JACK JOHNSON AND WHITE WOMEN:
THE NATIONAL IMPACT

by
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Though many hated Jack Johnson simply because he was a black conqueror of "white hopes," much of the prejudice against him can be explained in his relations with white women. As his biographer points out, "There was no getting around it, Johnson had women in his personal entourage and they were always white and blonde." Johnson's romantic associations with white women led directly to some of his most serious difficulties.\(^2\)

Between the months of September, 1912 and January, 1913, Johnson's affairs with white women drew the angry response of much of America.\(^3\) In early October, 1912, a few weeks after the suicide of Etta Duryea, Johnson's first white wife, Lucille Cameron, a nineteen-year-old white girl from Minnesota, visited Johnson's popular night club in Chicago, the Cafe de Champion. After being introduced to the champion, she asked him for employment as a secretary. Johnson consented and there began an association which he considered to be "purely of a business-nature."\(^4\) Within a matter of days, however, Lucille's mother, Mrs. Cameron-Falconet, journeyed to Chicago and announced that she intended to charge Johnson with the abduction of her daughter. Assisted by her

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3 Good accounts of these events can be found in Farr, *Black Champion* and Denzel Batchelor, *Jack Johnson and His Times* (London: Phoenix Sports Books, 1956).

lawyer, Charles Erbstein, she succeeded in getting an indictment on the charges. But to the dismay of those who wanted to see Johnson convicted, Lucille adamantly refused to substantiate the charges. Yet this made no difference to the anti-Johnsonites as their anger against the alleged act of Johnson swelled into a national chorus. They were satisfied the champion was such a bad character that it was their obligation to destroy him by any means available.

On November 7, Johnson was charged by the federal government with a violation of the Mann Act—transporting women across state lines for immoral purposes—with Belle Schreiber, a white woman with whom Johnson had earlier lived and travelled. Released on bond, Johnson’s trial date was set for May of 1913. On November 20, Johnson was acquitted of the abduction charges, as witnesses against him failed to appear in court. After the abduction trial, Johnson and Lucille Cameron met once again and on December 4, to top the events of the preceding months, were married. It was the reaction of these events, revealed mainly in the press, which formed the core of America’s view to Jack Johnson and his affairs with white women.

Before Jack Johnson came to trial on the charge of abducting Lucille Cameron, the bar of public opinion had found him guilty. Even during the trial, after Lucille had denied emphatically that she had been abducted, the sentiment continued among whites. Many Southerners, who normally lynched, murdered or maligned blacks upon the slightest intimation of their being even remotely associated intimately with white women, wished that Johnson was in their area of the country. “The obnoxious stunts being featured by Jack Johnson,” wrote the Beaumont (Texas) Journal, “are not only worthy of but demand, an overgrown dose of Southern ‘hospitality.’” The Houston Post commented that when Johnson was in Texas “he understood that he was a negro.” Subtly criticizing Northerners for their relatively relaxed racial policies, the Post added that Johnson was “much better than those with whom he associates away from Texas.”5 With a touch of sarcasm, the Fort

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5 All reprinted in Fort Worth Citizen-Star, October 24, 1912, p. 4.
Worth (Texas) *Citizen-Star* wrote, "We bet we know one person that isn't singing 'I Wish I Was in Dixie.'"*

Reacting to a welcomed rumor that Johnson had been killed by a woman, a white Mississippian rushed a congratulatory telegram to the Chicago Chief of Police which stated that "The undersigned and 100 others will back the woman or man to $500,000." The Chicago Tribune received a telegram from New Orleans which asked if it would "receive money from Southerners for the Johnson prosecution fund." Sam Sparks, former state treasurer of Texas, proposed that a delegation of 100 hand-picked Texans charter a special train with the purpose of going to Chicago to "attend Jack Johnson." Sparks' proposal aroused the attention of at least two black newspapers. The Chicago *Broad Ax* warned the "red-eyed, shallow-pated Texan not to invade the black belt of the Windy City with ten or one hundred times his present select, one hundred Texans." Censuring the actions of both Sparks and Johnson, the New York *Age* explained that the bold Texan was "in the bruiser class with Mr. Johnson," but also admonished that "the Negro bruisers of the Northern and Western cities will fight."*

Angry opposition to Johnson's alleged action was not relegated to the South. "'Kill him, Lynch him' were the shouts hurled at the champion as he exited from the Criminal Court Building following his arraignment on the abduction charges." Also in Chicago, a crowd of more than a hundred hanged a dummy of the champion in effigy. Pinned to the figure was a note which read, "This is the last of Jack Johnson." From Toledo a letter was mailed to Johnson in which the sender informed him that he was on his way to Chicago to "shoot you dead with a gun." The mayor of

