

Peter Jackson and the Elusive Heavyweight Championship: A Black Athlete's Struggle Against the Late Nineteenth Century Color-Line†

David K. Wiggins
*Department of Physical Education,
Dance, and Leisure Studies
Kansas State University*

Peter Jackson was full of optimism when he arrived in San Francisco in the Spring of 1888. At the urging of local sportswriter W. W. (Bill) Naughton, Jackson had made the nearly 9,000 mile trek from Australia in hopes of securing matches with America's leading boxers and ultimately wresting the world's heavyweight championship from the Boston Strong Boy, John L. Sullivan. Jackson's arrival was anxiously looked forward to by the West Coast sports who had read nothing but glowing reports about the boxing exploits of the man Australians admiringly referred to as the "Black Prince." Jackson had ascended swiftly to the top of the pugilistic ladder in Australia by defeating the country's top fighters, including Tom Lees for the heavyweight championship in 1886. The word out of Australia was that Jackson was a world beater. No one could stay in the ring very long with the talented black boxer and expect to survive. His enormous size, superior reach, and lightning quick hands had proven too much for even the best of the Australian fighters.

Unfortunately, Jackson's stay in America did not bring about the unconditional success he and his ardent admirers had hoped for. Instead it was a period in Jackson's career that coupled great triumphs with personal frustrations and disillusionments. Although he would establish himself as perhaps late nineteenth century's most famous black athlete, he would be denied the one thing he coveted most in life—fighting for the world heavyweight title. Like most black athletes of the period, Jackson could not transcend the increasing American intolerance of interracial sport.¹ Despite several lucrative offers, Sullivan

†The author would like to thank Professor Donald J. Mrozek of Kansas State University for reading an earlier version of this manuscript and Mr. Bill Schutte of the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater for sharing his fine collection on late nineteenth century American boxing.

1. A number of scholars have examined the racial discrimination faced by black athletes during the latter half of the nineteenth century. See for example: David K. Wiggins, "Isaac Murphy: Black Hero in Nineteenth Century American Sport 1861-1896," *Canadian Journal of History Of Sport and Physical Education*, 10 (May, 1979): 15-32, Iack W. Berryman, "Early Black Leadership in Collegiate Football: Massachusetts as a Pioneer," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 9 (June, 1981): 17-28; G. B. McKinney, "Negro Professional Baseball

repeatedly refused to cross the color-line and fight Jackson. Sullivan's successor to the crown, James J. Corbett, cleverly avoided giving Jackson a match after he became champion in 1892. Corbett's conqueror, Bob Fitzsimmons, was the same—adamantly refusing to enter the ring with the talented black boxer. The fact that Jackson was never given the opportunity to fight for the world's title raises several questions. How did Jackson respond to having the color-line drawn against him? Was the racial discrimination faced by Jackson any different than that endured by other black athletes during the latter half of the nineteenth century? Was Jackson treated differently in America than he was in Australia and England?

Jackson's early years differed from those of most children. Born in the village of Fredieriksted on the island of St. Croix, Virgin Islands on July 3, 1861, Jackson emigrated to Australia with his parents when he was twelve. His father had become disenchanted with sailing the waters of the Caribbean as a fisherman and decided to seek employment elsewhere. But by the time Jackson was fifteen, his parents had tired of Australia and returned to their native land. The adventurous young Jackson stayed behind and became a sailor for American ship owner, Clay Callahan. He never saw his parents again. When he finally returned to St. Croix, some twenty-one years later, his parents had already passed away. The only remaining members of his family were a brother and two sisters who he never met.² Nonetheless, staying in Australia helped Jackson's career, because it was while under the employ of Callahan that he got his first taste of boxing. Both a highly successful businessman and boxer of some note in Sydney and its environs, Callahan took an immediate liking to Jackson. He was enamored of the skills Jackson exhibited in several of their informal boxing matches and in bouts Jackson had arranged with other crew members. In Jackson, Callahan saw a quiet and unassuming young man who possessed everything necessary to someday become world champion. Besides extraordinary athletic ability, Jackson possessed those character traits normally thought to be lacking amongst members of his race. He was bright, hard working, ambitious, and perhaps more than anything else, a man with a great heart.

Callahan proved his respect for Jackson's talents by taking the fledgling black fighter to Sydney and introducing him to Larry Foley, the most famous man in Australian boxing. A smallish but rugged man, Foley was perhaps the person most responsible for the enormous popularity of boxing in Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Shortly after defeating Abe Hicken for the Australian championship in 1879, Foley retired from the prize ring and became a distinguished boxing instructor at his White Horse Saloon in Sydney. Foley's saloon was one of the first great centers of prize fighting in Australia, only to be surpassed in popularity by the Sydney Amateur Athletic

Players in the Upper South in the Gilded Age," *Journal of Sport History*, 3 (Winter, 1976): 273-280.

2. Jackson's early childhood is chronicled in Tom Langley, *The Life of Peter Jackson: Champion of Australia* (Leicester: Vance Harvey, 1974); A. G. Hales, *Black Prince Peter: The Romantic Career of Peter Jackson* (London: Wright and Brown, 1931); Nathaniel S. Fleischer, *Black Dynamite: The Story of the Negro in the Prize Ring from 1782 to 1938*, 3 vols. (New York: The Ring Book Shop, 1938). 1: 123-130.

Club and the Melbourne Athletic Club in the early 1890s. Boxers, young and old, famous and not so famous, came from the most distant parts of the country to seek his advice and train under Foley's watchful eye. To many fighters, training under his tutelage was indispensable to their future success in the ring.³

Jackson's life changed dramatically the day he and Callahan arrived in Foley's saloon. His days as a sailor were over. Foley took one look at Jackson and decided to take him on as a pupil. Other than a couple of fighters he had seen as a young boy growing up in New South Wales, Foley had never laid eyes on someone so perfectly built to be a boxer. Though still in his late teens, Jackson was already a superb figure of a man, molded on such perfect lines that it was difficult to believe that so slender-looking a body actually tipped the scales at close to 200 pounds. His wide shoulders, deep chest, slim waist, and long arms and legs were so beautifully balanced on his six foot quarter inch frame, that his appearance suggested, in the words of English boxing authority W. S. Doherty, "an idea of some splendid glossy-coated thoroughbred racehorse."⁴

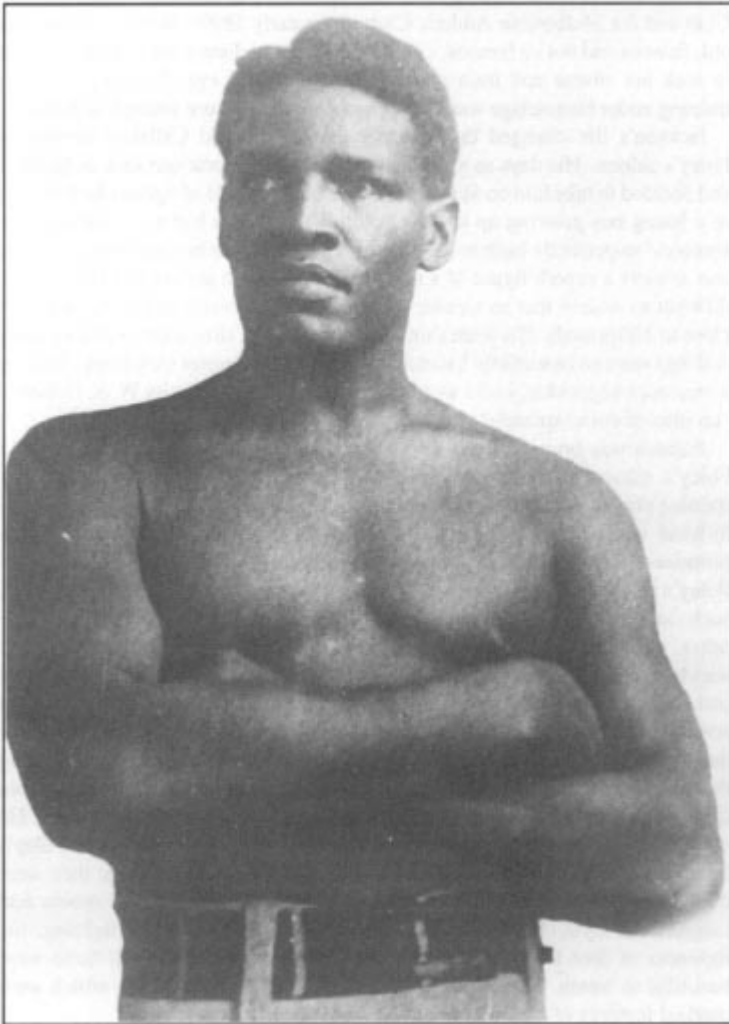
Jackson was brought along very slowly. He spent upwards of two years in Foley's saloon learning everything he possibly could about the sport. His training proved particularly beneficial because he had the luxury of going head-to-head with some of boxing's future stars, many of whom would figure prominently in Jackson's career. Also receiving their boxing education in Foley's saloon at the time were eventual world champion Bob Fitzsimmons and such outstanding performers as Frank Slavin, "Young Griffo" (Albert Griffiths), and Jim Hall. Like all good trainers, Foley was careful to teach the standard techniques and fundamentals of the noble science to Jackson without insisting that his black protege adopt a precise style. Foley, who had learned some of the finer points of the sport from famed English fighter Jim Mace during the latter's visit to Australia in 1877, stressed a defensive style of fighting that placed a premium on the short left jab and punches emanating straight from the shoulder. Jackson, for his part, took to the prize ring like a duck to water. He was a natural. During his sparring sessions, the rest of the boxers in Foley's basement gymnasium would invariably stop in the middle of what they were doing and gather around the ring to gape at Jackson's graceful moves and magnificent style. His arrow-like straightness of figure while fighting, his lightness of foot for so big a man, and the precision of his left hand were beautiful to watch. The feints, cross-counters, and side-stepping which were marked features of his coming fights, were already in evidence.⁵

