

By: Eiland

H.R. No. 490

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, March 31, 2007, marks the 129th anniversary of the
2 birth of Jack Johnson, a native of Galveston and the first African
3 American to win the world heavyweight boxing championship; and

4 WHEREAS, After gaining experience as a sparring partner,
5 Mr. Johnson began fighting in private clubs in and around
6 Galveston, and in 1897 he became a professional prizefighter; in
7 1903 he won the Negro heavyweight championship, and five years
8 later, in a victorious match in Australia, he staked his claim to
9 the world heavyweight championship; and

10 WHEREAS, Because of widespread prejudice, he was not
11 officially accorded the title until 1910, when he defeated former
12 champion Jim Jeffries in Las Vegas; Mr. Johnson continued to fight,
13 but in 1913, faced with conviction over a contrived charge, he quit
14 the States and began touring Europe, Mexico, and Canada; he
15 retained his championship until 1915; and

16 WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson was in Spain when the United States
17 entered World War I, and he became active in U.S. military
18 intelligence; his work helped to prevent German submarine crews
19 from landing on the Spanish coast; and

20 WHEREAS, Returning to the United States in 1920, Mr. Johnson
21 fought in exhibition matches, refereed fights, and worked with
22 other boxers as a manager and sometimes as a trainer; during World
23 War II he again stepped forward to serve his country by encouraging
24 citizens to buy war bonds; in 1954, eight years after he died in an

1 automobile accident, he was inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame;
2 and

3 WHEREAS, In 1967 *The Great White Hope*, a play based loosely on
4 Mr. Johnson's life, premiered in Washington, D.C.; the following
5 year the play moved to Broadway, and James Earl Jones and Jane
6 Alexander won Tonys for their performances in the leading roles;
7 the drama was made into a film in 1970; and

8 WHEREAS, An enormously gifted athlete, Mr. Johnson was
9 famous for his flawless boxing and near-perfect defense; he fought
10 in 113 matches and lost only 6; unbowed in the face of racial
11 antagonism, he exhibited great personal courage and, in times of
12 national crisis, signal patriotism; now, therefore, be it

13 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 80th Texas
14 Legislature hereby recognize March 31, 2007, as Jack Johnson Day at
15 the State Capitol in honor of this distinguished Texan and
16 exceptional athlete.