

BLACK HISTORY PROFILE

Jack Johnson, Boxing's first 'Greatest'

Jack Johnson (1878-1946)

Born in poverty in Galveston, Tex., Jack Arthur Johnson would become one of the most famous and hated men in white America, when as the first African-American heavyweight boxing champion from 1908 to 1915, he taunted his white opponents, led a high profile of fast cars and expensive clothes, and married three white women.

Johnson picked up his skills as a teenager hanging out in camps where African-American fighters trained. His first opportunity at fighting came at a carnival in Galveston where a carnival fighter offered \$5 to anyone who could stay in the ring for four rounds. At 17, Johnson not only lasted the four rounds, but knocked out the fighter in the fourth round.

After that, Johnson took up the trade in earnest, fighting for small purses throughout the United States and Europe. For years he tried to get a championship fight, but during this period, white fighters seldom fought the good African-American fighters. He couldn't get a championship fight until 1908, when, at the age of 30, he won the championship from Canadian Tommy Burns in Sydney, Australia. Johnson was pummeling Burns when police entered the ring in the 14th round and stopped the fight.

After Johnson won the championship, he fought four times in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Colma, Calif — three "draws" and a 12-round knockout of Sam Ketchel. The Ketchel fight was especially disturbing to whites because Johnson not only taunted Ketchel, but knocked out some of his teeth and then pulled Ketchel's teeth from his gloves.

The call had gone out for a "Great White Hope" to take back the championship from Johnson and now whites persuaded former champion Jim Jeffries, almost four years older than Johnson, to come out of a six-year retirement to take back the crown. His fight with Johnson on July 4, 1910 would become known as the "Fight of the Century," grossing more than \$275,000 and drawing a record crowd of almost 17,000 in Reno, Nev., a town whose total population was only 11,000. Moreover, each

fighter received record purses of more than \$110,000 each.

In the fight, Johnson taunted the former champion, hit him at will, opened cuts on his face and, finally knocked him out in the 15th round. Whites were so angered that race riots broke out in a number of cities after the fight and some towns banned showings of the fight films. In one southern town, an African-American is said to have caused a riot in a restaurant when he ordered a "Jack Johnson Special," — "coffee, black and strong like Jack Johnson; eggs beat up and scrambled like Jim Jeffries."

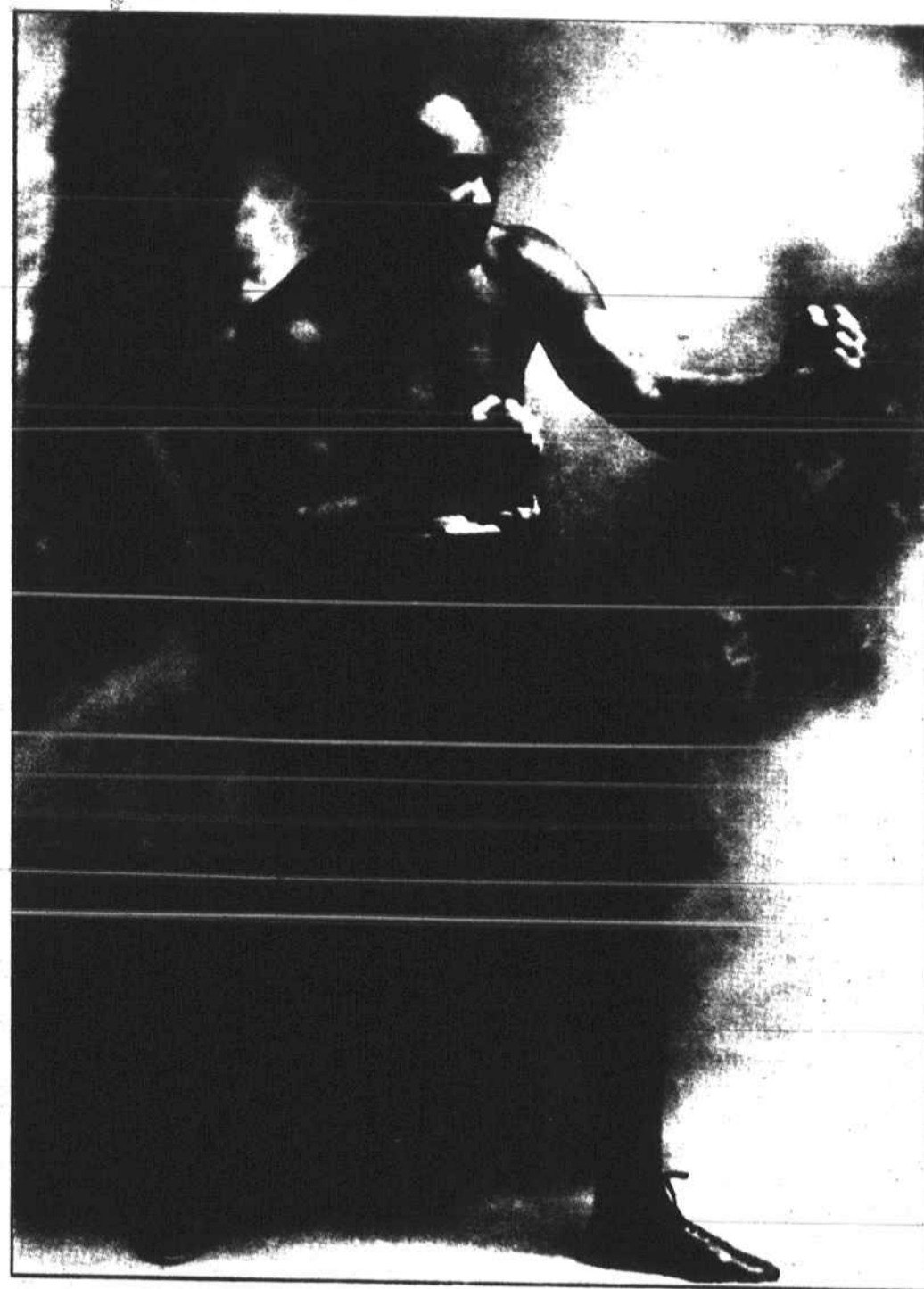
Johnson further angered whites because he was frequently seen, lavishly dressed in fast sports cars, with white women. Each of his three wives was white.

