

Alley Repertory Theater - Dramaturgy

The Royale by Marco Ramirez (Spring 2022)

A pretty handy resource guide from Lincoln Center Theater about *The Royale* (includes information on segregation, Jim Crow, sports history and more):

https://www.lct.org/media/filer_public/3c/45/3c451e83-5519-4eb9-91ab-e9b4602c057e/the-royal-e-resourceguide.pdf

The Prize Fight of the Century: The Basics

- Jack Johnson vs James Jeffries. July 4, 1910 in Reno, NV
 - Fight was originally scheduled to be held in San Francisco. Due to political pressure, it was moved to Reno 13 days before the fight. (One such campaign mailed out postcards asking to STOP THE FIGHT. THIS IS THE 20th CENTURY!
 - Boxing was illegal in most states (and pro boxing technically only legal in Nevada)
 - Rumors flew early and often -- 6 months prior -- that the fix was in (on both directions)

- George Lewis "Tex" Rickard was the promoter of the fight. Often called the greatest promoter of all time.
<https://www.boxingnewsonline.net/tex-rickard-the-greatest-promoter-boxing-has-ever-known/>

- ~18,000 were in attendance inside the outdoor arena, creating over \$300,000 in box office sales. (Other estimates have the attendance as high as 22,000). Also, no liquor was allowed inside the arena

- The fight was filmed but ultimately banned in most American cities from being shown due to politicians/social reformers. (Banned in many cities across the world, too).

- The purse for this fight was \$101,000. Originally supposed to be a 75/25 split (winner, loser) then Johnson proposed 50/50. After haggling, Jeffries agreed to 60/40. Jeffries was paid \$66,666 for film rights and Johnson \$50,000. Each man received a \$10,000 signing bonus.

- The fight helped start a new fashion in the boxing world: Ladies attending the bout. (~100)

- Very few Black people in attendance (for many, it would have been too expensive to make the trip out west. In 1910, approximately 89 percent of the Black population lived in the south.)

- Fight began sometime just before 3 p.m.

- Johnson won in the 15th round -- of a scheduled 45 -- after three times knocking down Jeffries in the round. Rounds were 3 min apiece.
- Coverage all over the world. Top correspondents (i.e. Jack London, Bat Masterson, Rube Goldberg) were sent to cover the fight)
 - Theater matinee houses reenacted the fight and bulletins were read in-between other performers and at intermission.
- Johnson emerged from the fight practically undamaged. Rex Beach wrote: "...it was really no fight at all."
- Johnson bet \$5000 on himself to win the match
- Information on the fight, plus a collection of photos. *Note: There is a historical site marker for the where the fight was held, which is now a salvage yard.
<http://renohistorical.org/items/show/82>

Riots:

There were no riots in Reno but five minutes after the fight, canvas, ropes, and anything not nailed down was taken as souvenirs.

However, the same can't be said in other cities around the nation. A few examples:

In **New York City**, an angry white mob nearly lynched a Black man, who was saved by police. In another part of the city, a mob chased a Black man, who was given sanctuary by a doctor, who defied the mob with a revolver. Between 37 and 39th streets, crowds kicked and beat any Black man. (These are simply a few examples from what happened post-fight in NYC).

In **Norfolk, VA** sailors from the Navy base went around beating Black people.

In **Omaha, NE** a Black man was killed.

In **Houston, TX** a Black man had his throat slashed.

All told, 23 Black people and 2 white people died from incidents across the nation

Jack Johnson

It was not my fights themselves, but my fight to get those fights that proved the hardest part of the struggle. It was my color. They told me to get a "rep"; but how was I to get a "rep" without meeting fighters of class? But I made them fight me. I just kept plugging along, snapping up what chances to fight I could grab, until by and by the topnotchers saw that, sooner or later,

they'd have to take me on. As soon as I had shown what I could do, the fight public -- most of the fans anyway -- took sides with me, and that helped a whole lot." - Jack Johnson