By 1882 Foley began to match Jackson in a series of fights that would ultimately result in his becoming Australia's heavyweight champion. In the

3. For details on Foley's career see, Alec Chisholm, ed., *The Australian Encyclopedia*. 10 vols. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971), 2: 81-84; 4: 127-128; 6: 86-87; Frank Gerald, *Millionaire in Memories* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1936), pp. 193-213. Foley's saloon was frequented not only by boxers but also by many of Australia's most famous track men, scullers, horsemen, footballers, and cricketers. See Gerald, *Millionaire in Memories*, pp. 193-213.

4. W. J. Doherty, *In the Days Of the Giants; Memories Of a Champion Of the Prize Ring* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1931), p. 49.

5. Chisholm, ed., *The Australian Encyclopedia*, 2: 81-84; 4: 127-128; 6: 86-87; Gerald, *Millionaire in Memories*, pp. 193-213



Peter Jackson, ca. 1890. (Photo courtesy of Bill Schutte).

summer of that year, Jackson fought a four round draw in Sydney against Jack Hayes, a good but forgettable local fighter. In a return match two months later, Jackson overwhelmed Hayes in a seven round knockout. Just a few weeks after the second Hayes fight, Jackson kayoed Sam Britten, a bullish heavyweight from New South Wales, in the sixth round. In December Jackson scored his biggest triumph yet, a three round victory over Mick Dooley, the doughty and

herculean young New South Welshman who had devoured his previous opponents. In 1884, Jackson fought two intensely physical bouts with Bill Farnan, the hard hitting blacksmith from Victoria whose slugging style of fighting was reminiscent of the former English champion Tom Sayers, Unfortunately for Jackson, he was knocked out by Farnan in the third round of their first bout in Melbourne and had to settle for a draw with Farnan in a return match in the same city just one month later. Devastated by his lack of success against Farnan, Jackson spent the next two years in Foley's saloon honing his skills and occasionally fighting in exhibition matches. He was thoroughly determined to become his adopted country's recognized champion. Finally, on the evening of September 25, 1886, his dream of capturing the Australian championship became reality when he defeated the spirited Victorian boxer Tom Lees in a gruelling thirty round fight in Foley's saloon. Certainly one of the more written about fights in Australian history, the victory over Lees was the culmination of four years of intense training by Jackson and convincingly proved that he was one of boxing's brightest stars.⁶

Jackson's elation after his victory over Lees was short-lived. Despite his willingness to fight all comers, Jackson quickly found out that it was, indeed, lonely at the top. He simply could find no one to fight. Why? First of all, there were only a handful of fighters in Australia at the time who stood a chance in the ring with Jackson. Former opponents such as Hayes, Britten, Dooley, and even Farnan, would have been outclassed by the Jackson of 1886. Secondly, Jackson and Frank Slavin, perhaps the most legitimate contender for the crown, could never come up with a mutually agreeable location in which to fight. Slavin would consent to a match with Jackson only if it were held in Melbourne, while Jackson was just as adamant that the fight be held at Foley's saloon in Sydney. The two boxers would not get together until some five years later when they fought a much celebrated match at the National Sporting Club in London. Lastly, Jack Burke, the popular boxer known as the "Irish Lad," repeatedly refused to cross the color-line and fight Jackson. He asserted that he did not want to injure his reputation by fighting a black boxer. Burke's decision was just one small example, of course, of the kind of racism that had been operating in Australia for years.⁷ Jackson handled his first taste of discrimination in much the same way he did similar situations later on in his career. Instead of hiding his true feelings behind a facade of passive acquiescence, Jackson denounced Burke for his actions and repeatedly challenged him to a fight. He pursued Burke with an aggressiveness that belied his basically easy-going and cheerful

6. See *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, March 3, 1889; *National Police Gazette*, June 9, 1888; Langley, *Life of Peter Jackson*, pp. 16-17; Fleischer, *Black Dynamite*, 1: 131-136; *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 22, 25, 27, 30, October 4, 1886.

7. W. W. Naughton, *Kings of the Queensberry Realm* (Chicago: The Continental Publishing Company, 1902), pp. 187-188; Fleischer, *Black Dynamite*, 1: 138. To gain insight into the racial realities of Australian culture, see F.S. Stevens, ed., *Racism: The Australian Experience*, 2 vols. (Sydney: Australian and New Zealand Book Company, 1971); Humphrey McQueen, *Aborigines Race and Racism* (Victoria: Dominion Press, 1974); Janine Roberts, *From Massacres to Mining: The Colonization Of Aboriginal Australia* (London: War and Want, 1978); C. D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Harmonsworth: Penguin Press, 1970); David Davies, *The Last of the Tasmanians* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974).

nature. His assailing tactics were probably best illustrated by the challenge he hurled at Burke immediately after the latter's exhibition match with Larry Foley in 1887. Prior to Burke's leaving the arena and before the crowd began to disperse, Jackson stepped to the side of the ring and angrily challenged Burke: "He says he [Burke] draws the color-line. Well, John L. Sullivan, who also draws the color-line, says he has no objection to meeting a colored fighter in private. If Mr. Burke is of the same way of thinking, I will gladly meet him tonight, tomorrow or any day he might select in a cellar barn or any private room he chooses to name, and will wager him 1,000 pounds on the result."⁸ Jackson's little speech did nothing to change Burke's mind. The veteran white fighter simply glared at Jackson, said nothing, and quickly found his way out of the arena.

While Burke's unwillingness to fight frustrated Jackson, it made his decision to leave Australia that much easier. With no one to fight in his adopted homeland, Jackson set sail for America aboard the steamship *Alameda* arriving in San Francisco in early April, 1888. Accompanying him on the trip were Australian lightweight boxers, Paddy Gorman and Tom Meadows.⁹ The arrival of the three boxers in San Francisco was significant because they represented the initial wave of Australian fighters that invaded America in hordes during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Following closely behind the Jackson contingent, many of them settling in San Francisco, were such prominent Australian fighters as Bob Fitzsimmons, George Dawson, Jim Hall, Abe Willis, Joe Goddard, Jim Barron, Steve O'Donnell, Tom Tracy, Billy Smith, Jim Ryan, "Young Griffio," Billy Murphy, Jack Hall, George McKinzie, and George Mulholland.

Jackson was lured to America by the opportunity of financial gain and the chance to fight the world heavyweight champion, John L. Sullivan. Like the Eastern European athletes who have recently immigrated to this country, Jackson viewed America as the place where his potential could be fully realized and his fortunes made. He was encouraged to make the move by W. W. Naughton, the noted San Francisco sportswriter. Not that he needed a great deal of prodding, but Jackson had some mixed emotions about leaving Australia. He was treated quite well in Australia having become a darling of the sporting crowd. He also realized that American blacks were not treated much better than their counterparts in Australia and sometimes even worse. Ultimately the chance to gain wealth and prestige overshadowed Jackson's fears.

Jackson's first two months in San Francisco were taken up primarily by visits to some of the city's famous sporting establishments. He called upon the sporting men from such noted organizations as the Olympic Club, the Golden Gate Athletic Club, and the California Athletic Club (CAC). He soon became closely associated with the CAC, becoming its professor of boxing almost immediately after his arrival in the city. The club sponsored four of Jackson's

8. Naughton, *Kings of the Queensberry Realm*, pp. 157-158.

9. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, May 13, 1888; *San Francisco Call*, May 13, 1888; *National Police Gazette*, June 9, 1888

most important fights and became one of America's most influential boxing organizations during its relatively brief seven year history. Organized in 1886 by Southern California native Sam Mathews and Jack Seymour, an Englishman who had been closely identified with pedestrian sports in Australia, the CAC was perhaps the first organization in America where Queensberry glove contests were regularly staged. With a membership that exceeded 1,700 by 1890, the CAC was comprised of some of the most influential men in San Francisco.¹⁰

Jackson had difficulty in arranging matches during his initial days in San Francisco. No one dared to get into the ring with him until Con Riordan, boxing instructor at the Golden Gate Athletic Club, finally agreed to an exhibition match on June 4. Held at Jack Hallinan's Cremorne Garden, the fight with Riordan was Jackson's coming out party. This was the first opportunity for San Francisco's sporting element to see the much ballyhooed black boxer in action and Jackson did not disappoint them. In front of a crowd of about 1,500, Jackson flashed the skills that had made him one of Australia's most famous fighters. Those in attendance had nothing but praise for his abilities. It was the general consensus following the bout that Jackson was the cleverest boxer ever seen in the city. "Fear alone," said one of the spectators, "will prevent Sullivan from meeting Jackson."¹¹

