

By: Eiland

H.R. No. 1039

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, March 31, 2011, marks the 133rd 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 famous
13 for his flawless boxing and near-perfect defense; he fought in 113
14 matches and lost only 6; unbowed in the face of racism, he exhibited
15 outstanding personal courage and, in times of national crisis,
16 great patriotism; now, therefore, be it

17 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 82nd Texas
18 Legislature hereby recognize March 31, 2011, as Jack Johnson Day at
19 the State Capitol in honor of this distinguished Texan and
20 exceptional athlete.