

¹³⁷ Gorn, *Manly Art*, 188.

beliefs. White belief in their racial superiority was at a high point. Australians reflected an unapologetic racism. A newspaper recaptured this essentially nationalist racism through its banner, who had changed its slogan from “Australia for Australians” to “Australia for Whites.”¹³⁸

Jack London, author of several books including *Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and *The Road* and many short stories, covered the fight for the *New York Herald*. London said, “Personally, I was with Burns all the way. He is a white man and so am I.” London compared Burns to a toy automaton and “Burns was a toy in his hands.” Johnson beat him all the while continuing “to grin and chuckle and smile his golden smile.”¹³⁹ It would be time for Jim Jeffries, London said, to “emerge from his alfalfa farm and remove that smile from Johnson's face.”¹⁴⁰ Johnson fired his manager, or according to some, was fired by Fitzpatrick. What people agree on is that the two parted ways because Johnson's white lover, Hattie McClay, and his manager could not get along. Johnson had also pulled Fitzpatrick's nose after a dispute over money.¹⁴¹ Nose-pulling has a masculine meaning. According to Kenneth Greenberg, pulling a man's nose was one of the greatest insults and another way of accusing a man of lying.¹⁴²

Johnson was a celebrity in the Chicago African American community. He returned to Chicago where streets were overflowing with thousands of fight fans. The *Chicago Defender's* Jackson Stovall wrote, “There is not a patriotic Negro in America today, no matter what his views might be in regard to the prize ring and its principals, who is not proud of the fact...that one of his race reigns supreme in his vocation, though it be from a pugilistic standpoint.” Stovall

138 Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 59.

139 Jack London, *Jack London Reports: War Correspondence, Sports Articles, and Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. King Hendricks and Irving Shepard (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 258-259, 261, 263-264 quoted in Thomas Hietala, *The Fight of the Century: Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and the struggle for Racial Equality* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002), 29.

140 Jack London, (*New York Times*, Dec 28, 1908), 5 quoted in Nat Fleischer, “*Fighting Furies: Story of the Golden Era of Jack Johnson, Sam Langford and Their Contemporaries* (New York, n.d.), 44 in Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 68.

141 Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 48.

142 Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 16.

predicted Johnson's contribution with, "Supremacy in one vocation begets supremacy in another."¹⁴³ It was a victory for African Americans that could not be taken away but whites coolly looked for a "white hope." Johnson's embrace of the role placed on him as a bad man mirrored his fearless pursuit of the title.¹⁴⁴ At the same time he embraced the role of immortal much as the folklore bad men like Railroad Bill, Bad Lee Brown, and Stagolee had welcomed a questionable fame. Johnson, however, also challenged the station as he challenged the endings to those myths and stories. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was established in 1909 and a year later the National Urban League. W.E.B. DuBois, president of the N.A.A.C.P. supported Johnson but attributed to him an "unforgivable blackness." It was this blackness and not his behavior that was the basis for white objection, said DuBois.

Competing narratives of Johnson's responsibility and importance existed on both sides of the color line but also among members of the black race. Booker T. Washington publicly denounced Johnson. DuBois celebrated Johnson and likened white stereotypes to Johnson's unforgivable blackness, a blackness that conjures up both manifestations of that double consciousness: minstrel and bad man. The appropriation of these stereotypes also happened across the color line. For whites, Johnson's attributes could be traced to stereotypes that were assigned to slaves. These were blanket stereotypes that would encompass the entire African American race. Simple athletic achievement then could be positioned accordingly by this overshadowing image. "Lifting the veil" of meaning of DuBois attribution of unforgivable blackness to Johnson, one might surmise that DuBois felt Johnson had little reason to be repentant. The blame, for DuBois, was on those who stereotyped Johnson. James Weldon

143 Ibid., 32.

144 Johnson chased Burns for several years through Ireland, England, and Australia. (Several continents when you include America.)

Johnson admired Jack Johnson and said Johnson was one of the most interesting people he met while in San Francisco. James Weldon Johnson in his book, *Along the Way*, recalls Frederick Douglass's esteem for Peter Jackson, the Caribbean born fighter. James Weldon Johnson says he believes Jack Johnson, like Peter Jackson, combated the question of African American inferiority.¹⁴⁵ James Weldon Johnson was one of the first scholars to position black athletes “within the larger cosmos of African American achievement.”¹⁴⁶

Jeffries eventually emerged from his farm but not until Johnson had beaten several white contenders. (Some of the challengers are as follows: Victor McClaglen, who co-starred with John Wayne in *The Quiet Man* and later won an Academy Award in John Ford's *The Informer*, Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, Antonio Rossilano or just Tony Ross, Al Kaufman, Stanislaus Kiecal better known as Stanley Ketchel or “The Assassin.”) All good fighters but none of them Jim Jeffries. Jeffries had retired undefeated with a great percentage of his fights ending in knockout.¹⁴⁷ Johnson found a new manager in George Little who had failed in Chicago politics and saw in Johnson an opportunity to regain some social status. Counting Carillo and then Fitzpatrick, Little was his third white manager. Johnson, as repeated in Randy Robert's book *Papa Jack*, told the newspaper that managers, like taxi drivers and lawyers, were occasionally needed but it was best never to keep one for too long.¹⁴⁸ Johnson and his new manager drank and enjoyed the Levee which was controlled by Irish politicians that made side money managing the vice district. Little had worked for Michael Kenna, one of the political bosses, and Little and Johnson were fond of the women, gambling, and booze. Johnson spent much of 1909 and 1910

145 James Weldon Johnson, *Along this Way* (New York: The Viking Press, 1933) Johnson also co-composed “Lift Every Voice and Sing” with his brother.

146 Wiggins and Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field*, 145.

147 Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 26.

