

Senate Joint Resolution No. 12—Senator Brower

Joint Sponsor: Assemblyman Munford

FILE NUMBER.....

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION—Urging the President of the United States to grant a posthumous pardon to John Arthur “Jack” Johnson for the 1913 racially motivated conviction of Johnson, which diminished his athletic, cultural and historical significance and destroyed his reputation.

WHEREAS, John Arthur “Jack” Johnson was a flamboyant, defiant and controversial figure in the history of the United States who challenged racial biases; and

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

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson became a professional boxer and traveled throughout the United States, fighting white and African-American heavyweights; and

WHEREAS, After being denied, on purely racial grounds, the opportunity in this country to fight two white champions, in 1908, Jack Johnson was granted an opportunity to fight the reigning white title-holder, Tommy Burns, in Sydney, Australia; and

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson defeated Tommy Burns to become the first African American to hold the title of Heavyweight Champion of the World; and

WHEREAS, The victory by Jack Johnson over Tommy Burns prompted a search for a white boxer who could beat Jack Johnson, a recruitment effort that was dubbed the search for the “Great White Hope”; and

WHEREAS, In 1910, as part of that effort, former champion named Jim Jeffries left retirement to fight Jack Johnson in Reno, Nevada; and

WHEREAS, Jim Jeffries lost to Jack Johnson in front of a crowd of 20,000 people, in what has been referred to by many as the “Battle of the Century”; and

WHEREAS, The defeat of Jim Jeffries by Jack Johnson led to rioting, aggression against African Americans and the racially motivated murder of African Americans nationwide; and

WHEREAS, The relationships of Jack Johnson with white women compounded the resentment felt toward him by many; and

WHEREAS, Between 1901 and 1910, 754 African Americans were lynched, some for simply being “too familiar” with white women; and



WHEREAS, In 1910, Congress passed the Act of June 25, 1910, commonly known as the "White Slave Traffic Act" or the "Mann Act," (18 U.S.C. §§ 2421 et seq.), which outlawed the transportation of women in interstate or foreign commerce "for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose"; and

WHEREAS, In October 1912, Jack Johnson became involved with a white woman, Lucille Cameron, whose mother disapproved of their relationship and sought action from the Department of Justice, claiming that Jack Johnson had abducted her daughter; and

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson was arrested by Federal marshals on October 18, 1912, for transporting Lucille Cameron across state lines for an "immoral purpose" in violation of the Mann Act; and

WHEREAS, The Mann Act charges against Jack Johnson were dropped when Lucille Cameron refused to cooperate with Federal authorities and then married Jack Johnson; and

WHEREAS, Federal authorities persisted and summoned a white woman named Belle Schreiber, who testified that Jack Johnson had transported her across state lines for the purpose of "prostitution and debauchery"; and

WHEREAS, In 1913, Jack Johnson was convicted of violating the Mann Act and sentenced to 1 year and 1 day in Federal prison; and

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson fled the United States to Canada and various European and South American countries; and

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson lost the Heavyweight Championship title to Jess Willard in Cuba in 1915; and

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson returned to the United States in July 1920, surrendered to authorities and served nearly a year in the Federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas; and

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson subsequently fought in boxing matches, but never regained the Heavyweight Championship title; and

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson served his country during World War II by encouraging citizens to buy war bonds and participating in exhibition boxing matches to promote the war bond cause; and

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

WHEREAS, In 1954, Jack Johnson was inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, Jack Johnson paved the way for African-American athletes to participate and succeed in racially integrated professional sports in the United States; and



WHEREAS, Jack Johnson was wronged by a racially motivated conviction prompted by his success in the boxing ring and his relationships with white women; and

WHEREAS, The criminal conviction of Jack Johnson unjustly ruined his career and destroyed his reputation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEVADA, JOINTLY, That the members of the 77th Session of the Nevada Legislature urge the President of the United States to grant a posthumous pardon to John Arthur "Jack" Johnson to expunge from the annals of American criminal justice a racially motivated abuse of the prosecutorial authority of the Federal Government, and to recognize Jack Johnson's athletic and cultural contributions to society; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the President of the United States; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this resolution becomes effective upon passage.