The local sporting press was so impressed with Jackson's efforts against Riordan that they immediately began clamoring for a fight between him and Joe McAuliffe, the San Francisco fighter considered one of the finest heavyweights on the West Coast. McAuliffe was a logical choice to fight Jackson. He had amassed an impressive ring record, defeating in succession such noted boxers as Dick Matthews, Mike Brannan, Paddy Ryan, and Frank Glover. Unfortunately, McAuliffe refused to cross the color-line and fight Jackson. Despite repeated efforts to induce him to fight, McAuliffe steadfastly stuck to his decision not to fight Jackson. He had never fought a black man before and he was not about to start now.¹²

Unable to arrange a bout with McAuliffe, Jackson was forced to fight George Godfrey, the well-known black boxer from Boston. Jackson was not overly enthusiastic about the match. He understood that a victory over a good but non-contending boxer like Godfrey would not bring him any closer to a championship fight. In spite of this, Jackson agreed to the match with Godfrey for a purse of \$2,000 and the "colored heavyweight championship of the world." He had been in America for nearly five months without fighting a major bout and

10. For information on the California Athletic Club see Dewitt C. VanCourt, *The Making of Champions in California* (Los Angeles: Premier Printing Company, 1926), p. 11; Naughton, *Kings of the Queensberry Realm*, pp. 55-59. See also Nathaniel S. Fleischer, *The Heavyweight Championship: An Informal History @Heavyweight Boxing from 1719 to the Present Day* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1949), p. 119.

11. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, June 4, 5, 1888; *National Police Gazette*, July 14, 1888.

12. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, June 11, 12, July 2, September 10, 1888. For information on the plight of black Americans during the latter part of the nineteenth century, see George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Augst Meier and Elliott M. Redwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier Books, 1965).

desperately needed a match to hone skills already grown rusty from inactivity. Perhaps most importantly, Jackson needed the money. He had to recover some of the expenses he incurred on his trip from Australia and the money he had freely spent in San Francisco.¹³

The Jackson-Godfrey match came about through the efforts of the California Athletic Club and took place on August 24. None of the experts gave Godfrey much of a chance against Jackson. He was simply not as good as the black Australian. Clearly approaching the end of his career at the age of thirty-six, Godfrey owned a respectable but less than spectacular fight record. Similar to Sam Langford and other black boxers of the early twentieth century, Godfrey was compelled, because of economic reasons, to fight some of the same black boxers over and over again. His most recent opponent had been McHenry Johnson, a little known black boxer he had fought three times previously. Perhaps Godfrey's most famous fight was one he never fought. Legend has it that John L. Sullivan, just prior to capturing the world's heavyweight title from Paddy Ryan, once entered the ring with Godfrey in Boston, only to have the match interrupted by the police.¹⁴

It was apparent from the moment the two boxers entered the ring on the night of the fight that Jackson outclassed Godfrey. Wearing his customary blue stockings, soft-leather heelless shoes, and white tights, Jackson towered over his opponent and Godfrey was never able to overcome Jackson's reach advantage. There were moments when Godfrey landed some forceful punches, but most of his blows fell far short. Jackson hit his opponent with alarming regularity in the first ten rounds, sending Godfrey to the floor with an uppercut in the second round. By the beginning of the fourteenth round, Godfrey probably wished he was anywhere but in the ring with Jackson. Jackson relentlessly followed him around the ring, raining him with blows that caused blood to flow freely from his nose and mouth. Godfrey tried to prolong the inevitable by clinging to Jackson, but to no avail. Jackson simply held him up with his right hand and hit him with repeated lefts. Finally, in the middle of the nineteenth round, Godfrey murmured, "I give in," saying later that he had "no desire to be killed."¹⁵

Jackson's defeat of Godfrey was significant because it caused Joe McAuliffe to have a change of heart. Initially refusing to meet Jackson on account of his color, McAuliffe was now doing everything he could to get Jackson into the ring. His sudden decision to drop the color-line did not stem from any altruistic reasons, but was strictly a career move. McAuliffe was pragmatic enough to know that despite his hatred for blacks he would have to fight Jackson if he was

13. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, July 9, 30, 1888; August 6, 1888; *National Police Gazette*, July 21, 23, 28, August 4, 18, 1888; *Cleveland Gazette*, August 4, 1888.

14. See Bill Edwards, *Gladiators of the Prize Ring or Pugilists of America, and Their Contemporaries from Tom Hyer to James J. Corbett* (Chicago: The Athletic Publishing Co., 1895); *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, July 2, 1888; William A. Brady, *The Fighting Man* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1916), p. 61; Donald Barr Chidsey, *John the Great: The Times and Life of a Remarkable American John L. Sullivan* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1942), pp. 108-109.

15. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, August 25, 1888. See also, *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, August 26, 27, 1888; *National Police Gazette*, September 8, 22, 1888.

ever to be considered a legitimate contender for the heavyweight title. There was a little bit of irony in all of this of course. While Jackson continued to be denied the opportunity to take part in a championship bout, boxers like McAuliffe often improved their chances or actually earned the right to fight for the title based on their performances against the black Australian.¹⁶

Jackson was obviously delighted that McAuliffe finally decided to drop the color-line. It would be the first time since his arrival in America that his abilities would truly be tested. As it turned out, Jackson passed his first test with flying colors. Though a 2 to 1 underdog, Jackson convincingly defeated McAuliffe at the California Athletic Club on December 28. At no point in the contest was Jackson in serious trouble. In fact, he simply toyed with McAuliffe for most of the fight. He had no difficulty in ducking McAuliffe's powerful right and administering counter punches to the face and body of the well-built white boxer. The fight ended about half-way through the twenty-fourth round, when Jackson delivered a left hook to McAuliffe's stomach and immediately followed it up with a straight right between the eyes. The badly beaten McAuliffe fell with his knees doubled under him near the ropes and was counted out amid cheers from many of those in attendance.¹⁷

The American public reacted to Jackson's victory over McAuliffe as it would throughout most of his career. His triumph almost immediately earned him hero status among this country's black community. Blacks from all over the country showered Jackson with unabridged admiration for what he had accomplished in the ring with McAuliffe. Perhaps more than any other athlete of his day, Jackson symbolized unbridled aggression for the black man in American society. While most black men of the period were taught to hold back and camouflage their normal masculine assertiveness, Jackson was openly expressing his aggressive impulses against white boxers. To be sure, Jackson typically assumed a defensive style in his fighting and was careful not to dole out undue punishment to white fighters. But he fought with a kind of fury that let blacks vicariously share uninhibited masculine drives.¹⁸

Perhaps no black community reacted more enthusiastically to Jackson's triumph than the one in San Francisco. One local newspaper noted that the city's black population had "not had such a jubilee since Mr. Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation." Every black man who had been waiting outside the clubroom rushed back home immediately after the conclusion of the fight

16. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, August 26, September 10, 11, 1888. James Corbett would secure a championship fight with Sullivan in 1892 based partly on his performance in the ring against Jackson in 1891. Jim Jeffries would fight Bob Fitzsimmons for the crown in 1899 just one year after defeating Jackson in a three round fight in San Francisco.

17. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, December 29-31, 1888; *National Police Gazette*, January 12, 1889; *Cleveland Gazette*, January 5, 1889.

18. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, December 29-31, January 5, April 21, 1889; *National Police Gazette*, February 2, 1889; *Cleveland Gazette*, January 12, 1889. Randy Roberts has recently noted that black boxers, including Jackson, normally assumed a defensive style in their fighting. "Black Fighters," says Roberts, "viewed both the ring and the object differently. The ring, like the world, was assumed to be the white man's territory, and the black fighter's object was to yield it without suffering physical punishment, allowing his opponent to defeat himself." See Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York: Free Press, 1983), p. 26.

and unfurled the "glad tidings." The word around town following the bout was that anyone who employed a black man "got mighty little work out of him." Those blacks who had placed bets on the fight "jingled coins in their pockets," and for "once were disposed to dispute the superiority of any race other than their own." The black waiters in the restaurant of the luxurious Palace Hotel neglected their customers, supposedly doing nothing but discuss the fight. Groups of them "stood about chuckling" and "letting the hungry men sit and curse the hotel and all in it." Easily the most demonstrative and revealing reaction occurred in the early morning hours after the fight when some hundred blacks gathered on Market Street and began parading up and down the well-known thoroughfare singing the praises of Jackson's victory.¹⁹

Interestingly, some whites praised Jackson's victory over McAuliffe as heartily as blacks did. The defeat of McAuliffe provided one of the first real opportunities to discover how whites felt about Jackson and generally their reactions were quite favorable. Tellingly, much of the post-fight comments of the white press centered around Jackson's positive character traits as much as it did his boxing abilities. Jackson possessed those personal qualities deemed suitable for members of his race. While never explicitly stating it, the white community believed that other blacks would do well to emulate him. In public, Jackson often assumed a deferential mask and shaped his feelings in the direction he thought whites wanted them to be. He ordinarily adopted an ingratiating and compliant manner with members of the majority race. Even in his dress, Jackson was rather conservative in comparison to other prominent blacks of the period. He always dressed in the latest fashions, but never wore the "freak clothes or favored the big cigar and scintillating diamond which some Negroes run to as soon as they are successful."²⁰

The irony in all of this was that Jackson was anything but submissive. It took an aggressive, driving, determined man to make it as far in the fight game as he had. Jackson was an expert at thoroughly concealing his ambition. Depending on the situation, Jackson could either be cleverly docile, verbally persuasive, or extremely forceful. One of his greatest gifts was versatility. Jackson was prepared to be passive if in a vulnerable position or when it assisted him in maintaining status. On the other hand, he could become combative when encountering discrimination, even though it might temporarily negate the quiet reticence on which he mostly relied. On more than one instance he got into street fights after whites hurled racial slurs at him. In the end, Jackson was prepared to stand on his dignity as a West Indian and protest American discrimination on his own behalf. Accustomed from infancy to standing up for

19. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, December 29-31, 1888.