148 Jack Johnson quoted in *San Francisco Post* January 10, 1903, GPC. Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 28.

entertaining himself in this way. He had taken up with a white prostitute named Belle Schreiber but they were not exclusive. He met another white woman at a race track named Etta Duryea, ex-wife of an Eastern horse racing patron.

Etta fell in love with Johnson but as their relationship devolved, much as his fitness, Etta found herself sharing her husband with several of his past acquaintances. Belle Schreiber Johnson, Hattie McClay Johnson, and now Etta Johnson, as Jack referred to them, were all part of a world American Reformers held up as the embodiment of the evil that threatened America. Tex Rikard, who was a relative unknown in big-time boxing circles, vied with Hugh "Huge" McIntosh and other promoters to gain the rights for promoting Jack Johnson/Jim Jeffries match. Rikard was an American success story orphaned at age ten and left to his wits. He moved from Missouri to Texas where he was a frontier marshal but eventually joined the gold rush in Alaska. He came back to his home country after losing a small fortune at poker but not before a stint in the gold fields of South Africa. His chance to promote this fight came with the limited experience he found in Goldfield Nevada, where the opportunistic Rikard staged fights and ran a saloon.

Rikard won the rights to promote the boxing match in a closed bid which offered one hundred and one thousand dollars, seventy five percent to the winner and twenty five to the loser. He also offered a percentage of the film rights and vaudeville contracts. Johnson had made as much as twenty five hundred dollars in a week on the stage and there was a long history of ex-champions making considerable money for these traveling performances.¹⁴⁹ A film of the fight, provided the white Jeffries won, could be very lucrative. Not only would the purse reach six figures but the racial overtone- America's white hero coming out of retirement to fend off this

¹⁴⁹ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 90.

black scourge- was quickly making this match the most important in America's history.

The fight met with opposition from reformers and, after California's governor received word from the San Francisco Board of Trade which was informed by Congressman William Bennett of New York that the fight would interfere with securing the Panama Exposition of 1913 for San Francisco, the California governor told Rikard he would have to find another venue. Rikard, though he had invested nearly a quarter of a million dollars of his and his backers money, did not panic. The fight was scheduled for July 4, 1910 in Reno, Nevada. Independence day was historically a day to parade and celebrate nationalism and fights were common occurrences on July Fourth. Reno was chosen because of its access to the railroad and incentives offered by the governor of Nevada who said no amount of protest could make him change his mind. A Chicago minister was quoted as saying, "There should be some way by which our nation could recall the charter of a state that has become a desert and a moral menace. Nevada has no right to remain a part of our nation."¹⁵⁰

John L. Sullivan signed a contract with the *New York Times* as a fight correspondent and joined more than five hundred correspondents which included other former champions like Gentleman Jim Corbett and Tommy Burns but also some of the leading writers of the day such as Jack London and Alfred Henry Lewis.¹⁵¹ John L. was ringside for the biggest sporting event to that date. The band played "Dixie" as the combatants entered the ring. Johnson came in first with a silver robe made of silk and an American Flag as a Belt. Jeffries, who had been reminded for more than a year that it was his duty to return the title to whites, entered the ring to cheers from the massive crowd of white men. There were several women viewing the fight from a

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 96.

¹⁵¹ Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America*, 358. For more on these "sportswriters" see: Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 99.

special section and there was a camera set up to film the spectacle. Johnson revealed how he felt in, *In the Ring and Out*. “I realized that my victory in this event meant more than on any previous occasion. It wasn't just the championship that was at stake- it was my own honor, and in a degree the honor of my race.”¹⁵²

Men from England, France, Germany, and Australia joined the celebration in Reno, Nevada on Independence Day when Johnson whipped Jeffries soundly. The beating left no doubt about who was the better man and John L. Sullivan, who had referred to Johnson before the fight in stereotypical ways, said in his ghost-written front page article that Johnson reminded him of himself. After speaking of his “well known antipathy for [Johnson's] race” Sullivan compared Johnson's domination of his era to his own and commented that Johnson's lack of discipline (like his own) kept him from being an even greater fighter.¹⁵³ The ghost writer may have overlaid the cultural significance paraphrasing Sullivan's halfhearted tribute but as Sullivan's “racial slurring” of Johnson seems to have ended after that momentous encounter, perhaps, one might graciously call the racist Sullivan a “product of his times.” Sullivan admired Johnson's masculinity and saw something of himself in the way Johnson expressed himself in and out of the ring. It will remain a mystery why Sullivan never crossed the color line. Did he not wish to “stoop to the level” of the station African Americans represented in class or was it a racially informed decision? Or did John L. see in black fighters men who could upset his claim of physical supremacy?

Not surprisingly, riots followed. In Texas, an African American man named Charles

¹⁵² Johnson, Jack. *Jack Johnson-In the Ring-and Out* (Chicago: National Sports Publishing, 1927) quoted in *Unlevel*

Playing Field, Wiggins and Miller, 74.

¹⁵³ Isenberg. *John L. Sullivan and His America*, 359.

Williams had his throat slit after celebrating Johnson's thrashing of Jeffries.¹⁵⁴ Race but also class order became upset in cities where white gangs terrorized blacks.¹⁵⁵ White gangs of the lower class attacked blacks and, again, it was Johnson, an apostle of savagery, and not white racism, that was to blame. Sailors and soldiers attacked blacks.¹⁵⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, a staunch supporter of John L. Sullivan, decided prize fighting was not the sport to reflect progress and needed to be banned.¹⁵⁷ Newspapers were criticized and public outrage about the prospect of the film being released reached such heights as to warrant mayors to publicly denounce the possibility of anyone viewing Johnson pummeling Jeffries.