After the Jeffries fight, Johnson beat Jim Flynn when Las Vegas police stopped the fight in the ninth round. Shortly after that, Johnson's highrolling lifestyle was used by the U.S. government to charge and convict him of a Mann Act violation of transporting women across state lines "for immoral purposes."

Johnson fled the country and spent eight years outside the U.S. He fought four more times in Paris, with a knockout, two more draws, and a 20-round decision. Finally, in 1915 in Havana, Cuba he lost the championship when he was knocked out in the 26th round by Jess Willard. Johnson claimed he lost the fight intentionally as part of a deal with the U.S. government to avoid prison, but that he was double-crossed. Films of the fight show Johnson lying on his back with one arm raised over his eyes as if to keep the sun out.

He surrendered to authorities in 1920 and served a one-year sentence in Leavenworth federal penitentiary. Having lost all of his wealth, he spent the rest of his life touring and making public appearances. He died on June 10, 1946 in a car accident near Raleigh, N.C. on his way to New York to attend the Joe Louis-Billy Conn championship fight.

For years, Jack Johnson was seen as the model not to be emulated by African-American fighters wishing to be a success in boxing. Joe Louis, the next African-American heavyweight champion would



Jack Johnson

be instructed not to act like Johnson.

Not until 1964, with the arrival of young Cassius Clay, would an African-American fighter become so hated by whites in the United States, especially when he changed his name to Muhammad Ali and espoused the separatist religion of the Nation Islam. Ali frequently pointed out that the parallels and ironies of his career and that of Jack

Johnson, noting that, unlike Johnson, he did not date white women, but he was still hated by whites because of his arrogance and skill.

More about Jack Johnson can be read in *Big Black Fire* by Reggie DeCoy, *Black Champion: The Life and Times of Jack Johnson*, by Finis Farr, and *Jack Johnson and His Times*, by Denzil Batchelor.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

THURSDAY, FEB. 13

• Phillip Aaron, attorney and author of *The Power to Create*, and Errol Smith, co-founder and chief executive officer of BMA, a multi-million dollar marketing and management firm based in Glendale, California, and author of *37 Things Every Black Man Needs to Know*, will lecture on "Black Accountability and Achievement," at 12 p.m. in Lehrman Auditorium in Washington, D.C. This is part of the continuing lecture series sponsored by The Heritage Foundation.



• Public Television will present Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist, Clarence Page, as he explores the topic "Black American Conservatism: An Exploration of Ideas," which traces the history of the black conservatism movement, from its pre-Civil War roots to present-day beliefs. Check local listings for time.

• As part of their Black History Month Celebration, UNCG will present a national issues forum, "Race Relations: Where Are We Now?," from 7-10 p.m. in the Cone Ballroom of EUC. The program is sponsored by UNCG Campus Ministries and the campus NAACP chapter.

