
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 371 Session of
2013

INTRODUCED BY FLYNN, SCHLOSSBERG, CLAY, MILLARD, THOMAS, BISHOP,
W. KELLER, HENNESSEY, CALTAGIRONE, MCNEILL, COHEN, PARKER,
YOUNGBLOOD, ROCK, KOTIK, P. DALEY, MIRABITO, KIRKLAND,
HARKINS, READSHAW, V. BROWN, KORTZ, CLYMER, BENNINGHOFF,
WATERS, GINGRICH, MAHONEY, GOODMAN, MURT, GAINNEY, HAGGERTY,
BIZZARRO, BROWNLEE, J. HARRIS, KINSEY AND CRUZ, JUNE 18, 2013

INTRODUCED AS NONCONTROVERSIAL RESOLUTION UNDER RULE 35,
JUNE 18, 2013

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the illustrious life of pioneering heavyweight boxing
2 champion Jack Johnson.

3 WHEREAS, John Arthur "Jack" Johnson was born on March 31,
4 1878, in Galveston, Texas, as the son of former slaves, who both
5 worked to earn enough money to raise six children and teach them
6 how to read and write; and

7 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson started boxing in his teenage years by
8 engaging in unofficial fights with Galveston locals; and

9 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson achieved great success as he moved on
10 to official fights and earned a record of 56 wins and 2 losses,
11 giving him the confidence that he could attain the highest level
12 of achievement in the sport of boxing; and

13 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson's life and career would be widely
14 affected by intense racial discrimination, and the boxing
15 establishment was reluctant to give him an opportunity to fight

1 for the heavyweight title due to his race; and

2 WHEREAS, In 1908, after continually challenging the reluctant
3 reigning heavyweight champion, Tommy Burns, to a fight for the
4 title, Burns finally relented and the match was held in
5 Australia; and

6 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson was 6 feet 1 inch tall and weighed in
7 at nearly 200 pounds, and Tommy Burns was the shortest
8 heavyweight champion ever at 5 feet 7 inches tall and just under
9 170 pounds; and

10 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson went on to defeat Burns to win the
11 heavyweight championship in a 14th-round technical knockout,
12 thereby becoming the first African-American heavyweight boxing
13 champion in the history of the sport, and he held the title from
14 1908 to 1915; and

15 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson accomplished this feat during the
16 bygone Jim Crow era in American history, which was characterized
17 by racial segregation and blatant, widespread discrimination and
18 persecution against African Americans in society; and

19 WHEREAS, This victory set off a search to find a "Great White
20 Hope" who could take the title back from Mr. Johnson, as the
21 victory by an African American over Burns, a Caucasian, was not
22 well received overall by the majority white American population;
23 and

24 WHEREAS, James Jeffries, former heavyweight champion, was
25 lured out of retirement as the "Great White Hope," however, in
26 July 1910, he failed to unseat Jack Johnson as the champion,
27 losing in the 15th round as Johnson proved to be stronger and
28 more nimble than his opponent; and

29 WHEREAS, The outcome of this event sparked racial riots
30 across the country, which led to several deaths; and

1 WHEREAS, According to the International Boxing Hall of Fame,
2 of Jack Johnson's 123 total fights, he won 77, of which 48 were
3 knockouts, lost 13, drew 14 and 19 were judged to be no
4 decisions; and

5 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson was nicknamed the "Galveston Giant,"
6 and was a highly capable and artful defensive fighter, who
7 experts believe could likely defeat almost anyone in the history
8 of heavyweight boxing; and

9 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson was one of the first celebrity athletes
10 who, living large, appeared in the press, on radio and in motion
11 pictures, and who endorsed various products, all earning him
12 quite a considerable income; and

13 WHEREAS, During his lifetime, Jack Johnson patented three
14 inventions, including an improved adjustable wrench and an anti-
15 theft device, both relating to automobiles, and the third was a
16 steam-powered heavy winch; and

17 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson authored two books, one published in
18 1914 and one in 1927, each of which were memoirs of his life,
19 and he was the sole author of both volumes; and

20 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson starred in theater productions such as
21 vaudeville shows; and

22 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson opened a nightclub in the neighborhood
23 of Harlem, New York City, that was later purchased from him and
24 renamed the Cotton Club, which became a famous venue for
25 African-American performers; and

26 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson fought sporadically until he was 50
27 years of age, when he retired from the sport of boxing; and

28 WHEREAS, On June 10, 1946, at 68 years of age, Jack Johnson
29 tragically died in a car accident near Raleigh, North Carolina,
30 as he sped away from a restaurant where he had been refused

1 service due to his race; and

2 WHEREAS, Jack Johnson has been inducted into both the
3 International Boxing Hall of Fame and the World Boxing Hall of
4 Fame and is considered to be one of the best professional boxers
5 of all time; therefore be it

6 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives honor the
7 illustrious life of pioneering heavyweight boxing champion Jack
8 Johnson.