

By: Eiland

H.R. No. 220

R E S O L U T I O N

1           WHEREAS, March 31, 2009, marks the 131st 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 claimed the world  
9 heavyweight title; and

10           WHEREAS, Outraged by Mr. Johnson's triumph, numerous  
11 commentators voiced the racial prejudice common in the early 1900s  
12 and called for his defeat by a white boxer; eventually, a bout was  
13 arranged with Jim Jeffries, a former heavyweight champion; on July  
14 4, 1910, Mr. Johnson knocked out his foe in the 15th round to retain  
15 his title; his reign as heavyweight champ extended for five years,  
16 but his life underwent a major change in 1913, when he was convicted  
17 on a contrived charge; to avoid a yearlong prison sentence, he fled  
18 the country and settled in Europe; and

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

23           WHEREAS, After returning to the United States in 1920,  
24 Mr. Johnson served his prison sentence and also fought in

1 exhibition matches, refereed fights, and worked with other boxers  
2 as a manager and sometimes as a trainer; during World War II, he  
3 again stepped forward to serve his country by encouraging citizens  
4 to buy war bonds; in 1954, eight years after he died in an  
5 automobile accident, he was inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame;  
6 and

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

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

17         RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 81st Texas  
18 Legislature hereby recognize March 31, 2009, as Jack Johnson Day at  
19 the State Capitol in honor of this distinguished Texan and  
20 exceptional athlete.