- Born in 1878 in Galveston, TX (Read more <https://www.biography.com/athlete/jack-johnson>)
- Left school after the 5th grade to support parents/siblings
- Began fighting in 1899
- More can be read about Johnson's personal life here, including romantic partners he was linked to, marriages, and more: http://www.myblackhistory.net/Jack_Johnson.htm
- Public often saw Johnson as a rags-to-riches story and a person who had a disregard for social convention. But, he was a man who simply spoke his mind and who was generous to a fault
- In 1901, was arrested -- along with his opponent -- after the 3rd round in a fight in Texas. Both boxers spent 3 weeks in jail because they couldn't afford bail. The wardens, however, allowed each boxer to fight and it is here where Johnson really honed his skills for the first time.
- Johnson, at various times throughout his career, spent time on Vaudeville between matches to help supplement his income. Went on a tour in 1909, where he sparred, played the bull fiddle, told jokes.
- Much like Jay "The Sport" Jackson, Jack Johnson loved to banter with the crowd, his opponent, and his opponent's trainers during a match.
- Favorite roulette numbers: 32, 33, 34, 35, 36
- Was in the first class of boxers inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990.
- Information is all over the place in regards to what Jack Johnson's boxing record was. Some places have him fighting 114 bouts (winning 80), stating he boxed about 50 matches between 1902-1907. He was still fighting when he was 60 years old. Other websites have him fighting only 76 total matches, but that is likely because some of them weren't counted as "official" because of boxing being illegal in some states. (This site, too, doesn't have anything listed after 1931 and only had him fighting 20 prior to the Fight of the Century). **My best guess is that Johnson was at about 80 matches since he began in 1899 (professionally) and probably had 8-10 matches per year, especially that five-year stretch between '02-'07.**

The Era:

- One of the few activities at the time where Black people could earn large sums of money (despite, too, usually not fighting for the biggest purses)
- Not all Black people were supportive of Johnson. Booker T. Washington, for one, believed that this fight would harm -- rather than help -- the race
- Many White fans believed that all Black boxers had a streak of yellow, which would make it easy for Jeffries to defeat Johnson.
- Author Jack London, who was contracted by the New York Herald to write 11 articles about the fight, wrote of Jack Johnson's "golden smile". "[Jeffries] must emerge and remove that golden smile from Jack Johnson's face."
 - London also mentioned in an article that "...the White Man must be rescued."
 - From London's recap of the fight: "He came first, airy, happy, and smiling, greeting friends and acquaintances here, there, and everywhere in the audience, cool as ice, waving his hand in salute."
 - "His [Johnson's] mind works like chain lightning and his body obeys with equal swiftness."
 - London places a continued emphasis on Johnson smiling/laughing throughout the article.
 - Also noted that Jeffries corner man did a lot of talking, in which Johnson usually responded to with not only words but by directly amping up his attacks on Jeffries.

The Script

**Note: I have a slightly different script so the page numbers aren't exact. I've indicated with "round/scene" to narrow it down. - JH*

Attempting to track down what a naval yard worker might make in the early 1900s. Nothing concrete, except the average worker made 22 cents/hr in 1910. Also found this, which might give an idea of different wages in that time.

<https://www.blackfives.org/negro-wages-in-1910s-compared-to-money-opportunities-playing-basketball/>

-p. 52 (Round 3): "boxing 10-12 years"... Very much in-line with Johnson's timeline

-p. 57 (Round 3): **White Man Worker's Union, Liberty's Guardians. Society for the Preservation of True American Culture.** While I didn't find anything in regards to these being real groups, they are no doubt based off real groups from this time, i.e.

-p. 78 (Round 5): So, I believe for licensing reasons the song in my script was changed to the one he sings in the Samuel French edition. But, I still want to share this original song. Wynton's song (starts about 2:10 mark, but intro is interesting as well):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuuOfsfY45o>

- A gramophone ranged from \$15 to \$50. (For perspective, in today's money, that's \$431.06 - \$682.51)
 - Also: By the first years of the century, most phonographs (or gramophones, or graphophones, depending on the brand involved) no longer had those big external horns that most people at the time found unsightly (today, these are the most valuable phonographs.)