FRIDAY, FEB. 14

• The Richard B. Harrison Players of North Carolina A&T State University will recognize Black History Month with a production of "Steal Away" by Ramona King. Performances will be at 8 p.m. today, Feb. 15 and 17. There will be a 3 p.m. performance on Feb. 16. The performances will be in the Paul Robeson Theatre on the A&T campus. Tickets are \$8, \$5 for students and senior citizens, and \$3 for A&T students and children. Reservations may be made by calling (919) 334-7852 between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. For further information, contact Jan Millin at (919) 334-7766.

SATURDAY, FEB. 15

• Consummate bluesman and guitarist Albert Collins shares the bill with guitar virtuoso, Danny Gatton in repeat presentations of Public Television's Austin City Limits as part of its Black History Month celebration. Check your local listings for appropriate time.

• African-American Arts Festival, The Carolina Theatre & The Piedmont Blues Preservation Society will present Bobby "Blue" Bland and Clarence Carter in concert at 8 p.m. at the Carolina Theatre. For ticket information, call 333-2605.

SUNDAY, FEB. 16

• Public Television salutes Black History Month with an array of programs highlighting some of America's top talents — past and present.

Today's featured program will be "Pioneer of Color: A Conversation with Mal Goode." Broadcast journalist Doris McMillon interviews Mal Goode and has segments from many of his historic broadcasts and archival footage of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Check local listings for time.

• UNCG celebrates Black History Month by offering different events during the month. Today, the program will be performance selections from David Fanshaw's "African Sanctus" by the UNCG Symphonic Chorus at 3 p.m. in Aycock Auditorium.

• The Greensboro Historical Society will present an Inventors Workshop at 3:30 p.m. There will be presentations by entrepreneurs with an invention in progress and a patent attorney, along with displays by local school children. For more information, call 919-373-2043.

• African-American Arts Festival & Green Hill Center for NC Art will present "Acha Debela: Computer Art," today through May 16. This is an exhibition of computer generated works at the Greensboro Cultural Center. For more information call 333-7460.

MONDAY, FEB. 17

• An African-American Film Festival will start today through Friday as part of UNCG's celebration of Black History Month. The movies will focus on the black experience in America. The performances will be in the basement of Cone Residence Hall and the times will be announced.

TUESDAY, FEB. 18

• A panel discussion on "Today's Conservative Movement: Historical Perspectives and Current Dialogue from the African-American Community," will be presented at 12 p.m. in Washington, D.C., as part of The Heritage Foundation's Black History Month Lecture Series. Panelists include: Dr. Gloria E.A. Toote, a New York attorney, is a former vice chairman of the U.S. Office of Private Sector Initiatives during the Reagan administration; and Phyllis Berry Meyers, executive producer of the PBS-TV series, "A Second Look Live," Free Congress Foundation, Washington, D.C.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 19

• "Songs of Freedom," includes special guests actor Roscoe Lee Brown, folk singer Odetta, soprano Shirley Verrett, and the Boys Choir of Harlem. This program will be featured on Public Television as part of its Black History Month celebration.

THURSDAY, FEB. 20

• Continuing the Heritage Foundation's Lecture Series, Dr. Marlene Abimaz, chief executive officer of Energy & International Development Corporation, a Chicago-based financial consulting firm, will lecture on "The Role of Black America in the International Trade and Financing Arena," at 12 p.m. in Lehrman Auditorium in Washington, D.C.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

• The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) will present "African-American Artists: The Color of Art," at the Elliott University Center (EUC) Gallery, open daily from Feb. 1-29.

• "The Real McCoy: African-American Invention and Innovation, 1619-1930," is appearing at the Greensboro Historical Museum from now through March 1. "The Real McCoy" is divided into six sections: "African Ingenuity in Colonial America," "Free Black Inventors, 1776-1865," "Black Inventors in the Antebellum South," "Reconstruction and Recognition: Black Inventors, 1865-1894," and "The Black Exposition Movement" and "Urbanization and Modernization in the 20th Century." More than 40 inventors are featured.



Poster of Africa offer

A vibrant poster featuring all of Africa's 52 heads of state as well as vital information on each country in vivid full color, is presented by BABAT Productions/Publications, an independently owned concern.

The 36" x 25" poster also carries such important information on each country as flags, capitals, major exports, currencies, populations, and the official languages.