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*6 Ibid.*
*7 Chicago Daily Tribune, October 20, 1912, p. 3.*
*8 Ibid., October 21, 1912, p. 3.*
*9 Ibid.*
*10 Broad Ax, November 9, 1912, p. 2.*
*11 Age, November 14, 1912, p. 4.*
*12 Chicago Daily News, October 19, 1912, p. 1.*
*13 Ibid., October 21, 1912, p. 3.*
*14 Tribune, October 21, 1912, p. 3.*
Kansas City, Missouri, warned all theatre managers not to book Johnson "as it would be an outrage against all decency."\textsuperscript{15} While the anti-Jack Johnson sentiments were as numerous as they were varied, certainly none was as vicious as those articulated by Frank Force, sports writer for the \textit{Police Gazette}, who stated that Johnson "is the vilest, most despicable creature that lives. . . . In all sporting history, there never was a human being who so thoroughly deserved the sneers and jeers of his fellow creatures . . . he has disgusted the American public by flaunting in their faces an alliance as bold as it was offensive . . . and has shown himself in every way to be what he is, an ingrate of the worst description."\textsuperscript{16}

That Johnson should be deprived of his title was advocated by some whites. Syndicated sports columnist, W. W. Naughton, wrote that it seemed to him that Johnson had been "eliminated as thoroughly from the pugilistic outlook, as though he had been signally defeated by some rival heavyweight. The disgust at his alleged misconduct is such that no one wants to think about him in any connection."\textsuperscript{17} J. S. Spargo, sports editor of the Boston \textit{Traveller}, said that the actuies of the champion were inexusable and "the thing to do is for the sporting public to demand a change in ownership of the championship title."\textsuperscript{18}

The Chicago \textit{Daily News} predicted that the Cameron controversy would be the finish of the champion in the prize ring, since that no promoter would "dare ask white men to pay and see the negro fight" now that he was under the "eyes of the united world." On another occasion, the \textit{News} editorialized that boxing was doomed for extinction as there could be "no respect for a sport which has as its most conspicuous exponent Jack Johnson the brazen lawbreaker."\textsuperscript{19} Various other suggestions that Johnson's crown should be removed were offered; however, influential sports

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Philadelphia \textit{Tribune}, October 26, 1912, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Reprinted in Minneapolis \textit{Tribune}, November 10, 1912, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, November 3, 1912, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Reprinted in Chicago \textit{Evening Post}, October 28, 1912, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{News}, October 21, 1912, p. 1; October 24, 1912, p. 8.
\end{itemize}
organizations and followers, although nauseated with the champion’s life style, demanded that he be defeated in the ring:20

At the outset of the Johnson-Cameron controversy, many blacks were as antagonistic toward the champion as were whites. More than anything else, it was Johnson’s continued open preference for white women that aroused their anger. Strangely enough, much of the anti-Johnson rhetoric was similar to that of whites. “Jack Johnson, dangerously ill, victim of white fever,” was the headline run by the Philadelphia Tribune, a black newspaper.21 “What a pity,” wrote the Newport News (Virginia) Star, “that Johnson was ever successful in obtaining the great amount of money which came to him, if it is to be put to no better use than being spent in desire to parade with a white woman as his wife.” The Birmingham Exchange believed that it voiced the sentiments of every “race-loving Negro, irrespective of his intellectual development” when it said that blacks “must indefatigably denounce his debase allegiance with the other race’s women and only express our feelings mildly when we say we hope that he will get everything that is coming to him as far as the law is concerned.” The Detroit Informer railed against Johnson as a member of the race who did not deserve “the touch of pity or defense from any source.” The champion was doomed to extinction, maintained the Illinois Idea, because he had attempted to “suppress public sentiment and morals by his escapades with white women.” The Texas Freeman explained that it had grown tired of Johnson’s affairs with white women. “From a racial point,” continued the Freeman, “we, in this country, would be better off if Jack Johnson would quit the United States, burning the bridges as he left.”22

Three of the leading black newspapers, the New York Age, the Baltimore Afro-American Ledger, and the Indianapolis Freeman ran lengthy articles, at the outset of the controversy, expressing hostility towards the actions of the

21 Tribune, October 26, 1912, p. 7.
22 All reprinted in Indianapolis Freeman, November 9, 1912, p. 7.
champion. "Mr. John Arthur Johnson is in trouble again," wrote the Age. "As a black champion, he has given the Negro more trouble by his scandals than he did in twenty years as a black tramp." 23

