

108TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. RES. 447

Expressing the sense of the Senate that the President of the United States should exercise his Constitutional Authority to pardon posthumously John Arthur “Jack” Johnson for Mr. Johnson’s racially-motivated 1913 conviction that diminished his athletic, cultural, and historic significance, and unduly tarnished his reputation.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 5, 2004

Mr. MCCAIN (for himself, Mr. HATCH, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. REID, and Mr. TALENT) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to

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## RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate that the President of the United States should exercise his Constitutional Authority to pardon posthumously John Arthur “Jack” Johnson for Mr. Johnson’s racially-motivated 1913 conviction that diminished his athletic, cultural, and historic significance, and unduly tarnished his reputation.

Whereas, Jack Johnson was a flamboyant, defiant, and controversial figure in American history who challenged racial biases;

Whereas, Jack Johnson was born in Galveston, Texas, in 1878 to parents who were former slaves;

Whereas, Jack Johnson became a professional boxer and traveled throughout the United States fighting white as well as black heavyweights;

Whereas, Jack Johnson, after being denied, on purely racial grounds, the opportunity to fight two white champions was granted an opportunity in 1908 by an Australian promoter to fight the reigning white title-holder, Tommy Burns, whom Johnson defeated to become the first African American to hold the title of Heavyweight Champion of the World;

Whereas, Jack Johnson's victory prompted a search for a white boxer who could beat Johnson, a recruitment effort dubbed the search for the "great white hope";

Whereas, a white former champion named Jim Jeffries left retirement to fight and lose to Jack Johnson in Reno, Nevada, in 1910 in what was deemed the "Battle of the Century";

Whereas, rioting and aggression toward African Americans resulted from Johnson's defeat of Jeffries and led to racially-motivated murders of African Americans nationwide;

Whereas, Jack Johnson's relationship with white women compounded the resentment felt toward him by many whites;

Whereas, between 1901 and 1910, 754 African Americans were lynched, some of whom were lynched simply for being "too familiar" with white women;

Whereas, in 1910 the Congress passed the Mann Act, (18 U.S.C. 2421), then known as the "White Slave Traffic Act," which outlawed the transportation of women in interstate or foreign commerce "for the purpose of pros-

titution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose”;

Whereas, in October, 1912, Jack Johnson became involved with a white woman whose mother disapproved of their relationship and sought action from the United States Department of Justice, claiming that Johnson had abducted her daughter;

Whereas, Jack Johnson was arrested on October 18, 1912, by Federal marshals for transporting this woman across State lines for an “immoral purpose” in violation of the Mann Act, only to have the charges dropped when the woman refused to cooperate with authorities and then married the champion;

Whereas, Federal authorities persisted and summoned a white woman named Belle Schreiber who testified that Johnson had transported her across State lines for the purpose of “prostitution and debauchery”;

Whereas, Jack Johnson was eventually convicted in 1913 of violating the Mann Act and sentenced to one year and a day in Federal prison, but fled the country to Canada and then on to various European and South American countries, before losing the Heavyweight Championship title to Jess Willard in Cuba in 1915;

Whereas, Jack Johnson returned to the United States in July, 1920, surrendered to authorities, served nearly a year in the Federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas, and fought subsequent boxing matches, but never regained the Heavyweight Championship title;

Whereas, Jack Johnson served his country during World War II by encouraging citizens to buy war bonds and partici-

pating in exhibition boxing matches to promote the war bond cause;

Whereas, Jack Johnson died in an automobile accident in 1946; and

Whereas, in 1954 Jack Johnson was inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame: Now, therefore, be it

1       *Resolved*, That it is the Sense of the Senate that—

2               (1) Jack Johnson paved the way for African  
3       American athletes to participate and succeed in ra-  
4       cially-integrated professional sports in the United  
5       States;

6               (2) Jack Johnson was wronged by a racially-  
7       motivated conviction prompted by his success in the  
8       boxing ring and his relationship with white women;

9               (3) his criminal conviction unjustly ruined his  
10      career and destroyed his reputation; and

11              (4) the President of the United States should  
12      grant a pardon to Jack Johnson posthumously to ex-  
13      punge from the annals of American criminal justice  
14      a racially-motivated abuse of the Federal govern-  
15      ment's prosecutorial authority and in recognition of  
16      Mr. Johnson's athletic and cultural contributions to  
17      society.

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