The celebrations were riotous but not all devolved into violence. Johnson stopped first in Chicago and was greeted by thousands of blacks. The *Chicago Defender* advertised a miniature statue of Johnson “for the home of every negro.”¹⁵⁸ He was written about in heroic fashion. His best qualities like volunteering with children, church, and family were presented and his shortcomings like drinking, cavorting, and representing blacks poorly, were not mentioned. As to the violence, one black reporter said, “It is better for us to succeed though some die, than for us to fail, though us all live.”¹⁵⁹ In a speech he made before going to the house he had bought his mother he compared himself to Napoleon. Egocentric, but aware of the meaning he gave to his fans, Johnson stated, “I only hope the colored people of the world will not be like the French. History tells us that when Napoleon was winning all his victories that the French were with him, but when he lost, the people turned against him. When Jack Johnson meets defeat, I want the colored people to love me the same as when I was the champion.” He was accompanied from

154 Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 111.

155 Ibid., 110.

156 Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America*, 74.

157 Ibid.

158 Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 114.

159 Ibid.

there to New York by *Ring Magazine* editor Nat Fleischer where, again, he was mobbed by fans.

The business of the stage promised even more money but it would be a month before Vaudeville was safe for Johnson. By mid-August Johnson was making “easy” money smiling and reproducing the part cast for him. He toured with several burlesque shows and made plenty of money but off stage he seemed troubled. He distracted himself with theater girls and even a brief stint at race car driving.¹⁶⁰ By 1911, and with few serious contenders at home, Johnson went back to England in an attempt to secure a fight with Bombardier Wells and play the Oxford Music Hall. England Reformers had the prospective fight with Wells banned on the issue the fights were “attracting profligate people” such as gamblers who desired “the sensational and brutal which is inconsistent with the manhood that makes a great nation.”¹⁶¹ Drinkers and gamblers who would want to watch Johnson/Wells, somewhat ironically, brought the Free Church movement together. The matter took considerable debate and eventually Winston Churchill under considerable pressure claimed the prize-fight to be illegal.

Returning to the States, he eventually found a game opponent. Fireman Jim Flynn head butted, wrestled and cussed. Johnson talked to his wife and manager while fighting Flynn, who was no match for him. The fight was a financial failure and the embarrassment of another white fighter led to the banning of prize-fight films by Congress. The bill sponsored by Representative Seaborn Roddenberry and North Carolina Senator Furnifold was racially motivated though it was framed otherwise. Johnson had success as a businessman opening a drinking establishment on Chicago's Southside around the time of the Flynn fight. Robert Abbott of the *Chicago Defender* praised Johnson's entrepreneurship and philanthropy the Cafe de Champion supported. Johnson

¹⁶⁰ *Unforgivable Blackness*, directed by Ken Burns, 2005, Film.

¹⁶¹ Stewart Mews, “Puritanicalism, Sport, and Race: A Symbolic Crusade of 1911,” in *Studies in Church History* ed. O.J. Cuming and Derek Baker, vol. III (Cambridge, England, 1972) 305-308 quoted in Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 128.

kept company in the upstairs portion of his business with several singing girls and a new white secretary named Lucille Cameron.

In September, Johnson's legal wife Etta, committed suicide. Johnson gave a letter Etta had written but not sent to her mother that painted him as a supportive husband to the *Chicago Defender*. The newspaper's Robert Abbott said, "Like wolves the reporters for the city papers tried in every way to have someone say that Jack was in the room at the time of the shooting."¹⁶² Etta had recently lost her father and it seems this contributed largely to her depression.¹⁶³ Many blamed the death of her father; many blamed Jack Johnson. Some took a deeper look at turn of the century society. The *Chicago Broad-Ax* published a letter Etta had written to a friend that revealed her state of mind. "I am a marked woman. I cannot go any place and am given no consideration as a human being. Once I was a well known woman. I was liked by everybody. Now, because my husband is a black man, I have become a recluse- a social outcast. I wish I had never married Jack." Jack mourned publicly but he also took solace in his new secretary and by the following month authorities began investigating their relationship.

Lucille Cameron confessed to loving Johnson and agent Martin Lins could not produce any evidence to support that Cameron was a victim of the Mann Act, a new act put forth by James Mann of Illinois. The act was designed to stop the importation of alien women for the purpose of "sex slavery." It also prohibited the importation of women from one state to another for immoral purposes. Gordon Russell of Texas said "no nation can rise higher than the estimate it places upon the virtue and purity of its womanhood."¹⁶⁴ Russell went on to say "More than forty years ago this country was drenched in fraternal blood and offered up the lives of nearly a

¹⁶² Hietala, *The Fight of the Century*, 59.

¹⁶³ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 142.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

million of the very pick and flower of its citizenship in in the struggle to abolish the slavery of the black man. In God's name, can we do less now than pass this bill, which will be a step towards abolishing the slavery of white women?"¹⁶⁵

Johnson was separated from Lucille Cameron who was held in a Rockford, Illinois jail. The newspapers condemned Johnson and so did Booker T. Washington. Les Walton of the *New York Age* said that Johnson acted with "utter disregard" for public opinion and C.W. Posey of the *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote, "We can climb no higher than the lowest among us." Washington said of Johnson, "It shows the folly of those persons who think that they alone will be held responsible for the evil they do." Johnson retaliated against Washington by saying, "I never got caught in the wrong flat. I never got beat up because I looked in the wrong key hole." Johnson was referring to an incident the previous year in which the statesman was accused of being a "peeping Tom."¹⁶⁶