The Ledger excoriated Johnson for his intimate affairs with white women and offered the opinion that he had "proven himself anything but a credit to his race." 24 Because the champion's past was replete with romantic involvements with white women, the Freeman reached the conclusion that Johnson harbored little affection for black women. "Most people," continued the Freeman, "thought of his marriage to a white woman as a mere chance affair and not a thing studied out by the champion in the sense of a demand, owing to his superior position, and apparently meaning the inferiority of his own race women." 25

The inclination of many whites to indict the entire black race for the notoriety of Johnson's alleged actions was deeply explored by the Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., of New York City, among other blacks. Speaking on the ill feelings against blacks resulting from Johnson's predicament, Powell said that "The overwhelming majority of colored people have no sympathy whatever with Johnson in his inordinate and persistent desire to seek female companionship with the whites." 26

Apparently Powell's plea had little effect on whites as "many colored waiters, porters, in white barbershops, and colored men employed in various capacities" were dismissed from their employment. Even black professional men suffered reprisals as a result of the bitter agitation stemming from the Cameron controversy. 27 Les Walton, of the Age wrote that the incident harmed the success of black theatrical troupes as it caused many cancellations. 28

One theatrical paper, reported Walton, criticized the use

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23 Age, October 24, 1912, p. 4.
24 Ledger, October 26, 1912, p. 4.
25 Freeman, October 26, 1912, p. 4.
26 Age, October 31, 1912, p. 1.
27 Broad Ax, December 21, 1912, p. 1.
28 Age, December 5, 1912, p. 6.
of the great black entertainer, Bert Williams, in the Ziegfield Follies. Repeatedly using Jack Johnson as an object lesson, the paper deplored Williams working in a company with white women.29

Aside from the view that Johnson’s troubles were hurting blacks economically, it was further believed that they damaged the race’s image in the eyes of others as well as its own. The Pittsburgh Courier stated that it regarded as significant “the disgrace and humiliation every self-respecting Negro must feel when he sees his race held up before the world through the evil agency of a single member.” The Amsterdam (New York) News remarked that “white men of standing not only do not brook the spectacle, they conceitedly point to the example as an evidence of the black man’s lack of race pride, his desire to be white and the general unworthiness of his race.” Centering its attention on the effect of Johnson’s notoriety on blacks, the Star of Zion maintained that “a great injury is done the race when any of its members are exploited whose lives cannot be emulated by the youth of the race.”30

Initially, as has been indicated, the overwhelming reaction to Johnson as a consequence of his alleged abduction of Lucille Cameron was one of condemnation. As the trial progressed, however, a number of incidents and circumstances led many to the defense of the champion. Some did so because of their resentment to the biased coverage of the trial given by several Chicago newspapers. Others owed their change of attitude to Lucille’s refusal to substantiate the abduction charges. Still others while not directly aligning themselves with Johnson’s defense, criticized his detractors as they believed he was more a victim of race prejudice than anything else. Though nearly all of Johnson’s supporters felt that his associations with white women were undesirable for a national race figure, they, nevertheless, insisted that the law rather than public opinion should determine the innocence or guilt of the champion.

29 Ibid.
30 All reprinted in Freeman, November 9, 1912, p. 7.
A speech made by Booker T. Washington on Johnson’s character led many to the defense of the champion. Speaking at the Detroit YMCA, during the controversy, Washington said:31

It is unfortunate that a man with money should use it in a way to injure his own people in the eyes of those who are seeking to uplift his race and improve its conditions. . . . In misrepresenting the colored people of the country, this man is harming himself the least. I wish to say emphatically that his actions do not meet with the approval of the colored race. Johnson, fortunate or rather unfortunate, it seems in the possession of money, is doing a grave injustice to his race. It only goes to prove my contention that all men should be educated along mental and spiritual lines in connection with their physical education. A man with muscle minus brains is a useless creature. . . . Undoubtedly Johnson’s actions are repudiated by the great majority of right-thinking people of the Negro race. . . .

In response to the Detroit speech, John Millholland, Treasurer of the newly organized National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, wrote an open letter to Washington. “Considering the terrible strain you recently put upon the confidence of your friends,” he asked, “do you think it is quite in keeping with the eternal fitness of things for you to assume to sit in judgment upon poor Jack Johnson?” Millholland went on to say that nothing would have been said about the whole affair if Johnson had been white.32

Several of the black newspapers wrote that Washington publicly condemned the champion because he had rivaled him in popularity. The Richmond Planet, for example, censured Washington in an article under which the headlines read: “Booker T. Washington, the Great Wizard of Tuskegee Does Not Like to Share His Popularity With Jack Johnson.”33

It should be noted that Washington’s speech was well received by those who sought to condemn Johnson. The Chicago Post applauded the ‘Tuskegee Wizard’ for implying that Johnson’s life style was “doing incalculable damage to