20. Almost everyone who wrote about Jackson mentioned his gentlemanly qualities, unassuming nature, and positive character traits. See for example: *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 4, 1886; *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, June 25, 1888; *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 17, 1890; *National Police Gazette*, September 30, 1896; Alexander Johnston, *Ten and Out! The Complete Story of the Prize Ring in America* (New York: Washburn Publisher, 1945), p. 90; Fred Dartnell, "Seconds Out!" *Chats About Boxers, Their Trainers and Patrons* (London: T. Werner Laurie, n.d.), p. 170; James Butler, *Kings of the Ring* (London: Stanley Paul and Co., 1936), p. 139.

his rights, Jackson did not hesitate to be forceful and more enterprising than many contemporary native black American athletes.

Jackson wandered aimlessly for nearly three months after the McAuliffe match, having no immediate fight plans and repeatedly refusing to grant McAuliffe a rematch. He divided most of his time equally among the California Athletic Club, Joe Dieves' Road House, and the various entertainment districts of San Francisco. Jackson established a well-deserved reputation as someone who enjoyed a night on the town partying with friends and, occasionally, a bevy of beautiful, if not altogether virtuous females. Like many others in his profession, he was a big spender and heavy drinker, and, during the evenings, haunted the many saloons located on Morton Street near Union Square. In the end he squandered his winnings on booze and women. Jackson's generous nature and love of a good time did not allow him to do otherwise.²¹

Jackson's nearly three month layoff came to an end when he agreed to fight Patsy Cardiff, the Peoria Giant, at the California Athletic Club on April 26, 1889. The West Coast sportsmen did not expect the bout to be a particularly difficult one for Jackson and they were right. Cardiff, who had gained a degree of notoriety for a match he fought against John L. Sullivan some two years earlier in Minnesota, was able to withstand Jackson's onslaught for ten rounds before finally admitting defeat. Jackson was never in serious trouble during the fight, repeatedly scoring with combination punches that left the tall and muscular Cardiff badly battered.²²

Jackson decided to leave San Francisco shortly after his fight with Cardiff and traveled East seeking matches with legitimate title contenders. Increasingly frustrated in San Francisco, Jackson hoped for better luck in such boxing rich metropolitan areas as Chicago and New York. He embarked on his trip sometime in May, 1889. Traveling with him were some of the most prominent men in boxing. Sam Fitzpatrick, the former Australian boxer who guided the careers of several outstanding fighters including Jack Johnson, went along as Jackson's trainer. Jackson's sparring partner was Tom Lees, the man he defeated for the Australian Championship in 1886. W. W. Naughton was along covering the trip for his newspaper. The final member of the contingent was Charles "Parson" Davies, a Chicago sporting man who had recently become Jackson's personal manager. Davies was widely known both as a promoter of pedestrian races and a manager of fighters. A shrewd and resourceful businessman, Davies recognized Jackson's money-making potential. He believed Jackson could be as big a drawing card as one of his former fighters from Boston, John L. Sullivan.²³

21. Jackson always seemed to live from day to day, with no real faith in the future. His reckless squandering of money could apparently give him a temporary illusion of plenty.

22. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*. April 27, 1889; *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*, April 27, 1889; *Cleveland Gazette*, May 4, 11, 1889; *St. Paul Western Appeal*. May 4, 1889.

23. Davies was born in Ireland in 1853. He eventually traveled to America and settled in Chicago where he became a manager of wrestlers with his star attraction being Japanese grappler Matsada Sorokichi. At the time he wore a black beard and high collars and was frequently mistaken for a preacher, thus his nickname. See *National Police Gazette*. November 11, 1882; *London Evening News and Post*. August 31, 1889.

Jackson and his friends arrived in New York City after approximately a three month long trip that was marked by an occasional exhibition match and an endless round of partying. Jackson was in New York for barely two weeks before he decided to leave the country at the urging of Parson Davies. Jackson's journey to London in the latter part of August 1889 came as no big surprise to insiders in the fight game. Almost everyone knew that Jackson had his sights set on Jem Smith, the former champion of England, probably best known for his 106 round bout against Jake Kilrain in 1887. Talk of a fight between Jackson and Smith had been brewing for some time, even before the match with George Godfrey. Negotiations between the two men resurfaced almost immediately after Jackson's victory over Joe McAuliffe. But on both occasions, Jackson and Smith had prior commitments that precluded them from making a match.²⁴

Almost immediately upon his arrival in London Jackson arranged a bout with Smith at the famous Pelican Club.²⁵ It was one of his shortest but finest fights and he may never again have been so impressive a boxer. Standing some four inches taller than his opponent, Jackson moved effortlessly around the ring from the initial moments of the bout. Smith, on the other hand, looked like "a cart horse beside a thoroughbred." In the opening round Jackson avoided most of Smith's blows and landed his own punches whenever and wherever he pleased. In the second round Smith found things even more difficult. Jackson began to force the fight, battering Smith from one end of the ring to the other. Smith spent most of his time covering up and clinging to the ropes with his right hand for support. Finally, with about one minute left in the round, Smith caught Jackson around the waist, threw him heavily to the ground and used his left, as one Australian tabloid described it, "to smite Jackson in a part of the body which may be hinted at but not named in newspaper phraseology." Not surprisingly, Jackson got up rather slowly. But it did not matter. The officials, Lord Clifford and the legendary Marquis of Queensberry, immediately jumped into the ring and awarded the fight to Jackson amidst the cheering of the wildly partisan crowd.²⁶ The fight that had received so much advance publicity was over after just two rounds.

Jackson's victory over Smith was important because the sporting public began clamoring louder than ever for a contest between Jackson and Sullivan. There were a considerable number of organizations throughout America that offered to stage a fight between the two celebrated heavyweights. Some of the offers were not worth the paper they were written on, but many were legitimate proposals that involved great sums of prize money. The California Athletic

24. See *St. Paul Western Appeal*, June 9, 1888, *Cleveland Gazette*, June 2, 1888, January 19, 1889; *Notional Police Gazette*, January 26, February 2, 1889.

25. The Pelican Club was essentially the informal club of England's sporting aristocracy during its brief five year history. Information about the club can be gleaned from the histories written about another famous sporting organization, The National Sporting Club. See Guy Deghy, *Noble and Manly: The History of the National Sporting Club* (London: Hutchinson, 1956); A. F. Bettinson and W. Outram Tristram, *The National Sporting Club: Past and Present* (London: Sands & Co., 1901).

26. *Boston Herald*, November 10, 1889; *Referee*, January 15, 1890. For descriptions of the Jackson and Smith fight, see also *Cleveland Gazette*, January 19, 1889; *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 11, 1889; *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, November 11, 12, 1889; *National Police Gazette*, November 23, 1889.

Club, for instance, offered to host a Jackson and Sullivan match sometime in the spring of 1890 for a purse of \$15,000. The Santa Cruz Athletic Club did even better than that, offering a purse of \$30,000 for the fight. Both the Erie County Athletic Club in Pennsylvania and the Seattle Athletic Club matched the \$30,000 offer of the Santa Cruz Athletic Club. Perhaps the most intriguing proposal was received from a group of men from San Francisco and Nevada who offered to stage the fight in the middle of Lake Tahoe. The proposal called for a fight to the finish without gloves and was to take place, so as to insure that the authorities would not interfere, on a specially constructed barge anchored on the state line.²⁷

Jackson was so encouraged by the various proposals that he decided to discontinue the exhibition tour he was currently making through Europe and return to the United States in the latter part of January, 1890. He should not have altered his plans. His hasty return to America only left him open to more frustration and disillusionment at the hands of Sullivan. The champion, in his own bratish way, refused to accept any of the offers. While experiencing great delight in dangling the carrot in front of Jackson by occasionally expressing his willingness to fight, Sullivan never had any real intentions of getting into the ring with the black Australian. As he would throughout the remainder of his career, Sullivan declined to meet Jackson on account of his color. If Sullivan could have arranged a fight with a less talented black boxer for the same kind of prize money that was being offered, then perhaps he would not have drawn the color-line quite so tightly. In fact, William Muldoon, Sullivan's manager, told boxing historian Nat Fleischer years later that he had kept Sullivan from making a match with Jackson because he wanted to "save [Sullivan] the humiliation of being defeated by a Negro."²⁸

The failure to arrange a bout with Sullivan did not exactly shatter Jackson's career. If anything, he was more in demand than before he had left for England. The defeat of Smith had enhanced his reputation as one of the world's great boxers. One of the most visible indications of Jackson's enormous appeal was the many accolades and tributes that were handed out to him by the black community in the months immediately following his return to this country. Black Americans were absolutely ecstatic over Jackson's most recent accomplishments. The black press could not say enough about him. Such influential newspapers as the *New York Age*, *Indianapolis Freeman*, *Cleveland Gazette*, and *St. Paul Western Appeal* praised Jackson as a race hero of unparalleled proportions. His performances in the ring were reminiscent of those given by Tom Molineaux, Bill Richmond, and other great black boxers of the past.²⁹ In

27. Examples of the various offers can be found in the *Mihauke Evening Wisconsin*, December 4, 5, 10, 1889; *Referee*, March 19, 1890; *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, November 23,24,30, December 9,14,16,1889; April 21, 22, 24, 1890; *National Police Gazette*, May 17, 1890; *Cleveland Gazette*, November 30, 1889.