While the prosecution hid Lucille away, they searched for Belle Schrieber, a woman Johnson was known to have traveled from state to state with. Johnson was eventually charged with transporting the prostitute across state lines. He was convicted of traveling with her from Pittsburgh to Chicago. Johnson was bonded out the same day but the man who put up a surety bond was sentenced to a year in Joliet Prison when the property he had put up turned out to be in his wife's name. Johnson married Lucille Cameron while out on bail and legislation attacking mixed couples quickly followed. Roddenberry of Georgia said, "No brutality, no infamy, no degradation in all the years of Southern slavery, possessed such a villainous character and such atrocious qualities as the provision of the laws of Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, and other

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 149.

states which allow the marriage of the negro, Jack Johnson, to a woman of Caucasian strain.”¹⁶⁷ Johnson eventually fled the country after being indicted on eleven counts, ranging for “aiding prostitution and debauchery to unlawful sexual intercourse and crimes against nature.”¹⁶⁸

Jack Johnson was found guilty by a “jury of his peers,” twelve white men. He made bail and fled. He was received with a mixture of interest and scorn abroad but managed to secure some stage performances, and by the end of 1913, secured a title defense against a black American, “Battling” Jim Johnson, in France. The fight was dull and ended in a draw. He then defended against Frank Moran, an Irish American. This fight in Paris generated twenty rounds of Johnson, the defensive wizard, and Moran, the scrappy but sorely outclassed opponent. Johnson won but fans were not thrilled. Archduke Ferdinand was killed in Bosnia by an assassin hours after the fight and the beginning of a world war changed Johnson's plans to stay in Paris.

At “home” Woodrow Wilson was president. Wilson, like Roosevelt, was pro-Union but the North Carolinian who had studied at Princeton had strong racial sentiments. He, under Southern pressure, advocated for segregation in all government departments and “as a president of southern descent, the color line seemed an appropriate measure to apply to black people.”¹⁶⁹ Roosevelt had questionable reactions to events involving African Americans like soldiers at Brownsville but he had publicly and privately defended blacks and had, in visible ways, evolved his deterministic views from his time as a Teutonic disciple of John Burgess at Columbia. He wrote in a private letter to Owen Wister, who in authoring *The Virginian*, a novel not unlike Thomas Nelson Page's deluded fictions, had justified Southern efforts to keep the vote away from blacks. He criticized another novel of his friend Wister's, *Lady Baltimore*, but added, “I

167 Hietala, *Fight of the Century*, 71.

168 Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 161.

169 Gould, Lewis. *Reform and Regulation: American Politics, 1900-1916* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1978), 151.

entirely agree with you that as a race and in the mass they are altogether inferior to the whites” but “admitting all that truthfully be said against the Negro, it also remains true that a great deal that is untrue is said against him; and that much more is untruthfully said in favor of the white man who lives beside and upon him.” Roosevelt continued in his correspondence with Wister to admit to failures in advancing the situation of blacks but blamed these failures on Southern opposition. Southern politicians “who in the Senate yell about the purity of the white blood, deceived me into appointing postmasters whom I found had colored mistresses and colored children,” Roosevelt told Wister.¹⁷⁰

Wilson shared a racially Teutonic ancestral education and his “concept of the nation included only white Americans of European ancestry.”¹⁷¹ An early divide existed between African American leaders as to their support of Wilson. Booker T. Washington supported Taft who called Washington, “one of the greatest men of this and the last century, white or black.” Washington assured Taft that “five-sixths of the 187 black newspapers in the country favored him.” W.E.B. DuBois's, *Crisis*, and William Monroe Trotter's *Guardian* favored Wilson. DuBois said of Wilson and the Democratic party, “it is better to elect Woodrow Wilson ...and prove once and for all if the Democratic party dares to be Democratic when it comes to black men.”¹⁷² Woodrow Wilson, if not overtly, catered to the racial segregationists of the South by filling his cabinet with Southern racist. Wilson was not the man Du Bois and Trotter hoped he would be. An indication of his allegiance to the ideals of “Old South” racial order could be seen at his inauguration in 1913. According to Lawrence Friedman in *White Savage*, “the atmosphere

170 Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, 107.

171 Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and his Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 24.

172 James D. Startt, *Woodrow Wilson and the Press: Prelude to the Presidency* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 220.

in the nation's capital bore ominous signs for Negroes. Against a background of 'Rebel Yells' and bands blaring 'Dixie,' Edward Douglass White, ex-Confederate, ex-Ku Klux Klansman, and Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, administered the oath of office to Woodrow Wilson.”¹⁷³

Jack Johnson eked by in Europe. He was no longer the center of attention he had once been and he longed to return home. Johnson finally was defeated by a “white Hope” in Havana Cuba when he was thirty seven years old.¹⁷⁴ He lived in Spain for some time and eventually moved closer to home settling in Mexico. Mexico was a place where Johnson retrieved some of his former glory for a time but Tijuana was politically volatile and an alliance with those in power proved a disaster when that power changed hands. Johnson was desperate to return home even if that meant incarceration. He was allowed back July 20, 1920 and served a year in Leavenworth. He was met by thousands in a homecoming celebration in Chicago and then in New York where he led a parade in his honor in Harlem. Johnson wore his hat at a tilt and stepped lively with a cane wearing a black suit with white pinstripes. He was forty two years old.

James Weldon Johnson, associate editor of the *New York Age*, said even though Johnson lost favor with many of his race for the way he represented the image of blacks to whites, the man was still “something of a racial asset.” He said, “the white race, in spite of its vaunted civilization, pays more respect to the argument of force than any other race in the world.”¹⁷⁵

Other black editors noted that while Roosevelt and Wilson viewed aggression as a threat, they

¹⁷³ Friedman, *White Savage*, 156.

¹⁷⁴ Graeme Kent, *The Great White Hopes: The Quest to Defeat Jack Johnson*. United Kingdom: Sutton Publishing, 2005. Chapter 12- “The Pottawatomie Giant” -Jess Willard, a reformer's dream, was six and a half feet tall and did not drink or smoke.