31 Ledger, October 26, 1912, p. 4.
32 Cleveland Gazette, November 9, 1912, p. 2.
33 Planet, December 21, 1912, p. 4; similar expressions were given by the Columbus (Ohio) Appeal, November 16, 1912, and Broad Ax, November 16, 1912, p. 2.
the progress of the negro race.’’ The Post added that the champion’s ‘‘acts’’ should be avoided as they ‘‘injured the lot of every colored man and woman in the North.’’ Likewise, the Charleston News and Courier was delighted that Washington had seen fit to denounce Johnson as a discredit to his race.34

Another factor which garnered sympathy, if not ardent support for Johnson, was the biased handling of the controversy by several Chicago newspapers. Leading black weeklies such as the Chicago Defender, Chicago Broad Ax and the Baltimore Afro-American Ledger retaliated against the Chicago presses. ‘‘The mischievous manner in which the Chicago press has and is exploiting the Jack Johnson episode,’’ noted the Defender, ‘‘is not only a disgrace to the entire journalistic profession, but a crying sin against the peace of the community. It has the effect to inflame the feeling of the masses of the white race against the Negro, who is having a hard enough time as it is.’’ After analyzing the Chicago Tribune’s coverage of the trial, the Broad Ax was moved to refer to it as ‘‘that rank Negro hate sheet.’’ The Ledger charged the Chicago newspaper with inflating the entire controversy out of proportion mainly because Johnson was black and a white woman was involved.35

Certainly the incident which served most to bring blacks to Johnson’s defense, centered around a statement in the Chicago Daily News reputed to have been made by Johnson. During the trial, the News quoted the champion as saying to Lucille Cameron’s mother, ‘‘I can get any white woman in Chicago I want.’’36 The reporting of this alleged statement had a tremendous effect on blacks. In Chicago it attracted the attention of the Appomatox Club, an organization of business and professional men as well as a center of black life in general.37 Demanding that he meet with the club to deter-

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34 Evening Post, October 21, 1912, p. 8; News and Courier, October 24, 1912, p. 4.
35 Defender, October 26, 1912, p. 2; Broad Ax, November 16, 1912, p. 1; Ledger, October 2, 1912, p. 4.
mine whether or not such a statement had been made, Beaugard Moseley, President of the organization, wrote Johnson.\textsuperscript{38}

Johnson consented to Moseley’s request and met with members of the Appomattox Club and other leading Chicago blacks. At the meeting he unequivocally denied making any such statement as attributed to him by the News.\textsuperscript{39} For most of the club’s members, Johnson’s testimony was sufficient and they promptly exonerated the champion of the alleged statement.\textsuperscript{40} However, Johnson’s mere denial of the statement was not acceptable to all. In fact, opposition was vocalized there at the meeting. “This man is physically strong, but mentally weak,” shouted former Reconstruction Congressman, John R. Lynch, “the public should know if it does not know already, that he does not, and cannot in the future command the respect of the respectable, decent, intelligent men of his race.” Not one to be easily intimidated, Johnson quickly retaliated: “I’m just as good as that Elder [Lynch].” Then in reply to Booker T. Washington’s speech at Detroit, Johnson boasted: “I never got caught in the wrong flat. I never got beat up because I looked in the wrong keyhole.”\textsuperscript{41}

Johnson was soon joined by others who felt it inane that some blacks had convened to disavow him as a member of the race. “The very idea of the best-thinking people of the race holding ‘indignation meetings’ to denounce Johnson as a member of the race,” was enough to disgust one black. Writing to the Defender, he asked how long would it be before blacks realized that they were their “greatest enemy and will always be such as long as we allow others to keep us.

\textsuperscript{38} Reprinted in Freeman, October 26, 1912, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{39} Freeman, November 2, 1912, p. 1; Defender, November 2, 1912, p. 1;
Broad As, November 2, 1912, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Chicago Daily Tribune, October 24, 1912, p. 3; Johnson was referring to an incident of 1911 in which Henry Ulrich, a white New Yorker, accused and beat Booker T. Washington of peeping through a keyhole at his wife. Washington was eventually proven innocent of the accusations. Willard B. Gatewood’s, “Booker T. Washington and the Ulrich Affair,” Journal of Negro History (January, 1970), pp. 29-44.
apart.’”42 The Indianapolis *Freeman* reminded the “colored folks who got together at Washington, D.C., and voted to repudiate Johnson as a member of the race that they were “going a bit too far.”43 One of the most piercing examinations among blacks who held that Johnson was not living up to race standards came from G. B. Aldrich, a black lawyer of Tacoma, Washington. Aldrich wrote that:44

Many colored papers, preachers, and other Negroes continue to harp on one line, that Johnson owes the Negro race something. . . . The Negro race has done nothing for Johnson, has given him nothing and is entitled to nothing considered as a race. When Jack Johnson needed money to go to Australia to fight Burns, did the Negro race come forward with help, or at any other time, have they done anything for him. . . . The idea Negroes have of criticizing is too common; just as soon as a Negro, great or small falls afool of the white man’s one-sided law, all the Negroes, like rats deserting a sinking ship, begin to outdo the white in denouncing him. . . . The fact that he likes white women is no reflection on the race; you make too much of that point. Most men like fair women. If you don’t believe it, just go into the best Negro homes amid the blackest of the most prosperous Negro families and you will find a yellow or almost white woman occupying the leading place of wife.