28. Letter from William Muldoon to Nat S. Fleischer, April 11, 1931. Private collection of Bill Schutte, University of Wisconsin, Whitewater.

29. *Cleveland Gazette*, May 31,1890; *New York Age*, December 20, January 4, 1890, *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 15, April 5,26, May 10,17, July 19, September 13, December 6,1890; *St. Paul Western Appeal*, May 24, 1890.

virtually every city Jackson visited the local black community went wild with excitement over his presence and would honor him with a testimonial dinner. New York's Harlem Unique Club, for instance, honored Jackson with a banquet in January, 1890 and similar dinners were organized for him in Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Boston and Indianapolis.³⁰

Ironically, this attention was being lavished on Jackson during one of the most emotionally distressing periods of his career. Sullivan's continuing refusal to fight for the championship was beginning to exact its toll on Jackson. While he valiantly tried to maintain an air of confidence during his public appearances, Jackson was obviously dejected about the way he was treated by Sullivan. He was developing a sadness and intimacy with misery which was to become so much a part of Isaac Murphy, Sam Langford, and other outstanding black athletes who confronted racial discrimination around the turn of the century. Melancholy rather than happy-go-lucky was now a more accurate way to describe Jackson.

Jackson's frustrations could easily be seen in his boxing performances during 1890. He was rather listless in a five round victory over Gus Lambert in Troy, N.Y. in March, and only slightly more impressive in his triumph over "Denver" Ed Smith in Chicago a couple of months later. Neither was a vintage Jackson performance. In October, Jackson fought one of the worst fights of his career against Joe Goddard in Melbourne, Australia. Although the bout was officially recorded as an eight round draw, Jackson probably deserved to lose the fight. A native of New South Wales who had just begun his professional boxing career, Goddard battered the black Australian as no other fighter ever had. Jackson's heart was simply not in the bout. He almost appeared to welcome the punishment doled out by Goddard, repeatedly dropping his hands and sticking out his chin as if to dare Goddard to hit him.³¹

Jackson's spirits were temporarily revitalized when he was able to arrange a fight with James J. Corbett in San Francisco for May, 1891. The fight was held at the California Athletic Club, the winner to receive an unprecedented \$10,000 purse. Jackson's match with Corbett was one of the most thoroughly discussed fights in the last half of the nineteenth century. The fascination that many people had with the bout stemmed from several different reasons. First of all, Jackson and Corbett were both local fighters with enormous popular appeal. Corbett was born and raised in the city and had already shown unlimited potential. Jackson had spent most of his time in America in San Francisco, and had cultivated a loyal following among the city's black and white residents. Second, the fight took on added significance because it matched the most gentlemanly and scientific white fighter of the age with his black counterpart. Corbett and

30. *Cleveland Gazette*, March 15, 1890; *New York Age*, February 8, May 3, 1890; *Indianapolis Freeman*, July 19, 1890; *St. Paul Western Appeal*, April 26, 1890.

31. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, March 6, 8, May 20, 1890; *National Police Gazette*, March 22, June 7, December 6, 13, 20, 1890; *Cleveland Gazette*, March 15, May 31, 1890; *Referee*, April 23, 1890; *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 6, 1890.

Jackson represented a new breed of fighter. They both fashioned themselves as men of honor who relied on ring generalship rather than the mauling tactics of old time fighters like Sullivan. Last, and perhaps most important, it was assumed by most people in boxing that the winner of the bout would be the logical choice to fight Sullivan for the heavyweight championship. To get at Sullivan, Corbett was willing to overcome his own abhorrence of blacks and fight Jackson this one time because victory over the black Australian would almost guarantee him a title shot. A triumph over Jackson combined with his previous wins over such boxers as Joe Choynski, Jake Kilrain, and Dominic McGaffrey would just about seal a championship fight for Corbett.³²

The fight did not live up to its advanced billing. It was a painfully slow affair, with both men cleverly feinting, ducking, and jabbing each other for some sixty-one rounds before the referee, Hiram Cook, decided that no useful purpose would be served by allowing the fight to continue. It was apparent from the outset that Jackson and Corbett had great respect for each other's boxing abilities and were content with laying back and letting the other man be the aggressor. Round after round was fought without one solid punch being landed on either side. At moments during the bout, the two fighters livened things up a bit, but for the most part they moved around the ring like two dancers performing the waltz. W. W. Naughton noted that about mid-way through the bout people began leaving the arena and the remaining spectators "stretched themselves out on the vacated benches and went to sleep."³³

The fight between Jackson and Corbett had different effects on the careers of the two participants. For Corbett, simply staying in the ring with his celebrated opponent for sixty-one rounds greatly enhanced his reputation as a boxer and gave him immediate credibility among influential people in the fight game. His rather lackluster performance against Jackson was conveniently forgotten, and he now became most everyone's choice to fight Sullivan for the heavyweight championship. As for Jackson, it was the consensus of most sporting men that the black fighter had just about reached the end of his boxing career. Jackson was simply not the same man who had so handily defeated such fighters as George Godfrey, Patsy Cardiff, Joe McAuliffe and Jem Smith. At no time during the fight did he exhibit the physical skills he had become famous for.³⁴

No one was more frustrated over the outcome of the fight than Jackson. Friends said they had never seen him so despondent after a bout. His frustrations, interestingly enough, were not directed at Corbett, or Hiram Cook for his

32. There was a great deal of discussion prior to the fight about the relative merits of Jackson and Corbett. See *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, May 21, 1891; *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*, May 21, 1891; *Referee*, May 27, 1891; *Cleveland Gazette*, April 4, May 16, 1891; *New York Age*, March 21, April 18, 1891.

33. *Referee*, June 24, 1891. For various descriptions of the fight, see *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, May 22, 23, 1891; *Referee*, May 27, June 24, 1891; *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*, May 22, 1891; *New York Clipper*, May 30, 1891; *Cleveland Gazette*, May 30, June 6, 1891; *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 23, 1891; Richard Kyle Fox, *Life and Battles of James J. Corbett, The Champion Pugilist of the World* (New York: R. K. Fox, 1892); James J. Corbett, *The Roar of the Crowd: The True Tale of the Rise and Fall of a Champion* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1925).

34. See *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, June 14, 1891; *Boston Herald*, May 22, 1891; *New York Clipper*, June 6, 1891; *Referee*, June 24, 1891.

decision to call the fight a draw, but at himself. Always critical of his performances in the ring, Jackson was particularly chagrined of the way he had fought Corbett. Outweighing his much less experienced opponent by some thirty pounds, Jackson knew it was a fight he should have won.³⁵

In truth, Jackson was blinded to the reality of the situation. Corbett was just as responsible for the poor fight as he was. Even more unusual, however, was that Jackson never voiced any complaint about Corbett's sudden emergence as the number one contender for the heavyweight crown following their fight. Surely he must have been upset by the fact that Corbett was now being touted as the top challenger to Sullivan's title based on some impressive but limited number of fights. Corbett obviously had great talent, yet there was nothing in his boxing record to indicate that he was more worthy of a shot at the championship than himself. Like a host of other boxers, Corbett had gained a big reputation by limited fighting. In the words of San Francisco's *Daily Examiner*, "it is not what he [Corbett] has done but what people believe he can do that makes him a famous fighter."³⁶

Perhaps one of the reasons for Jackson's uncustomary silence was that he simply felt that no good purpose would be served by voicing his complaints at this time since a fight between Corbett and Sullivan was inevitable. He would simply bide his time and challenge the winner of that particular contest. More likely, though, Jackson may have been reluctant to acknowledge that the boxing establishment had exerted any negative discriminatory influence over his life. While on one level Jackson was always painfully aware of the insensitivity and discriminatory practices of the boxing profession, on another level there was the opposite tendency—a determination not to see. Jackson sometimes acted as if the boxing establishment had done nothing to curtail his career, even in the face of such realities as Sullivan's continuing refusal to fight him and the fact that he was constantly being passed over for title shots for less deserving boxers like Corbett. The apparent reason for Jackson's blindness was that he desperately wanted to believe that the men in boxing were immune from racism and that advancement in the profession was based strictly on merit. By deluding himself into thinking such nonsense, Jackson could be assured that his efforts would be duly rewarded and that it was just a matter of time before he was given a chance at the title. In other words, he could feel as if he had some control over his own destiny and that his future did not hinge on discrimination and the personal whims of individuals in the fight game.³⁷

Jackson remained in San Francisco for some nine months following his fight with Corbett, passing his time in the usual fashion. If he was not drinking and playing cards with the boys at Joe Dieves' Road House, he was out combing the streets looking for female companionship. To supplement his always depleted pocketbook, Jackson became an entrepreneur of sorts and opened a saloon that catered to the city's sporting fraternity. He was anything but a businessman,

35. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, June 14, 1891; *Referee*, June 24, 1891; *Boston Herald*, May 22, 1891.

36. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, May 21, 1891.

37. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, June 14, 1891; *Referee*, June 24, 1891.

however, and after a short time sold the saloon to two acquaintances. Occasionally Jackson would drag himself into the gymnasium for some exercise. But as during most interludes between his fights, Jackson paid very little attention to those activities that contributed to physical fitness.³⁸

Jackson left San Francisco in February, 1892 for a return trip to England. No one had to persuade him to go back. Most of the arrangements had already been made for a fight between himself and his old nemesis, Frank Slavin, for some time in the early spring. From a personal standpoint, this was perhaps the most important fight of Jackson's career. He and Slavin had been bitter rivals ever since their early days in Australia when they were both students of Larry Foley. The two fighters never got along, and for good reason. Their lifestyles differed and each resented the other's relationship with Foley. The two men were constantly competing for the affections of their former mentor, and it led to several heated confrontations through the years. Also contributing to the bad blood between the two Australian heavyweights was the fact that Slavin was an unabashed racist who rivaled Corbett and Sullivan in his hatred of blacks. He had proudly stated on several occasions that he would never let a black man beat him. If all this were not enough, Jackson and Slavin had made the mistake of falling in love with the same girl. At one time or another, both fighters were involved with Josie Leon, the beautiful niece of a wealthy Jamaican planter. Jackson and Slavin had come to blows over the girl at least three times during their careers, the most famous a twenty minute brawl at Foley's White Horse Saloon in 1883. Neither one of them had anything to show for their efforts because Miss Leon eventually ran off and married someone else.³⁹

There was obviously a great deal at stake, then, when Jackson and Slavin met at London's National Sporting Club⁴⁰ on the night of May 30, 1892. Boxing promoters, journalists, and various members of London's ruling class jammed the club's recently constructed 1,300 seat gymnasium in Covent Garden to witness the fight between the two bitter antagonists. It was immediately apparent upon their entry into the ring that Jackson and Slavin were a study in contrasts. Slavin, who was dressed in dark blue knee breeches, light blue stockings and russet shoes was a formidably built man whose rough-hewn figure bespoke of strength rather than grace. He had a large hairy chest and arms, smouldering, deep sunken eyes, and a black handle-bar mustache that covered up his always truculent frown. Jackson, on the other hand, wore white drawers, white socks, and dark leather shoes. His beautifully proportioned bronzed body bespoke more of balance and style than brute strength. His smiling face could easily be seen under the still not too familiar glare of the

38. See *Referee*. June 24, August 12, 1891; *Cleveland Gazette*, June 6, 1891.

39. The relationship between Jackson, Slavin, and Leon is most fully described in Hales, *Black Prince* Pefer, pp.134-48.

40. The National Sporting Club was organized in the spring of 1891 by John Fleming and A. F. Bettinson. Originally founded as a middle-class substitute for the aristocratic and bohemian Pelican Club, it would eventually become one of the world's great centers of boxing. The club went public in 1928 and the next year was forced to close. See Deghy, *Noble and Manly*; Bettinson and Tristram, *The National Sporting Club*; John Arlott, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World Sports and Games* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 710.

club's new electric chandeliers and through the dense cigar smoke that began to hang in a haze under the panelled ceiling.

The fight was everything that boxing fans had expected and more. Chroniclers of the sport have repeatedly ranked it as one of the most viciously contested fights ever held in England.⁴¹ From the moment they first emerged from their respective corners, Jackson and Slavin went after each other like two ravenous alley cats grappling over a leftover piece of food. The fight was virtually even through the first three rounds with each boxer landing a number of telling blows on his opponent. In the fourth round, however, the tide began to shift in Jackson's favor. Jackson kept throwing stinging jabs until Slavin's left eye was nearly closed, his right cheek was marked with a gash three or four inches in length, and his lips looked like "two big lumps of bladder." Slavin was able to regroup somewhat and landed several meaningful punches over the next few rounds, but Jackson continued to batter him so severely that his face became nearly unrecognizable. Finally, in the tenth round Jackson settled the question as to who was the superior boxer. Taking advantage of every possible opening, Jackson rained blow after blow on Slavin's damaged face and eye. The white boxer became a pathetic figure, his head loosely flopping about as he wandered aimlessly around the ring. The fight ended with about one minute left in the round when the courageous Slavin fell helplessly to the floor. He had let the unthinkable happen—he had lost to a black man.⁴²

Jackson's victory over Slavin greatly increased his already enormous popularity among the English public. He mingled freely with a broad segment of English society, treated more like a prince than a black boxer. He was welcomed into the charmed circle of the finest men's clubs and learned associations, and became a well-known figure in London's most fashionable public places. Members of some of England's most famous families vied with one another for Jackson's friendship and displayed no sign of aversion to his presence. The fifth Earl of Lonsdale, for instance, President of the National Sporting Club and one of Victorian society's most celebrated sportsman, was a friend and supporter of Jackson. Famous for his gray side-whiskers, nine inch cigars, and gardenia buttonhole, the intensely individualistic Lonsdale was perhaps the man most responsible for arranging the bout between Jackson and Slavin.⁴³

Jackson was obviously delighted with and appreciative of the kind treatment he received from polite society in England. In fact, ever since his bout with Jem Smith in the latter part of 1889, Jackson had repeatedly complimented the

41. See, for example: Butler, *Kings of the Ring*, pp. 140-145; Gene Corri, *Fifty Years in the Ring* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933), pp. 68-74; Jeffery Farnol, *Epics of the Fancy* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., n.d.), pp. 213-220; John Gilbert Bohun Lynch, *Knuckles and Gloves* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1923), pp. 121-126; Henry Sayers, *Fights Forgotten: A History of Some of the Chief English and American Prize Fights Since the Year 1788* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1909), pp. 199-205; Trevor C. Wignall, *The Story of Boxing* (New York: Brentano's, 1924), pp. 253-256.

42. *San Francisco Examiner*, May 31, 1892; *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*, May 31, 1892; *New York Times*, June 1, 1892; *Cleveland Gazette*, June 4, 11, 1892; *Referee*, June 1, 8, 1892.

43. For information on Lonsdale see L. G. Wickham Legg, and E. T. Williams, eds., *Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-1950* (New York: Oxford, 1959), pp. 529-530.

English on their hospitality and contrasted his freedom from insult in that country with his experience of discrimination in supposedly democratic America. Why Jackson was treated differently in England is a difficult question to answer with any certainty. Not unexpectedly, many Englishmen took a rather patronizing attitude towards Jackson. He was their pet. He was someone to pat on the back and play with. Coupled with this sense of patronizing, however, was that the English seemed to react more sharply to class than racial differences. Late nineteenth century Englishmen were certainly color conscious but were unlike Americans since they were more inclined to treat a black gentleman like Jackson as a gentleman. Through his social connections and ability as a boxer, Jackson had both the position to command respect and the money to pay his way. He gained the friends, influence, and training in the social graces to make him an acceptable visitor in distinguished circles. His success rested upon his ability to conform to conventions of appropriate behavior. In manner, speech, dress, confidence, and in his own social ease, Jackson was eminently qualified and therefore accepted in the finest circles of English society. Jackson had been raised in a West Indian home where English customs, notions of etiquette, and social behavior had been adopted and followed for more than a century. He had not only been taught to regard himself as a member of one of the oldest British colonies, but was proud to think of himself as a British subject.⁴⁴

After spending some five months socializing with England's privileged classes and fighting an occasional exhibition match, Jackson suddenly decided to return to America in the latter part of October, 1892. The reason for his unexpected departure was to seek a rematch with Corbett who just one month earlier had defeated Sullivan for the heavyweight championship.⁴⁵ Shortly after his arrival back in the United States, Jackson, through manager "Parson" Davies, challenged the newly crowned champion to a fight. His proposal was simple enough. He wanted to fight Corbett for a side wager of \$20,000, the contest to take place at a "mutually agreed upon club no sooner than six to ten months from the date [February 10, 1893] of this challenge. Corbett agreed to Jackson's offer but with the stipulation that his acceptance would be void if he was first able to arrange a match with Charlie Mitchell, a full-time crook and part-time boxer from England. Corbett, and his manager, William Brady, desired a match with Mitchell above all others. Corbett felt obligated to give Mitchell first shot at the title since the Englishman was the first boxer to lay down a challenge, a representative of Mitchell having approached him with an offer immediately after his victory over Sullivan. Corbett also noted that a fight with Mitchell would be financially more rewarding and generate a great deal