¹⁷⁵ James Weldon Johnson quoted in *New York Age* April 8, 1915 in Hietala, *Fight of the Century*, 104.

respected it.¹⁷⁶ Booker T. Washington, who had publicly denounced Johnson but privately rooted for him, also valued the kind of force Johnson could display.¹⁷⁷ Gail Bedermen in *Manliness and Civilization*, says that white men at in the first years of the twentieth century could not bear Johnson's "challenge to their manhood. The men who rioted, the Congress that passed laws suppressing Johnson's fight films, the Bureau of Investigation authorities who bent the laws to jail him- all detested the way Johnson's shredded the ideologies of white male power embedded in 'civilization.'"¹⁷⁸

176 Ibid. Booker T. Washington wrote a Japanese diplomat that "the sudden rise of Japan has nowhere been studied with

greater interest than by the Negroes of America."

177 Wiggins and Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field*, 78. Washington arranged a room at Tuskegee to monitor Johnson's fights.

178 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 42.

IV. JOE LOUIS CHALLENGES THE COLOR LINE

When Jack Johnson won the Heavyweight Championship of the World, William Monroe's Boston newspaper *The Guardian* and W.E.B. DuBois's *The Crisis* were advocating progress for African American's through education and political participation. Booker T. Washington's programs advocating racial advancement through the attainment of a vocation were better known in the South than were the politics of Harvard educated Trotter and DuBois.¹⁷⁹ When Johnson defended the title against Jim Jeffries in 1910, Edwin Bancroft Henderson had just co-written the first of a series of handbooks that emphasized proper behavior in African American athletes. According to David Wiggins, "The series is especially significant because it reflects both the immense pride that African Americans took in their own sporting organizations during the early decades of the twentieth century and their simultaneous concern that these organizations be as pristine as possible, devoid of much of the corruption that characterized white amateur sport during this period."¹⁸⁰ Joe Louis, like Jack Johnson, was born in the South, a South where Washington was relatively unknown and DuBois, Trotter, and Bancroft were unknown. Louis knew who Jack Johnson was, everybody did.

Early on, African Americans lacked a separate cohesive culture although they married one another, lived together, went to church together, and identified themselves against other groups. Growing up, Joe Louis had few black heroes. He knew about Johnson and knew the former champion had acted as a cohesive agent to a shattered group. When he moved to Detroit,

¹⁷⁹ John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Pivotal Decades: The United States 1900-1920* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 75.

¹⁸⁰ David Wiggins, *Glory Bound* (Syracuse University Press, 1997), 223.

his world changed and the tracks laid by men like Bancroft allowed Louis to participate in a sport in a gym with white children and other African Americans. “Scores of schools, churches, rec centers, and neighborhood clubs offered instruction.”¹⁸¹ DuBois argues in, “The Problem of Amusement,” that northern cities are filled with danger and that African American children need the church to offer recreation.¹⁸² DuBois uses the example of billiards to insist that the church can claim the game and offer an environment that does not involve the necessary evil side of gambling, drinking, and other vice that was then associated with billiards.

Joe Louis Barrow was born the seventh child to Munrow Barrow and Lily Reese Barrow, sharecroppers on a cotton farm outside Lafayette Alabama. Proud of his heritage, which included some Native American and Anglo Saxon but mostly African American ancestry, Louis also felt a sense of luck, perhaps even destiny, as the seventh child. Louis went to Mt. Sinai, a large one room church school that opened after harvest and closed in spring for planting. In his autobiography Louis talks about the struggle of poor people in the early nineteen hundreds. “Then meant hard times, no telephones, poor transportation, eight kids to raise on a poor-land farm.”¹⁸³ Two years after Louis's birth in the spring of 1914, his father, Munrow was committed to an insane asylum.

Louis moved when his mother sewed her fortune, which was little more than the clothes she and her eight children wore, with his new stepfather Pat Brooks, who also had eight children. The family lived for the next decade in the Buckalew Mountains of Alabama, not far from his first house or school. Louis and his mother and siblings and her new husband and his children all worked as sharecroppers and, though Louis was young and remembers having enough to eat

181 Richard Bak, *Joe Louis: The Great Black Hope* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1996), 26.

182 Dan Green and Edwin Driver, eds. *W.E.B. DuBois on Sociology and the Black Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) in *Unequal Playing Field*, Wiggins and Miller, 39.

183 Louis, *Joe Louis: My Life*, 7.

and a warm place to sleep, opportunities were limited and money was scarce . The family decided to follow the lead of visiting relatives who encouraged the family to relocate to Detroit.

The Ford factory hired Pat Brooks and Louis's older brothers but Louis had to wait nearly a year after his mother and her husband and the older boys went to Detroit before joining them. During this time, Louis lost interest in some of life's little pleasures in his slow paced life in Alabama and he dreamed of life in Detroit. Louis left Alabama for good in 1926 at the age of twelve and moved to a large wooden frame house with his mother and stepfather and extended family on the east side of Detroit until they got a place of their own.

Gangs ran bootleg liquor and stolen merchandise and murders were commonplace. Joe's mother saw to it that he went to Calvary Baptist and attended school at Duffield. Her influence on Joe is a steady refrain throughout *Joe Louis: My Life*. Louis hated school but fondly remembered assembly days where his mother dressed him in his best clothes and where the school allowed him to carry the flag. Louis was shy and stuttered and wound up in a vocational school. He made cabinets and tables and brought them home. Louis worked at whatever odd jobs he could find to help his family during the depression. His best friend Freddy, who was a sharply dressed, animated young man, usually partnered with him on various hustles which included working in produce, shining shoes, scrubbing floors, and delivering ice from a horse drawn ice wagon. Louis would often carry sixty pounds of ice up stairs to people who used the ice for their perishables. After all, the few refrigerators and freezers were not owned by poor folks. Freddy thought he could talk Joe into doing all the heavy lifting but Joe liked doing it and their partnership thrived. Louis's mother Lily was worried that he had begun to associate with the Catherine Street Gang.¹⁸⁴ His mother gave him money for violin lessons. Louis, who had

¹⁸⁴ Bak, *Joe Louis: The Great Black Hope*, 24.

dropped out of Bronson Vocational School, used the money for boxing lessons at Brewster Recreational Center and soon he had dropped his last name “Barrow” and fought under “Joe Louis” so his mother would not find out.