Because many newspapers and individuals continuously upheld the virtues of Lucille Cameron, while debasing those of Johnson, additional sympathy was corralled by the champion. “The papers seem to be featuring Miss Cameron’s beauty and Mr. Johnson’s blackness,” remarked one black.45 Questioning Lucille’s innocence, as depicted by the Chicago presses, the *Defender* disclosed that she had known the “turns and twists” of Chicago before “she knew the outs and ins of the Café de Champion.” On another occasion, the *Defender* criticized the Chicago dailies for “entwining a halo of purity” around the head of Lucille, while painting a villainous picture of Johnson.46 Tone Wilson, editor of a black Kansas newspaper, reported that the people of Chicago

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42 *Defender*, November 16, 1912, p. 4.
43 *Freeman*, October 26, 1912, p. 4.
44 *Freeman*, November 23, 1912, p. 6.
45 *Gazette*, November 23, 1912, p. 2.
46 *Defender*, November 23, 1912, p. 9; October 26, 1912, p. 1.
would "hang their deceitful and hypocritical heads in shame" when they learned that they had permitted themselves "to go crazy, not in behalf of a pure or innocent young lady," rather a "sweet nineteen who understands the art of making love to both White and Colored gentlemen, providing they have plenty of money in their pockets."\(^{47}\) Wilson's comments were applauded by the *Broad Ax* for "hitting the nail square on the head."\(^{48}\)

In the opinion of some, race was a more important factor in the prosecution of Johnson than the validity of the abduction charges. Lucille Cameron had refused to incriminate the champion and, to their consternation, the federal government in the midst of the trial, brought charges against Johnson for violation of the Mann Act. Both charges involved white women and this was not believed to be a coincidence. Rather, it was felt that the Mann Act charge had grown out of the failure to gain substantial evidence on the abduction charge. Thus, it was surmised that racism was a greater influence than the quest for justice in the prosecution of Johnson. For example, Colonel J. O. Midnight, correspondent for the *Ledger*, wrote that the bulk of the judicial harassment of Johnson stemmed from the fact that "He got mixed up with white women."\(^{49}\)

As others began to express this point, the Philadelphia *Tribune* observed "The authorities of Cook County [Chicago] and others are seemingly persecuting, instead of prosecuting Jack Johnson, to such an extent that many fair-minded persons have uttered their protest in public print."\(^{50}\)

Temporary relief was won from the "persecution" of Jack Johnson on November 20, when the abduction charges were dropped as witnesses for the prosecution failed to appear in court. Feeling that justice had prevailed, the news was well received by blacks. Anti-Johnsonites, on the other hand, judged themselves more delayed than defeated as they

\(^{47}\) Topeka, Kansas *X-Ray Democrat*, reprinted in *Broad Ax*, November 9, 1912, p. 2.

\(^{48}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{49}\) *Ledger*, November 23, 1912, p. 6.

\(^{50}\) *Tribune*, November 16, 1912, p. 4.
banked their hopes on the Mann Act charges of which the champion was free on bond. With the trial date set for May 14, 1913, they believed that it was only a matter of time before Johnson would be convicted.

On December 4, less than three weeks after the abduction trial, Jack Johnson and Lucille Cameron, to the disbelief of the entire nation, were married at the Champion's home in Chicago. This presented somewhat of an enigma to the detractors of the champion as Johnson, legally married, was much more difficult to vilify and condemn than Johnson, the accused abductor. The Johnson-Cameron marriage, as had been the case with Etta Duryea, his first white wife, presented the anti-Johnsonites with a bothersome contradiction: it legitimized a relationship, they contended, that should have never begun anyway. Consequently, the marriage, in many instances had the effect of diverting the attention away from Johnson as an individual and overflowed into the political arena where the general question of interracial marriage surfaced as a national issue.

