

Peter Jackson and the Elusive Heavyweight Championship: A Black Athletes Struggle Against the Late Nineteenth Century Color-Line

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The intent of this study was to analyze the career of Peter Jackson, the most famous and universally admired black boxer of the late nineteenth century. Through an examination of black and white newspapers, sporting journals, personal correspondence, and other primary source materials, Jackson's influence on the sport of boxing was examined from the moment of his first professional bout in 1882 to the time of his rather tragic loss to Jim Jeffries in 1898. Born on the island of St. Croix, Virgin Islands in 1861, Jackson eventually moved with his family to Sydney, Australia where he took up the sport of boxing under the tutelage of the famous instructor, Larry Foley. In 1888, just two years after claiming the Australian heavyweight championship from Tom Lees, Jackson established residence in San Francisco where over the next few years he would earn an international reputation for his victories over such noted fighters as George Godfrey, Joe McAuliffe, Patsy Cardiff, Jem Smith, and Frank Slavin. His most famous bout was a sixty-one round draw fought against James J. Corbett in 1891 at the California Athletic Club in San Francisco. By that time, however, Jackson was experiencing, like other black athletes, the effects of this country's intolerance of interracial sport. He was repeatedly denied a rematch with Corbett and was never successful in arranging a bout with John L. Sullivan for the heavyweight championship. Both fighters drew the color-line against Jackson and continually dodged the challenges that the famous black boxer hurled at them. Frustrated by it all, Jackson spent the last few years of his life touring as an actor in **Uncle Tom's Cabin** and traveling throughout America, England, and Australia searching for people to fight. His once beautifully proportioned body became ravaged by drink, late night hours, and forced inactivity. Finally, in July, 1901, Jackson died in his beloved Australia, bitter at being denied the opportunity to fight for the world title he so richly deserved.