The checks Louis received for fighting supplemented his new work pushing truck bodies at the Briggs auto-body plant. He was, however, unable to train properly and with his mother's support, who had learned of Louis's potential, he left the plant and began to train full time. Soon the checks came weekly and he used them to buy groceries for his family. In 1931 the new Golden Gloves boxing program was started in Detroit. A local newspaper sponsored the boxers.¹⁸⁵ Louis met a trainer Holman Williams at Atler Ellis's Gym also known as Brewster's Gym who was about his age and from Florida. Williams was a promising middleweight but according to Louis's biographer Richard Bak, Williams was the wrong color and just too good. After training some, Louis did his first amateur match against Johnny Miler. Miler was an Olympic fighter on the 1932 team and out boxed Louis. Frustrated, Louis briefly went back to Ford. In his autobiography Louis said, “Eventually, I couldn't stand it anymore. I figured, if I'm going to hurt that much for twenty five dollars a week, I might as well go back and try fighting again.”¹⁸⁶ Louis left Ford in January of 1933 found success in 1933, winning Detroit's Golden Gloves tournament, and had the opportunity to start traveling to fight in other cities. He later said, “I saw things I wanted that I had never really known about. I met important people and wanted to be important, too.”¹⁸⁷

John Roxborough was an African American managing a few fighters in Detroit. He went to Louis's mother and, together, Louis and Roxborough asked for her consent to allow Louis,

185 *The Detroit Mirror* who initially sponsored Golden Gloves went out of business. *The Free Press* resumed G.G.

186 Louis, *Joe Louis: My Life*, 27.

187 Richard Bak, *Joe Louis*, 35.

who was now twenty, to fight professionally. Roxborough contacted an old friend in Chicago, Julian Black, who was well connected in the sport. Richard Bak describes Black as “a chunky numbers racketeer with a slight limp and shiny hair combed straight back.”¹⁸⁸ Louis went to live with Black in Chicago. Roxborough and Black were Louis's co-managers and found a trainer for Louis and set up a fight for him at Bacon Casino on the South Side of Chicago. Louis's trainer Jack Blackburn was an ex-fighter from Kentucky and a no-nonsense trainer who had Louis in great physical condition for his first fight. Louis won his professional debut by a first round knockout. The two African American managers and the African American trainer knew that Louis was no ordinary fighter. He would be someone special but he had to conduct himself as a gentleman.

Louis began dressing in the manner his managers dressed and he was asked to live by a set of rules. These rules were leaked to the press: Never take a picture with a white woman; No nightclubs; Never gloat; Maintain a deadpan expression in front of cameras; Live and fight clean. Joe Louis later said of Jack Johnson, “When I got to be champ, half the letters I got had some word about Jack Johnson. A lot was from old colored people in the South. They thought he disgraced the Negro. I just figured he did what he wanted to do, and what he did had no effect on me.”¹⁸⁹

Louis and his management were pressured by the Michigan Athletic Commission to hire a white manager. The commission threatened to keep Louis fighting only black fighters for small purses. Roxborough had Louis fight a few more times in Michigan and then most of his fights were in New York or Chicago. The *Chicago Defender*, an African American newspaper, was covering Louis in 1934 long before white newspapers began taking a second look at him.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 75.

According to Chris Mead, another Louis biographer, “Black papers were essentially middle class and conservative...actively worked to promote recognition of black leaders, artists, and heroes so absent from the white press.”¹⁹⁰ Louis learned that the black press could not get ringside seats. He and Hype Igoe, a white writer for the *Journal American*, pressured the promoters to set up an auxiliary press that included *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and other newspapers that could get ringside. Louis in his autobiography said, “This was a first time deal and I'm glad I had something to do with it.”¹⁹¹

Another first time deal was helping break the monopoly Jimmy Johnston had on Madison Square Garden. Louis was aided indirectly by William Randolph Hearst. Hearst newspapers *New York American* and *New York Journal* employed Damon Runyan, Edward J. Frayne and Bill Farnsworth. These journalists promoted boxing for various charities including Mrs. Hearst's milk fund for babies. The journalists decided to go into business with Mike Jacobs and compete against Jimmy Johnston, a decision which ended up backfiring for them. It did, however, have a benefit for Louis who was brought into the new organization by its president Mike Jacobs who needed a talent like Louis to help him break into the big money at Madison Square Garden. In 1935, Louis fought Primo Carnera, an Italian fighter, who was managed by Owney Madden. Madden owned the Cotton Club which had the best African American entertainers in the country but was a whites only club.

Carnera in a series of questionable fights gained the heavyweight championship and returned to Italy. He defended the title once in Italy, where Benito Mussolini cheered him as a hero of fascism. Carnera returned to the States and defeated Tommy Loughran in Miami before

190 Chris Mead, *Champion-Joe Louis: Black Hero in White America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 188.