For several weeks following the marriage, many people frowned upon Johnson just as rancorously as they had during the abduction trial. A group of white Louisianians inquired as to whether or not the people of Illinois knew what "sea-grass ropes were made for," and started a fund to pay a "posse" to travel to Chicago and "take care" of Johnson.51 A white lady from Oklahoma vented her anger to Illinois for permitting the marriage by telling the state that "down in this part of the country, he would never have lived to marry the second white girl."52 Two southern ministers even went as far as to recommend lynching Johnson.53 Reactions of this kind to the marriage occurred frequently; however, reactions of political officials attracted the most attention and threatened to be most detrimental, not only to Johnson, but the black race as well.

Speaking at the first session of the annual Governor's Conference on December 3, Governor Cole Blease of South

51 Los Angeles Times, December 5, 1912.
52 Cleveland Gazette, December 21, 1912, p. 2.
53 Crisis, December 1912, p. 72
Carolina gave warning as to what his judgment would be of the Johnson-Cameron marriage, when he commented on the abduction trial of which Johnson, to his regret, had been set free. "The black brute," shouted the Governor, "who lays his hands upon a white woman ought not to have any trial and all the white manhood of South Carolina wants to know is that they have the right man and they will have no trial. If we cannot protect our white women from black fiends, where is our boasted civilization?"\textsuperscript{54} With the release of the news that Johnson and Cameron were married, Blease once again took it upon himself to address the convention on the subject. The Governor reaffirmed his confession that:\textsuperscript{55}

There is but one punishment, and that must be speedy, when the negro lays his hands upon the person of a white woman. Such a thing as happened a few days ago in a certain state can't happen in South Carolina; the boasted hero of the blacks, who claims to be the superior of the white man in the ring, could not disgrace South Carolina by having himself united to a white woman within its borders, thank God, and if it did happen, the law provides a punishment for him and a punishment for her... In the South we love our women, we hold them higher than all things else, and whenever anything steps between a Southern man and the defense and virtue of the women of his nation and his states, he will tear it down and walk over it in her defense, regardless of what may be the consequences...

Bearing close resemblance to Blease's address were the criticisms of the marriage by the governors of Virginia and Maryland. "It is a desecration of one of our most sacred rites," were the words of Governor William Mann of Virginia. Governor Phillip Goldsborough vehemently added: "The Johnson marriage would never have been allowed in Maryland. We protect our white girls."

Other governors at the Convention spoke on the marriage and there was a consensus of opinion that the situation necessitated more stringent laws prohibiting marriages between the races. Even in states where interracial marriages

\textsuperscript{54} Proceedings of the Fifth Meeting of the Governors of the States of the Union, Richmond, Virginia, December 3-7, 1912. (Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia), p. 52.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., pp. 199-200.
were not forbidden by law, governors now felt obliged to advocate their passage. "That Johnson wedding," spoke Governor John Dix of New York, "is a blot on our civilization. Such desecration of the marriage tie should never be allowed." Governor John Tener of Pennsylvania commented that "any law to prevent the mixture of bloods of different colors" had his hearty approval. Stating remorsefully that his state had no law to prohibit such alliances, Governor Hudson Harmon of Ohio placed his sympathies with those who agitated for an anti-intermarriage law. In Massachusetts, Governor Eugene Foss now remarked that he was in favor of placing such a law in the state's statute books. Likewise, Governor Simeon Baldwin of Connecticut said that he "would like to see one passed."  

The Johnson-Cameron marriage was so revolting to Representative Seaborn A. Roddenberry of Georgia that, on December 11, 1912, he introduced in Congress a constitutional amendment to ban intermarriages. Eloquent with indignation, he gave defense of his proposed amendment in a lengthy speech:

...No brutality, no infamy, no degradation in all the years of southern slavery, possessed such villainous character and such atrocious qualities as the provision of the laws of Illinois, New York, Massachusetts, and other states which allow the marriage of the negro, Jack Johnson, to a woman of Caucasian strain. [applause]. Gentlemen, I offer this resolution... that the States of the Union may have an opportunity to ratify it...

Intermarriage between whites and blacks is repulsive and averse to every sentiment of pure American spirit. It is abhorrent and repugnant to the very principles of a pure Saxon government. It is subversive of social peace. It is destructive of moral supremacy, and ultimately this slavery of white women to black beasts will bring this nation to a conflict as fatal and as bloody as ever reddened the soil of Virginia or crimsoned the mountain paths of Pennsylvania.

...Let us uproot and exterminate now this debasing, ultra-demoralizing, un-American and inhuman leprosy.