44. The status of blacks in Great Britain has been well chronicled. See, for example: Douglass A. Lorimar, *Color, Class, and the Vicorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1978); Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1972); Kenneth Little, *Negroes in Brittain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); James Walvin, *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England 1555-1860* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

45. The Corbett and Sullivan fight was certainly one of the most famous bouts in boxing history. For a discussion of the fight see *New York Times*, September 8, 1892; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, September 8, 1892; *Chicago Tribune*, September 8, 1892; *National Police Gazette*, October 1, 1892.

more interest among the sporting public. The majority of Americans, said Corbett, would rather see Mitchell “thrashed than any man living.” Tellingly, Corbett was quick to point out that his decision to give Jackson second billing was not based on the latter’s race. He told a group of reporters in Minnesota “that he had no objection to fighting Peter Jackson because he is colored. I think he is a credit to his profession.”⁴⁶

Corbett’s choice of an opponent did not sit well with Jackson and “Parson” Davies. They were appalled by the champion’s actions and let the sporting public know exactly how they felt. Jackson said he had no intention of being Corbett’s “lackey,” and refused to travel around the country begging for a fight. Davies was even more pointed than Jackson in his assessment of Corbett. In several scathing newspaper editorials Davies admonished Corbett for avoiding a match with his boxer. The only reason Corbett wished to fight Mitchell was to get back at the Englishman for some unkind remarks he had made about him at the Bowery Theatre in New York City the previous spring. Unlike Jackson, Mitchell had never won any kind of championship nor distinguished himself as a legitimate contender for the crown.⁴⁷

By the latter part of February, 1893, Jackson had temporarily given up on Corbett and, like his antagonist, went on the stage. After much persuasion Jackson agreed to join L. R. Stockwell’s Theatrical Company in San Francisco and play the role of Tom in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Jackson entered into this project rather reluctantly, agreeing to take part only after being convinced by Davies



Jackson and friends at Barney Farley’s road house in San Mateo, California, 1893. Front row, L-R: W. B. Halloway, Barney Farley, Sr., Tom Nolan, Jack Miles. Middle row: Joe Choynski, “Parson” Davies, Jackson, John Herget, George Dawson. Top row: Barney Farley, Jr., Teddy Alexander, Jim Barron, W. W. Naughton, William Dooley, W. Schewerin, Sam Fitzpatrick. (Photo courtesy of Bill Schutte).

46. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, February 12, 16, 14, 1893.

47. *Cleveland Gazette*, February 18, 1893; *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, February 12-14, 16, 1893

that a great deal of money could be made if the play was successful. His apprehension stemmed from the fact that he knew absolutely nothing about acting and was not eager to learn. While quite worldly in many ways, Jackson was like most members of his profession in that his total commitment to boxing had failed to prepare him for other kinds of work. As it turned out, Jackson's fears were well founded. He was totally inept as an actor, and, after about a three month long trip through such principal American cities as Portland, Seattle, Salt Lake City, Chicago, and Milwaukee, the play closed amidst less than enthusiastic reviews. It was an experience Jackson would like to have forgotten.⁴⁸

Jackson's dreadful stage experience was soon blotted out because in April, 1894 he and Corbett had finally arranged a bout. The two boxers placed a \$20,000 stake wager with Will J. Davies of Chicago, agreeing to meet sometime during the last week in June at a "responsible club north of Mason and Dixon's Line."⁴⁹ As might be expected, however, no sooner had Jackson and Corbett made their stake wager with Davies than a bitter argument broke out between the two fighters over the exact location of their proposed bout. Two clubs made legitimate offers for the fight, but for various reasons Jackson and Corbett could never come to any agreement. In May the National Sporting Club of London offered a purse of \$15,000 for the fight. While Jackson was willing to accept the offer, Corbett refused it. Corbett believed, among other things, that he would not be treated fairly by the club since some of its most influential members were friends of Jackson. He insisted that the fight be held at the Duval Athletic Club in Jacksonville, Florida, but Jackson was adamantly opposed to the Florida club's offer having always made it clear that he would never fight in the South where he could not expect fair treatment.⁵⁰

The verbal sparring match between Jackson and Corbett finally came to a conclusion on August 13, 1894 when the two fighters came face to face for the first time to discuss their differences at the Grand Union Hotel in New York City. Until then, Jackson and Corbett had communicated almost completely through the press, and each boxer welcomed the opportunity to personally present his side of the story. Corbett instigated the meeting through William Brady, contacting Jackson in July while on a theatrical tour of Europe, and asked for a conference upon his return to America. Jackson willingly accepted Corbett's overture and hurriedly made his way east from San Francisco. The meeting between the two boxers was not pleasant. In a cramped hotel room some twelve feet long and ten feet wide, Jackson and Corbett stood so close at times that their noses were not more than six inches apart and spoke to each

48. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, February 21, March 15, 19, 1893; *National Police Gazette*, March 4, 1893; *Indianapolis Freeman*, February 24, 1893.

49. *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, April 10, 1894; see also, *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*, May 1, 2, 18, 1894; *National Police Gazette*, April 28, 1894; *Referee*, May 23, 1894.

50. See, for example, *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, May 26, June 1, July 19, 28, August 4, 6, 1894; *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*, June 1, 7, 1894; *National Police Gazette*, May 12, 19, June 9, 16, 23, July 21, 1894; *Referee*, June 27, August 8, 1894; *Cleveland Gazette*, March 24, 1894; *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 21, 28, June 9, 1894.

other in the most combative way. Corbett reiterated that he would not fight in England under any circumstances. He insisted that the bout be held in America and that it be a fight to the finish. Jackson angrily responded by calling Corbett a bluffer. To show his sincerity, Jackson offered to give Corbett an American referee if the latter would go to England. But Corbett stubbornly refused the proposition. Finally, after about twenty minutes of wrangling, the two boxers decided further discussion was fruitless and angrily stalked out of the room. The much talked about rematch between Jackson and Corbett would never materialize.⁵¹

Some of the most influential people in boxing criticized Corbett for the way he treated Jackson. W. W. Naughton argued—and perhaps correctly so—that Corbett was avoiding the match until Jackson had physically deteriorated to the point where he would no longer be a serious challenger. The *Referee*, Australia's foremost sporting tabloid, castigated Corbett for his "underhanded" dealings with Jackson.⁵² The fact remains, however, that Corbett made an offer that Jackson refused to accept. As badly as Jackson yearned to be heavyweight champion he was no different than Corbett in wanting the bout to be fought on his terms. He was simply unwilling to swallow his pride and consent to the various stipulations set down by Corbett. The champion had already passed him over to fight the less deserving boxer Charlie Mitchell and made him wait an unreasonable amount of time before seriously discussing a match. Considering such things, Jackson was not going to let Corbett dictate to him where and when the fight should take place.

Jackson certainly had good reason to be unhappy with Corbett, but was probably acting against his better judgment in not agreeing to fight in the South. He was not exactly in an ideal bargaining position. Corbett was, after all, heavyweight champion of the world and therefore had the upper hand in any dealings with prospective opponents. Jackson was at Corbett's mercy, not the other way around. Equally disadvantageous to Jackson was the fact that other than the Jacksonville Athletic Club and the National Sporting Club, virtually no organization was willing to sponsor a title fight between a black and a white fighter. For instance, the Olympic Club of New Orleans, one of America's most renowned boxing organizations, made no attempt to arrange a match between the two fighters. The sportsmen in that city had decided shortly after the featherweight championship bout between George "Little Chocolate" Dixon, a black, and Jack Skelly on September 6, 1892 that they would never sponsor another interracial bout. Unfortunately for Jackson, the idea of an interracial

51. See *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, July 19, 28, August 46, 14, 1894; *Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin*, August 14, 1894; *National Police Gazette*, August 25, September 1, 1894; *Cleveland Gazette*, September 1, 1894. The real intentions of both Jackson and Corbett in this affair will never be known. It is quite possible, however, that Corbett would have found another excuse not to fight if Jackson had agreed to the bout at the Duval Athletic Club. That being the case why did Jackson not call Corbett's bluff and say yes to the proposition? Perhaps Jackson believed he no longer stood a chance with Corbett and that he would be courting disaster if he accepted the champion's offer. Jackson was, after all, 33 years old, and had been drinking quite heavily since his bout with Slavin. Corbett, on the other hand, had gained some twenty pounds since his fight with Jackson in 1891 and was still in reasonably good condition.

52. *Referee*, June 27, August 8, 1894.

bout, particularly one for the heavyweight title, was becoming increasingly repugnant to the majority of white Americans. The world heavyweight championship had come to symbolize the Anglo-Saxon belief in racial superiority, and to allow Jackson to fight for the exalted title would have jeopardized the basic scientific underpinnings of American society. A black man might be allowed to fight for a title in the lower divisions, but not in the heavier divisions because these were, in the words of Randy Roberts, "the championships that mattered."⁵³ The bigger the fighters, the more important the contest, and the more crucial it was that a black and a white boxer not be allowed in the ring on terms of equality.