191 Louis, *Joe Louis: My Life*, 55.

losing the championship to Max Baer in the summer of 1934. Louis was not a political person. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president at this time and Europe was on the brink of war. Benito Mussolini invaded Ethiopia killing and maiming Africans with mustard gas. Joe Louis became a defender of Africans in his fight against the Italian Carnera. Louis said, “The whole world was looking. Lots of black groups came up to camp telling me that I represented Ethiopia. They talked to me about Marcus Garvey, who I had never heard of. They told about his plan for black people to go back to Africa. They put a heavyweight on my twenty-year-old shoulders. Now, not only did I have to beat the man, but I had to beat him for a cause.”¹⁹²

Louis trained for the Carnera fight in Pompton Lakes in upstate New York at a local doctor's estate. Dr. Joseph Bier was threatened by the Ku Klux Klan but gave no ground. Louis and “Chappie,” his affectionate name for Blackburn, his African American trainer from Kentucky, prepared to fight the Italian giant. Louis destroyed the six and a half foot tall Carnera and was received by twenty thousand African Americans who gathered on Lenox Avenue in Harlem.¹⁹³ Bojangles Robinson, who Joe had met backstage at the whites only Cotton Club said, “I am so happy I could eat a mud sandwich!” Joe later recalled that it “was the night I remember best in all my fighting. If you was ever a raggedy kid and you come to something like that night you'd know. I don't thrill to things like some people. I only feel good. I felt the best that night.”¹⁹⁴ Louis returned to another celebration in Detroit. His mother took him to church where the Reverend J.H. Maston preached a sermon about gifts given to help mankind. Louis realized his responsibility to represent African Americans. He made plenty of choices that would have been frowned upon but he he did not do so publicly. He became the kind of fighter and man his

192 Ibid., 59.

193 Mead, *Champion*, 51.

194 Bak, *Joe Louis*, 92.

management had groomed him to be.

Louis's biggest fight came against Germany's Max Schmeling on the eve of America's entry into World War II. Schmeling had beaten Louis in 1936 and Louis never forgot. Louis attributed the loss to poor training. He had become fond of golf. In his non assuming way, Louis opened up professional golf to African American participants some years later.¹⁹⁵ For the second Schmeling fight, Louis left his golf clubs at home. He trained hard under Blackburn, who had once fought Jack Johnson in an exhibition. Louis had just defeated James Braddock and was now the Heavyweight Champion of the World.

Just as reporters built up the ethnic match with Carnera, they drew from long racial stereotypes to describe the white Braddock and the black Louis. Louis's camp embraced the stereotypes and actually claimed Louis was lazy. They did this to increase profits and the way they maximized profits was to play on this old stereotype but also to convince the public Braddock had a chance. The media covered Louis in a stereotypical way for most of his career. Playing up supposed racial and, at times, animal qualities of Louis, he was called "The Dark Destroyer," "The Sepia Slugger," "The Mahogany Maimer," "The Dark Dynamiter," "The Dusky David from Detroit," "The Sable Cyclone," "The Tawny Tiger-Cat," "The Saffron Sphinx," "The Dusky Downer," "Mike Jacob's Pet Pickaninny," "The Shufflin' Shadow," "The Saffron Sandman," "The Heavy-Fisted Harlemite," "The Coffee-Colored Kayo King," "The Murder Man of those Maroon Mitts," "The Tan-Skinned Terror," "The chocolate Chopper," "The Mocha Mauler," "The Tan Tarzan of Thump," and many more. The one that stuck was "The Brown

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Louis, who was an avid golfer, played in a Chevrolet sponsored tournament in San Diego. He publicly denounced the PGA for barring African American players, two of which were his friends Eural Clark and Bill Spiller. He was also instrumental in mentoring several other athletes including Walker Smith (Sugar Ray Robinson) and Jackie Robinson.

Bomber.”¹⁹⁶

When Joe Louis sought to avenge his lone defeat and again do battle with Max Schmeling, both the United States and Germany embraced their fighters not only as representatives of their nation's peoples but also as representatives of their nations' respective ideologies. The ideological imperative of national politics in Germany positioned the Aryan race above and superior to all other races and ethnic groups. The Berlin Olympics just a couple of years before the Louis/Schmeling rematch was a chance for African Americans, like Louis's fellow Alabamian Jesse Owens, to upstage the “master race.” It was also an opportunity for white Americans to root for their fellow Americans and take a hard look at themselves and their policies that perpetuated a second class citizenship for African Americans.

Long before the Olympics or his rematch with Schmeling, Joe Louis progressed from being just another poor black boy with a modicum of athletic potential to an up and coming black boxer who carried himself with a quiet but fierce dignity to a world class black athlete who would force a dialogue for inclusion. As a symbol for African Americans, Louis sought for his people an acceptance into the world of sports and beyond. Unlike Jack Johnson, whose personality was seen as abrasive and undignified by most whites, Joe Louis appeared to accept the rules made for men of color, rules made by white men who were very protective of the society they ruled. To challenge white society's general idea of their own sovereignty, Louis played by their rules and slowly acclimated them to the idea that a black man could conduct himself as a champion and a gentleman.

Studying Louis, one begins to realize the extent to which society was segregated. According to biographer Chris Mead, “The white press ignored more substantial black leaders.”

¹⁹⁶ Mead, *Champion*, 50.

and activists like W.E.B. DuBois and A. Philip Randolph appeared sparingly in the papers. Dancers and actors only appeared in stereotyped roles such as Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, who was successful when he played the role white society was comfortable with.¹⁹⁷ Louis was seen as an everyman who could represent African Americans but also as a poor Alabama kid that people of the depression era could relate to. Richard Bak says, “Most of all, Americans could appreciate the rags-to-riches tale of an Alabama sharecropper who had, in classic Horatio Alger fashion, pulled himself out of poverty...His image was that of a humble modest, hard- working, and thankful young man.”¹⁹⁸ When organizations like the N.A.A.C.P. rarely made the front page of newspapers like *The New York Time*, Louis was able to enter the households of white Americans.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then governor of New York, wrote Louis and encouraged him to be a representative for African Americans. Roosevelt said, “The qualities which may soon make you a world champion should call to the attention of the people the world over, that the good in you can also be found in others of your race, and used for their own welfare, and the welfare of humanity at large. So, Joe, you may soon have on your strong hands the job of representative-at-large of your people.”¹⁹⁹ Roosevelt became president and Louis became the Heavyweight Champion of the World. Roosevelt sent a private car to bring Louis to the White House. Louis in his autobiography said, “White Americans- even while some of them were still lynching black people in the South- were depending on me to knockout Germany.”²⁰⁰ Roosevelt told Joe that America was depending on him.