One month later, in Chicago, there occurred a highly

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56 Comments of Governors are in New York Age, December 12, 1912, p. 4; Age, December 19, 1912, p. 4.
publicized incident in which a fifteen-year-old mentally retarded white girl was married to a forty-two-year-old black man. According to the reports of the Chicago Record Herald, which was read before the House of Representatives by Roddenberry, the black man was quoted as saying that he had a right to take the young girl for his wife “if Jack Johnson could marry Lucille Cameron. I wanted her and I got her. Her mother is raving because I am colored. She thinks I ain’t good enough. But if Jack Johnson is good enough to marry white women, why can’t I marry one?” The remarks of this “African negro [sic],” to Roddenberry, served as undeniable proof that the Johnson-Cameron marriage was a threat to the “purity” of white womanhood. Waving a copy of the marriage certificate before the House of Representatives he, once again, encouraged legislators on the state and national levels to pass laws “prohibiting forever the marriages of whites and negroes [sic] in this country.”

Instigated by men like Roddenberry and Blease, anti-intermarriage bills were introduced in ten of the twenty states then free of such law in 1913. In Congress, at least twenty-one bills of this nature were introduced. No less than five bills were presented that year in Illinois alone. And while none of these bills gained final state or national approval to be enacted into law, they reveal to a great extent the national impact of the Johnson-Cameron marriage.

Affronted by the racist declarations of whites who advocated the passage of anti-intermarriage laws and, on occasion, lynchings to curtail the dreaded romantic associations

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58 Ibid., January 30, 1913, p. 2312.
between black men and white women, many blacks and some whites were moved to condemn the white demagogues. They believed that the Johnson-Cameron marriage was not desirable for a national race figure and recognized that it had the potential of creating ill-feelings against the race; yet they were of the firm conviction that the marriage was merely an act of mutual consent between two individuals which had been sanctioned by law and was thus not a crime. Moreover, they felt that state and national anti-intermarriage laws were unreasonably harsh penalties to impose upon an entire race for deeds of a single member. Still further, they questioned as to why the anti-Johnsonites had failed to offer legal remedy for the countless cases of concubinage between white men and black women, particularly in the South.⁶⁰

As expected, a prime target in the retaliation was Governor Cole Blease of South Carolina. His blatant racism as manifested in his favoring of lynchings was repulsive, not only to blacks, but to a large number of some of the more progressive-minded whites of the period. A correspondent of the New York World asserted that the Governor exhibited the characteristics of the “poor white trash” of the South in his espousal of lynchings as a solution for the prevention of associations between black men and white women. “There is a growing suspicion that no matter how bad a man Johnson may be—and he is bad undoubtedly—popular clamor and race prejudice are making him blacker than he is,” continued the writer. “Whatever he may be, he is entitled to his rights under laws impartially administered.” Commenting on how “the head of a Christian American commonwealth in solemn conclave applauds the mob and upholds its lust for blood,” the New York Times added that the lynching of blacks who consorted with white women could no longer be condoned because, “This is not an age for Blease and his like.” From the Governor’s own state, the black Sumter Defender criti-

⁶⁰Edward Byron Reuter, a white sociologist, stated that while the cases of concubinage between white men and black women were numerous, due to the nature of such relations it is “wholly impossible” to say exactly how many cases there actually were at any given period. The Mulatto in the United States (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 144.
cized him for not showing equal concern about the protection
of black girls from the sexual advances of white men. "Not a
single white rapist in South Carolina has met death for his
crime through the orderly process of the courts or by lynch-
ing," pointed out the Defender. "In Sumter County alone,
there have been, during the past ten years, five assaults by
white men against Negro girls, and not a single one of the
criminals was even brought to trial."  

Representative Roddenberry also received an abundance
of criticism for his proposed anti-interracial marriage amend-
ment. The Chicago Defender exclaimed, "It is very well, for Mr.
Roddenberry to lash himself in a fury over the marriage of
Jack Johnson to a white woman, but what in the name of
heaven does he propose to do about the colored woman who is
more earnestly sought by the white man than the white
woman is sought by the Negro?"  

Similarly the Chicago Broad Ax blitzed the "wild or large-eyed mossback states-
man . . . from the land of clay and crackers" for ignoring the
issue of "white gentlemen consorting with colored women."
The Broad Ax also exhorted the white women of Georgia to
recall the Congressman and "select someone else to champi-
on their cause who will not stamp or brand them as being
weak-minded drones or members of the superior race."  

The black St. Louis Argus wrote that Roddenberry should
have admitted that Johnson's marriage was more honorable
than "many of the white gentlemen" who were "rearing
octoroon families alongside their legitimate offspring."  

Even the champion's bride, Lucille Cameron, stood puzzled
as to why the Georgia representative had not seen it imper-
ative to "stop Southern and Northern white men as well
from living and raising children by colored women out of
wedlock."  