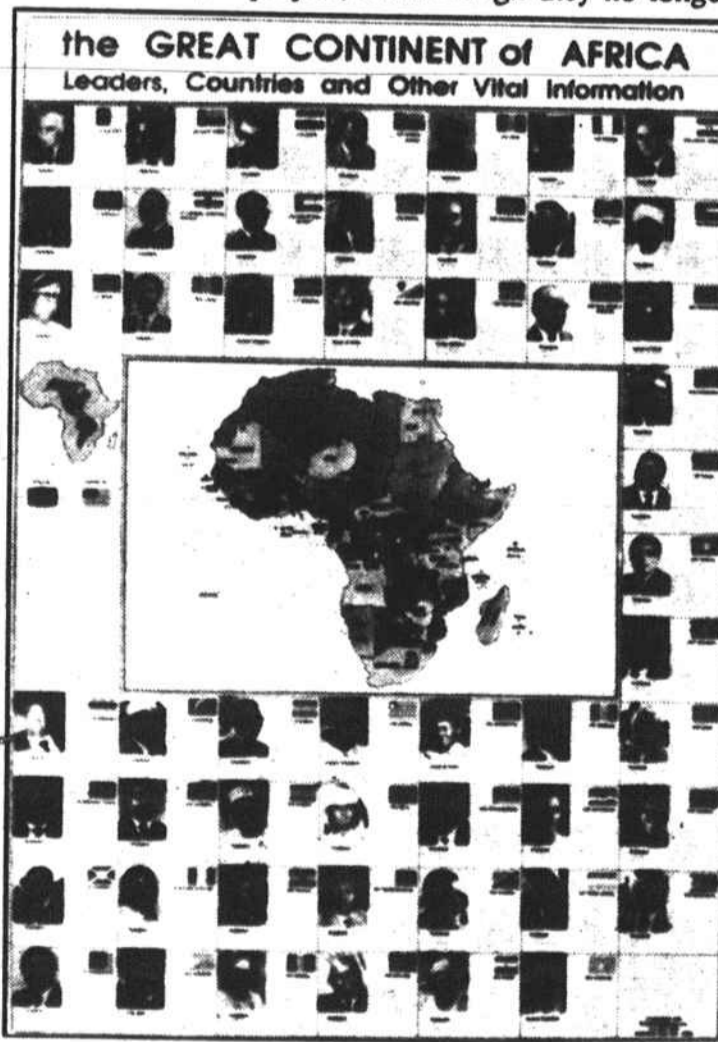
The continent, once labeled by colonial exploiters as the "Dark Continent" is now totally free of European domination and has cities that can rival anywhere in the world. The poster also lists Africa's landmarks such as lakes, rivers, and also capitals of each country, including the year of independence from those former colonial rulers.

"The data on the poster can be used for comparative analysis," says the poster's associate publisher, Dr. Babatunde Soleye, an African born surgeon-podiatrist. "It is an important educational tool that schools and colleges will find useful, since it also provides an excellent frame of reference for African, Global and Multicultural studies."

Among the featured leaders are such veterans as Ivory Coast's Houphet Boigny, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, and newcomers such as Sam Njuoma of Namibia, formerly known as South West Africa. A section of the poster also pays tribute to

all people of color who have African ancestry.

Reads the poster: "We have to recognize all people of color in this project, even though they no longer



The Great Continent of Africa Poster

live in Africa, they are still direct descendants of our African ancestors who were blessed with great cultural heritage and civilization, but were unfortunate to have been forcibly transplanted from the shores of Africa, to North, Central and South America and also the Caribbean. Their sweat and blood immensely contributed to building these great nations, especially the United States of America — We salute."

The poster retails for \$9.95 each (plus \$3 for shipping and handling) and can be ordered through Dr. Soleye at P.O. Box 1205, Scarsdale, N.Y. 10583. For further information call (914) 682-1423.

FEBRUARY IS ... BLACK HISTORY MONTH

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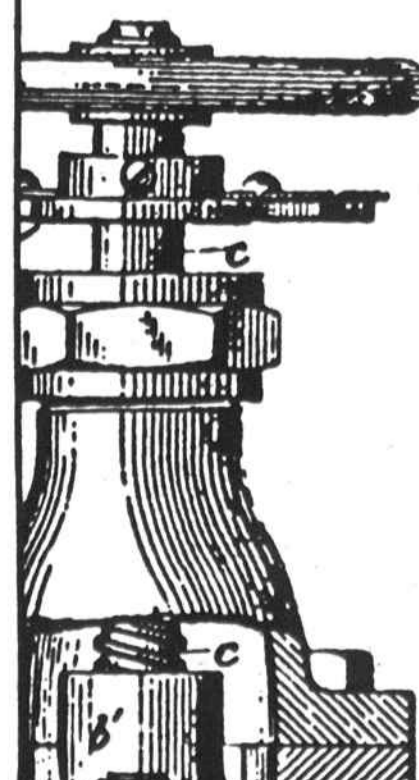
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Greensboro Historical Museum
130 Summit Ave

Jan 18 - Mar 1

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For more information, call 919/373-2043