Meaning/origin of "battle royale" or "royale":

- This 1st article cites that the term(s) were coined likely in the early 1700s in England. Of course, in the 1890s and 1900s, it was used when Black men -- usually five of them -- were placed together to fight. If you scroll to the end of the article, you'll see that the term was likely coined in a play from 1672, with three women fighting over a deadbeat dad in a "battail royal". Trying to locate more, if needed, that might have personal stories similar to Wynton's. For now:
<https://www.mmobomb.com/first-use-battle-royale-nearly-350-years-ago-didnt-involve-youd-expect>
- An excerpt from interviews with two former slaves, as part of the archive of interviews (**SLAVE NARRATIVES: A folk history of slavery in the United States**) that lives on in the Library of Congress: "[A] ring was drawn on the ground which ranged from about 15 ft. to 30 ft. in diameter depending on the number of contestants who engaged in the combat. Each participant was given a kind of bag that was stuffed with cotton and rags into a very compact mass. When so stuffed, the bags would weigh on an average of 10 pounds, and was used by the contestants in striking their antagonist.
- Each combatant picked whichever opponent he desired and attempted to subdue him by pounding him over the head with the bag, which he used as his weapon of defense. And which was used as an offending weapon.
- The contest was continued in this manner till every combatant was counted out, and a hero of the contest proclaimed. Sometimes two contestants were adjudged heroes, and it was necessary to run a contest between the two combatants before a final hero could be proclaimed.
- Then the two antagonists would stage a **battle royal** and would continue in the conflict till one was proclaimed victorious. Sometimes these Free-For-All battles were carried on with a kind of improvised pair of boxing gloves, and the contests were carried on in the same manner as previously described.
- Very often, as many as 30 darkies of the most husky type were engaged in these battles, and the contests were generally attended by large audiences. Being staged during the period of favorable weather, and mostly on Saturday afternoon; these physical

exhibitions were the scenes of much controversial conflict, gambling, excessive inebriation and hilarity.”

- Battle Royals essentially replaced the old bear-baiting events that entertained so many. Also this, which cites different examples of these royales taking place at carnivals, fairs, etc.: <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/question/2014/may.htm>
- As I believe was mentioned in the Jack Johnson documentary on PBS, Johnson fought in at least one of these royales early in his career. And later, in 1909, even was a referee in one in 1909.
- These battle royals continued in the south until the 1940s.

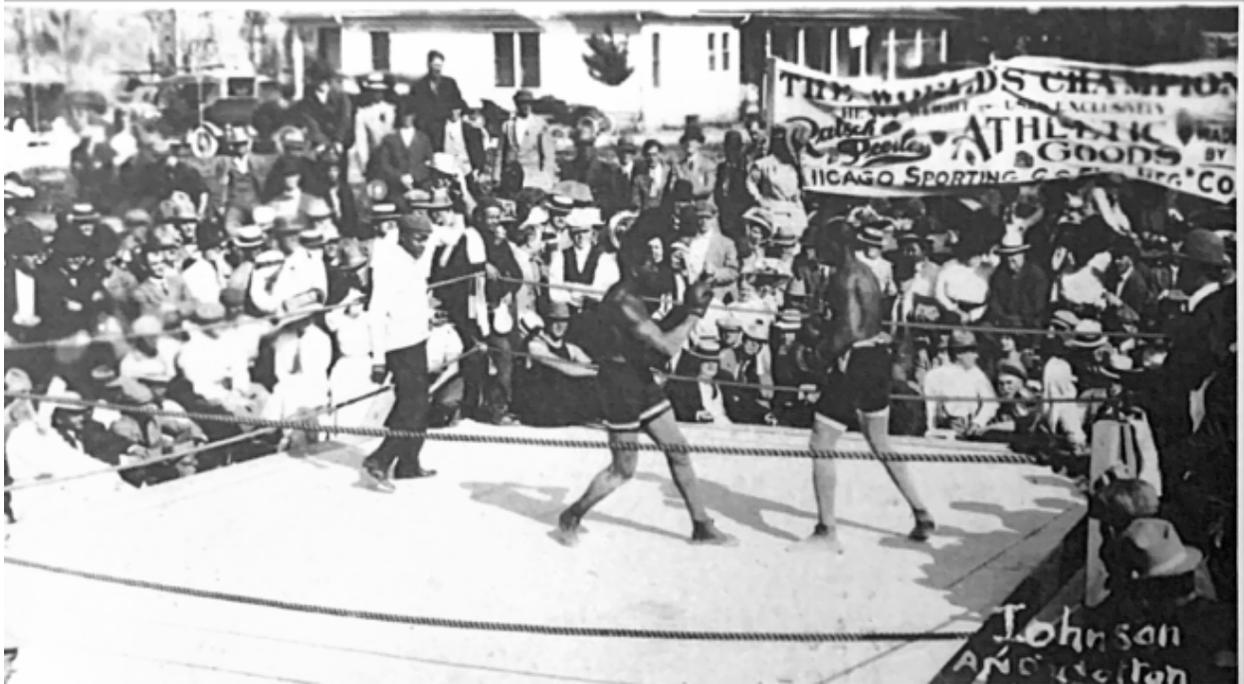
Miscellaneous:

A poem by [William Waring](#), written about Johnson’s victory:

*O my Lord
What a morning,
O my Lord,
What a feeling,
When Jack Johnson
Turned Jim Jeffries’
Snow-white face
to the ceiling.*

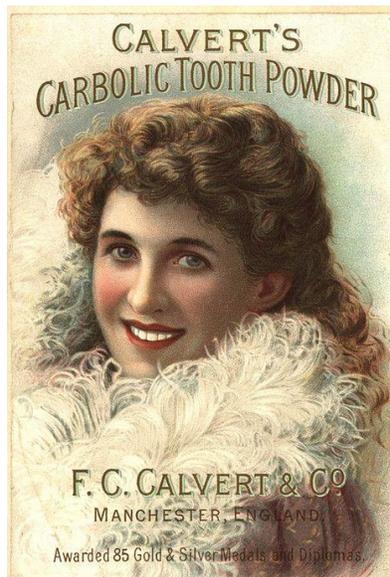
- A timeline of Black boxing history:
<https://boxraw.com/blogs/blog/black-boxing-history-timeline>
- <https://www.vice.com/en/article/zmvmd3/a-history-of-racial-epithets-in-boxing>
- A reprint from July 5, 1910 and coverage of the fight:
<https://www.rgj.com/story/life/2014/07/01/nearly-witness-jeffries-defeat/11811765/>
- Trying to locate more information on **Doc Furey**, who was a trainer of Johnson’s.

Johnson and one of his sparring partners, George “Kid” Cotton. Cotton was an accomplished boxer in his own right and said, “Johnson is the greatest boxer that ever pulled on a glove. It is next to impossible to hit him.



- A conversation with playwright Marco Ramirez:
<https://www.staythirstymedia.com/201604-092/html/201604-ramirez.html>

A couple of examples for ads from the 1890s (the toothpaste ad is from the UK)



Boxing Promoters:

**Currently looking for sound bytes from these big-name announcers of early 1900s but as you can imagine, some difficulty around that era.*

- [Billy Jordan](https://boxrec.com/media/index.php/Billy_Jordan): Ringside Announcer for Johnson/Jeffries fight. Had a catchphrase “Let ‘er go”. https://boxrec.com/media/index.php/Billy_Jordan
- Joe Humphreys was another prominent announcer during this time. <http://www.ibhof.com/pages/about/inductees/nonparticipant/humphreys.html>

Music:

- A little bit of Scott Joplin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMA7n_-rc
- A brief outline of Jazz in America between 1900 - 1910 <https://www.jazzinamerica.org/JazzResources/Timeline/1900/1909>
- The [Fisk Jubilee Singers](#) and their rendition of “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” from 1909 (the first known recording of this song): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUvBGZnL9rE>
- Buddy Bolden was a top cornetist of the time and the first musician celebrated for playing Jazz music. This is a nice 9-min video talking about his life, music, and importance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtRehf2m5o>