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61 Reprinted in Crisis, December, 1912, p. 74; Crisis, January, 1913, p. 124.
62 Defender, December 14, 1912, p. 3.
63 Broad Ax, December 14, 1912, p. 1.
64 Reprinted in Broad Ax, December 30, 1912, p. 1.
65 Cleveland Gazette, December 21, 1912, p. 2. For the reaction of other black
presses to Roddenberry see: Washington Bee, December 21, 1912, p. 4; Gazette,
December 21, 1912, p. 2; Philadelphia Tribune, December 14, 1912, p. 1; New York
Age, December 19, 1912, p. 1.
Often blacks chose not to distinguish individually any of Johnson's detractors—whom they viewed synonymously with anti-black forces. Instead, they condemned in common all who sought by legislative procedures, vigilance committees, or other means of proscribe the black race as a result of the Johnson-Cameron marriage. However, to classify them as avid pro-Johnsonites would be misleading. In fact, they deplored Johnson's seemingly endless affairs with white women with acrimony equal to those they criticized. Yet, as the Washington Bee explained, although they were "unalterably opposed to inter-marriages," they were "just as unalterably opposed to the enactment of any statute, state or national, to prohibit them."66 Clearly comprehending the implication of such "white supremacy" proposals, the Age articulated a view generally held by blacks: "Marriage is a question for every citizen to decide for himself... We do not need to favor the marriage of blacks and whites as a personal matter, but we do need to stand by the principle that blacks and whites shall be free to marry if they so desire, without legal or sentimental restringtion...."67

C. Grant Williams, editor of the Philadelphia Tribune, wrote, "Because Jack Johnson saw fit to marry a white girl, and the white girl saw fit to become his bride, the white pulpit, press and the Chief Executives of many states are trying to prove to the world that Johnson represents the true character of the colored man." Johnson and his wife, Williams continued, belonged to the "sporting element" of their races. Thus, any of their actions did not warrant consideration among the "self-respecting law-abiding citizens of either race."68 Likewise, the Indianapolis Freeman, while being sternly opposed to race proscription, remarked that it was "satisfied that the better class" of blacks in its city saw the champion "as a sport—nothing more."69 In the same vein, the Richmond Planet wrote that although blacks generally deplored racial mix, it still believed that "from a stand-

66 Bee, February 1, 1913, p. 4.
67 Age, December 19, 1912, p. 4.
68 Tribune, December 14, 1912, p. 7.
69 Freeman, December 14, 1912, p. 7.
point of personal liberty, a white man has the moral right to marry a colored woman and vice versa.’”

The double standard of justice for whites and blacks as indicated by the actions of the anti-Johnsonites, motivated the Chicago Defender and the Muskogee (Oklahoma) Cimeter to request an equal application of the law for both races. “If Johnson,” opined the Defender, “had been a white man and had made the display of honorable intentions evidenced by the marriage of the Cameron girl, all of the court procedure would have terminated automatically and by common consent, but the only thing he could reasonably do in atonement to the girl for the unpleasant notoriety to which she has been subjected is the very thing that the irrationalists did not want him to do.” The Cimeter suggested that whites not forget the misuse of black women and girls by men of their race. “White women are not responsible for the thousands of white negroes, but white men are, and it’s these fellows who should quit the devilment because they are white Jack Johnsons, and are just as detestable’” said that paper.

W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of the Crisis, the organ of the interracial NAACP, questioned the wisdom of mixed marriages; but, in a summary of the entire controversy surrounding the Johnson-Cameron marriage, concluded that such marriages should not be forbidden for three reasons: physical, social, and moral.

1. For the physical reason . . . would be publicly to acknowledge that black blood is a physical taint—a thing no decent, self-respecting black man can be asked to admit.
2. For the social reason . . . if two full-grown responsible human beings . . . propose to live together as man and wifl, it is only social decency not simply to allow, but to compel them to marry. . . . Granted that Johnson and Miss Cameron proposed to live together, was it better for them to be legally married or not?
3. The moral reason: such laws have the colored girl absolutely helpless before the lust of white men. It reduces colored women in the eyes of the law to the level of dogs.

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70 Reprinted in Broad Az, January 4, 1913, p. 1.
71 Defender, December 14, 1912, p. 3.
72 Reprinted in Crisis, December, 1912, p. 73.
73 Crisis, February, 1913, p. 180.
In retrospect, the nation's reaction to Jack Johnson and his affairs with white women—September 1912 through January 1913—shows that the Champion reached his nadir in popularity during this period. He had incensed many whites to the point of proposed legislation which affected his entire race. The esteem that he had once held among most blacks and many whites was drastically reduced. What affection that remained from blacks, was perhaps best expressed by the Cleveland Gazette when it wrote "that Jack Johnson has married his second white wife and had a whole carload of white women does not in the least alter his championship status, and the whole world knows this, too."