African American athletes showcased their physical and emotional dexterity in Berlin Germany at the 1936 Olympics. A boycott by American athletes was narrowly avoided and

197 Mead, *Champion*, 48.

198 Bak, *Joe Louis*, 108.

199 Ibid., 110.

200 Louis, *Joe Louis: My Life*, 137.

African Americans Ben Johnson, Cornelius Johnson, Jesse Owens, Ralph Metcalfe, and Eulace Peacock decided to participate in the militaristic German carnival. The African American athletes spoiled the Olympics for Herr Adolf Hitler who reportedly told Baldur von Schirach, leader of the Hitler Youth, that Americans should have been ashamed of themselves for “letting negroes win medals for them.”²⁰¹ Max Schmeling, who had defeated Louis in Louis's first loss in 1936, was used as a propaganda tool by the Nazi party. Louis's defeat hit African Americans particularly hard but the wins by African Americans at the 1936 Olympics, particularly in the context of Naziism, bolstered racial pride and pride in country.

Louis's rematch with Schmeling in 1938 was not obscured by the fact that Nazi Germany espoused white supremacy and aspired for no less than world domination forced Americans to view this fight in a political context. In America, Max Schmeling became the Nazi villain and Louis, though still qualified in racial terms, was America's best chance to overcome the evil doctrines of Hitler. A West Virginia editorialist wrote, “Race prejudice should have NO place in sports. But Hitler has created a situation which the civilized world cannot and will not overlook...Using sentiment- and judgment too- I choose Joe Louis, an American Negro, to beat the ears off Max.”²⁰² Louis remained a symbol and little more to mainstream white America. His first round knockout of Max Schmeling in their June 22, 1938 rematch solidified his legacy as an American hero but it would be the way he comported himself through the war years that made Louis the first black celebrity to really breakthrough to whites.

African American musicians paid tribute to Joe Louis. Paul Robeson teamed up with Richard Wright and Count Basie to make a hit called “King Joe.” Carl Martin's “Joe Louis Blues,” George Dewey Washington's “Joe Louis Chant,” Joe Pullum's “Joe Louis is the Man,”

²⁰¹ Anton Rippon, *Hitler's Olympics* (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Military, 2006), 151.

²⁰² Mead, *Champion*, 141.

Ike Smith's "Fighting Joe Louis," and Memphis Minnie McCoy's "Joe Louis Strutt" were just a few of the dozens of recordings that attest to his iconic national status.²⁰³ At a Navy Relief Society benefit at Madison Square Garden, Louis spoke a few words that were used in countless ads and recruitment campaigns. He said, "I have only done what any red-blooded American would do. We gonna do our part, and we will win, because we are on God's side. Thank you."²⁰⁴

Joe Louis remained in the shadow of Jack Johnson a long time before he received the endorsement of white sportswriters and editors. Louis ran six miles every morning and took his job and role as champion in the most professional sense. John Kieran of the *New York Times* referred to Louis as "Shufflin' Joe" and Paul Gallico of the *New York Daily News* referred to Louis as a savage individual. Louis and his management used these stereotypes to increase sales of his championship bid. Unable to combat the ideological mudslide of racism, both fighters fought fearlessly. Jack Johnson challenged the old order of society through a similar anti-narrative to that of the black folk hero who sought to combat rigid racism. While much is said about Johnson perpetuating racist stereotypes of African Americans through a dangerous public persona, it is worthwhile to view his stance as advantaging African American mobility. Johnson went all over the world defeating racism. It took a fearless black man, a fearless fighter, and a fearless public performer to unveil rhetorical weaknesses in white society's message of African American inferiority.

Scholars like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois recognized Johnson's ability through fearless expression to advantage African American's sense of their own attachment to this unforgivable blackness in its juxtaposition to white mainstream masculine rhetoric. DuBois celebrated Johnson's winning and defense of his world championship in the way Johnson "lightly

²⁰³ Ibid., 203. For more on musical compositions, see: Bak, *Joe Louis*, pictorial centerpiece on page 68.

²⁰⁴ Bak, *Joe Louis*, 207.

and carelessly punched the head off Mr. Jeffries.”²⁰⁵ It is only a relatively recent development that black writers can be seen in America's top publications and they and African American athletes can pursue proprietorship based on the work of these first black champions. Those thinking and writing about the influence of masculinity in the context of African American fighters should see these men as framers of a new American conversation that includes cultural traditions. These traditions are by nature changing social constructs. Which myths of masculinity will be recycled, which dispelled, and which ones will be added to the phenomenal power of sports to hold a mirror up to society?

Joe Louis and Jack Johnson challenged myths of white supremacy. Johnson antagonized the superordinate class while Louis worked within an assimilation of the white value system. Both men advanced African American masculinity and an acknowledgment of their physical prowess by whites included them in constructing African American athletic advancement. The advances made by these pugilists advanced other facets of African American life. As fighting men, they deserve to be considered leading activists in the struggle for racial equality.

²⁰⁵ W.E.B. DuBois, quoted in *New York World* 1910 in *Unlevel Playing Field*, Wiggins and Miller, 79.

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