The inability to arrange a fight for the heavyweight championship was a stultifying experience for Jackson. In some ways, he was less fortunate than many of the other well-known black athletes of the late nineteenth century because he was unable to reach the pinnacle of his profession. Such star athletes as Isaac Murphy, Moses "Fleetwood" Walker and Marshall "Major" Taylor, were able, however temporarily, to reach the top of their particular sports. Murphy captured the Kentucky Derby three times, Walker played Major League baseball with the Toledo Mudhens and Taylor captured the National Cycling Championship twice. Similar to these athletes, Jackson was caught between two worlds, in neither of which he really belonged. Since he relied on the boxing establishment for his position and material rewards, he was separated somewhat from his origins. Yet no matter how great his achievements, he was still black. Even when he did triumph in the ring, he often received half-hearted praise from the American public, not the glory he might expect. Jackson lived in a continual state of agonizing ambiguity, a condition he found progressively difficult to deal with.

Following his meeting with Corbett at the Grand Union Hotel, Jackson decided to return to England where he stayed for most of the next three years. Shortly after his arrival Jackson began to fight a series of exhibition matches with David St. John, the mammoth heavyweight boxer from Ireland. Despite challenges from such fighters as Frank Slavin, Peter Maher, Frank Craig, and Charlie Mitchell, Jackson was content to travel through Europe sparring with St. John. When not on tour, Jackson was either conducting boxing classes at the Harmony Club in London or more likely partying with friends until all hours of the night. He was drinking more than ever now, and word out of London was that "almost any afternoon between 4 and 5 o'clock" he could be seen staggering down the Strand. Physically he was not the same man who had so convincingly thrashed Frank Slavin at London's National Sporting Club just a few years earlier. Alcohol had swollen his face and clouded his eyes. His body was marked by a certain flabbiness and laxity of movement that were uncharacteristic of him in his earlier days. Friends of Jackson's remarked that his hands

53. Ibid.; August 22, 1894; Dale A. Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans 1850-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), pp. 181-183; Roberts, *Papa Jack*, p. 18.

shook when lifting a glass and there was a curious "halt now and then in his speech."⁵⁴

In September, 1897 a thoroughly worn-out and restless Jackson grew weary of England and once more returned to San Francisco. Unfortunately, he did not receive a particularly cordial welcome in the city he considered his American home. Jackson quickly found out how fleeting fame is and how America's racial lines had hardened when denied a room at the well-known Baldwin Hotel, an establishment he had frequently stayed in during his previous sojourns in San Francisco. When Jackson arrived in the city, he went directly to the Baldwin, registered, and was assigned a room. However, after visiting with some friends that evening, Jackson found out that his registration and baggage had been moved to a room in the hotel annex across the street. He was absolutely livid and vehemently complained to the hotel management, but to no avail. The proprietor denied that the color-line had been drawn, explaining that the room in the annex was the only one available. Jackson was obliged to accept the room in the annex, and subsequently secured alternate accommodations across the bay in Oakland where there was a much larger black population. The man who had "dined with Earls, hobnobbed with Dukes and shaken hands with royalty" felt the pangs of discrimination in a city whose racial climate was generally considered to be mild in comparison to other parts of the country.⁵⁵

Jackson was in the bay area for some six months when he arranged the last major fight of his career against Jim Jeffries, the burly Southern California native who would later become world champion. He made the match only after Tom Sharkey, the Whilom pride of the American Navy and future challenger for the heavyweight championship, drew the color-line and refused to fight him. At this point in his career, Jackson would have been better off if Jeffries had also drawn the color-line. He was humiliated by the heavy hitting white boxer in a three round bout on March 22, 1898 at San Francisco's Woodward Pavilion. Jackson gave a terrible performance; the few blows he landed had no effect on Jeffries. The hardest punch he threw all night was when he accidentally tripped over his own feet at the end of the first round and inadvertently struck Jeffries on top of the head. Jeffries, for his part, seemingly tried not to inflict undue punishment on Jackson. He had too much respect for the veteran to treat him in any other way. The three knockdowns Jeffries scored were caused more by Jackson's ineptness than by any punches he had thrown. The sight of Jackson moving helplessly around the ring was particularly sad for the legion of fans who had followed him faithfully throughout his career. They preferred to remember the lightning quick black boxer who had so effortlessly defeated such men as Joe McAuliffe rather than the sluggish and overweight fighter who was too helpless to answer the bell for the fourth round.⁵⁶

54. *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 1, 2, 1897; *Philadelphia Record*, April 25, March 1, 6, 28, 1897; *Referee*, October 3, 1894; January 30, February 20, September 18, 1895; April 1, 1896 (quotes); May 12, 1897; *Cleveland Gazette*, December 1, 1894; February 9, 1895.

55. *Referee*, December 29, 1897; *San Francisco Call*, September 28, 29, 1897; *Cleveland Gazette*, October 16, 1897.

56. *San Francisco Call*, September 28, 1897, March 23,24,1898; *Referee*, April 27, May 4, 1898; *Cleveland*

Jackson stayed in San Francisco following his fight with Jeffries just long enough to say goodbye to old friends and then traveled north to Victoria, British Columbia. He hoped a change of residence would alter his luck, but was wrong. After five months in Victoria, Jackson came down with viral pneumonia that brought him close to death.⁵⁷ To recuperate from the near fatal illness, Jackson decided to return home to Sydney, Australia in March, 1900 and take advantage of that country's warmer climate. Jackson received a hero's welcome in a country generally considered one of the most racist in the world. While never completely able to escape his homeland's abhorrent discriminatory practices, Jackson was almost universally admired by Australians for his boxing triumphs and his embodiment of qualities Australians found so worthy in their sport heroes. Jackson symbolized the very essence of English sportsmanship that was adopted and so rigorously applied in Australia. He was modest, unselfish, and above all else, an athlete who played by the rules. He never threw a fight, never made excuses for a poor performance, and never took advantage of an inferior opponent. In short, he was a hero to many Australians precisely because he never infringed the Victorian rules of good sportsmanship.⁵⁸

During his initial days back in Australia Jackson appeared on the road to full recovery. He regained enough strength to travel throughout different parts of Australia with the Fitzgerald Brothers Circus.⁵⁹ He had gotten to the point where he was capable of giving an occasional boxing exhibition. Towards the end of the year, however, Jackson was stricken with sciatica, a debilitating disease that caused severe pain in his lower back and hips. No sooner had Jackson recovered from the sciatica when he was stricken with tuberculosis. At his doctor's request, Jackson traveled to the small town of Roma and entered the local sanitarium. He probably would have been better off staying in Sydney. Despite the close care he received Jackson grew steadily worse and died quietly in the arms of his close friend, the black comedian Ernest Hogan, on the evening of July 13, 1901. He was only 40 years old.⁶⁰

The cause of Jackson's death was officially listed as tuberculosis. It was a broken heart, however, that was probably most responsible for bringing on his premature aging and early death. Jackson's failure to reach the pinnacle of his profession and fight for the heavyweight championship was a saddening experience. It was apparent that certain whites in the fight game had locked arms against him and that he lived not in a benign community but in a society that often viewed his success with hostility. The reality of being alternately assaulted, then singled out for some undue punishment had extracted its toll on

Gazette, April 2, 1898.

57. *Referee*, August 9, September 27, 29, 1899; *National Police Gazette*, September 16, 1899; *Indianapolis Freeman*, November 4, 18, December 30, 1899.

58. W. F. Mandie, "Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59 (December, 1973): 225-246.

59. *Sacramento Union*, March 22, 1900; *San Francisco Call*, April 17, 1901; *Referee*, March 14, April 11, 18, May 16, 23, April 11, 18, May 16, 23, June 13, 20, July 25, August 1, September 12, October 17, November 28, December 12, 26, 1900; *Indianapolis Freeman*, March 20, 31, April 14, August 4, 1900.

60. *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 15, 1901; *Referee*, July 31, September 18, October 9, 1901; *Cleveland Gazette*, August 24, 1901.

Jackson. Ironically, Jackson sometimes appeared to be held back by an inner command to be anonymous. Despite his numerous ring triumphs, he was never completely comfortable with success and never liked to draw attention to himself. He continually shied away from—even while pursuing Corbett—the publicity and notoriety that inevitably came to an athlete of his stature. While he was highly skilled in the social graces and liked to enjoy himself, Jackson was always quick to guard his privacy. He liked to be alone much of the time, away from fans and the hangers-on of the boxing world.

In the final analysis, Jackson cannot be considered simply an innocent victim. He made some choices in his career that contributed to his inability to arrange a title fight. His decision not to fight Corbett in the South and the fact that he chose to stay in England for long periods of time cannot be passed off as inconsequential. If the heavyweight championship was his primary goal, and undoubtedly it was, then Jackson committed some tactical mistakes that a black man in late nineteenth century America simply could not afford to make. Nevertheless, Jackson's failure to arrange a title fight did not stop him from becoming the nineteenth century's most internationally renowned black athlete. In varying degrees, he was a hero to both blacks and whites in Australia, America, and England. Jackson was frequently ignored and sometimes discriminated against, but he was always deep in the consciousness of Sullivan, Corbett, other members of the boxing profession, and the sporting public.