Pardon Sought for Boxer Imprisoned by Racism

Jack Johnson was first heavyweight champion

(AP) - Researching a documentary on Jack Johnson, filmmaker Ken Burns decided that racism, not justice, sent the first black heavyweight boxing champion to jail nearly a century

Burns decided to seek a presidential pardon to right the wrong. Last week, civil rights leaders and Sens. John McCain and Orrin Hatch joined Burns to announce the filing of legal papers with the Justice Department seeking the pardon.

The petition argues that Johnson's 1913 conviction under the Mann Act, a law passed three years earlier than bans the interstate transport of women for immoral purposes, unfairly punished him for a consensual relationship with a white woman.

"A gross and grave injustice was done to Jack Johnson where a law was perverted to send this decent American to jail," said McCain, R-Ariz. "Pardoning Jack Johnson will serve as a historic testament of



Documentary filmmaker Ken Burns talks about his next film, 'Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson' - the story of a boxer wrongly imprisoned for a relationship with a white woman. (AP photo)

America's resolve to live up to its noble ideals of justice and equality."

Hatch, R-Utah, said: "This man was flamboyant. But there was a reason for the flamboyancy: he was taking on the world and fighting to give African-Americans a chance."

Johnson died in a traffic accident in 1946 at age 68. If granted, the pardon would be only the second awarded posthumously. The first was President Clinton's 1999 pardon of Henry O. Flipper, a former slave who be-

came the first black army officer.

Johnson became the first black champion when he stopped Tommy Burns in Australia in 1908. Two years later, he defeated challenger Jim Jeffries, who had come out of retirement as the "Great White Hope" to beat the black man.

Johnson's victory, in an era when Jim Crow laws and segregation ruled, sparked race riots in parts of the country. But it was not just the championship that made many white Ameri-

In a 1983 biography of Johnson, Randy Roberts wrote that the boxer was proud of his conquests among white women. Prosecutors moved against him in 1912 by arresting Johnson on the charge of abducting Lucille Cameron.

Johnson was indicted, but the government lost Cameron as a witness when she became the second white

was invoked to invade the privacy of consenting adults.

The district attorney at the time, Harry Parkin, called the conviction "the foremost example of the evil in permitting the intermarriage of whites and blacks," which Burns' petition said revealed the extreme prejudice at

McCain and Hatch said they plan to ask other senators to join in a resolu-

Johnson's victory, in an era when Jim Crow laws and segregation ruled, sparked race riots in parts of the country. But it was not just the championship that made many white Americans hate him.

woman to marry Johnson; a wife cannot be forced to testify against her husband. The prosecution came up with a witness, Belle Schreiber, also white and a former mistress. Her testimony led to Johnson's conviction, and he served a 10-month sentence.

The petition filed Tuesday contends the conviction was legally unfounded, the first trial in which the Mann Act

tion urging that Johnson be pardoned. Other supporters include Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass.; Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., D-Ill.; boxers Sugar Ray Leonard and Vernon Forrest; and actor Samuel L. Jackson.

Burns' documentary on Johnson, titled "Unforgiveable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson," will air on PBS in January.



Real People, Real Advice An advice column known for its fearless approach to reality based subjects!

Dear Deanna!

My husband of 15 years had a midlife crisis and decided to find a 20year old mistress when he was age 40 and gother pregnant. This woman took me through many changes like calling on the phone with explicit details of the affair. Now he has to pay a huge chunk of child support and has asked for my forgiveness. Considering all she put me through, I find it hard to deal with this outside child syndrome because I'm reaping from his sins. How can I deal with this? -- Barely Hanging On; Tampa, Fla.

Dear Barely Hanging On

don't make a right and you should tune out the baby's immature mother and let God lead you while supporting your husband and heal your marriage. Yes, your husband was just as wrong, but the baby is innocent and didn't ask to come here. Seek faith based counseling and represent your womanly strength by demonstrating love and forgiveness.

Dear Deanna!

In response to the woman who chose a non-traditional partner, I think you're either homophobic or don't have common sense. You Deal with this by avoiding the judged her when you told her she gold digging child who's trying needs to select a man. God loves they need to get back to basics

to bring you down. Two wrongs everybody and you should've and keep it moving. been more supportive of her decision. There's nothing wrong with the lifestyle she chose. -- Kim McConnell; Bronx, N.Y.

Dear Kim:

Telling this woman she was correct in getting off the path of God's plan would be the same as telling you to go play in traffic. Simply insane. Unfortunately, people like you and others continue to enjoy feel good honesty which simply means a lie. Again, if a person selects an alternative lifestyle and they can't handle the pressure, ridicule, drama and taunting that comes with it, then

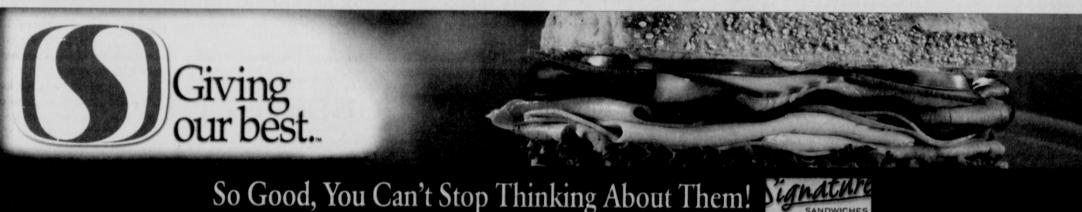
Dear Deanna!

I'm in prison and I read your column every week. I've looked at people's lives and situations and realize my life wasn't that bad and I messed it up with stupidity and crime. I'm also glad to see you don't judge the inmates and criminals that are locked up and help M. Write Ask Deanna! Email: us as well. When I get out, I'm staying out of trouble. -- Chris; write: Deanna M, P.O. Box 88847, Raleigh, N.C. prison

A mind is a terrible thing to waste if idle and it's good to see you're reading while in prison. Continue to receive wisdom from all ven-

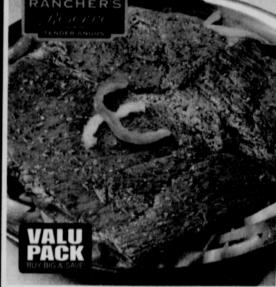
ues that will make your life better when you're released. Stay positive and encouraged and you'll be able to stay on the right path when you get back into society. Besides, criminals and inmates are still people and need love and support too.

Ask Deanna is written by Deanna askdeannal@yahoo.com Los Angeles, CA 90009. Website: www.askdeanna.com

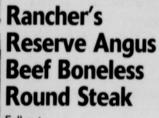




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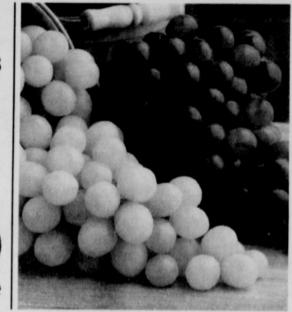


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