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# "A Picture Terrible In Its Significance": Jack Johnson, Interracial Relationships, And Methods Of White Social Control In Early Twentieth-Century America

Aimee M. Duchsherer

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“A PICTURE TERRIBLE IN ITS SIGNIFICANCE”:  
JACK JOHNSON, INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS, AND METHODS OF WHITE  
SOCIAL CONTROL IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

by

Aimee Duchsherer  
Bachelor of Arts, Minot State University, 2012

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts


Grand Forks, North Dakota


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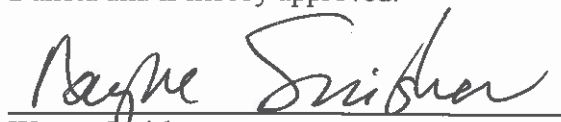
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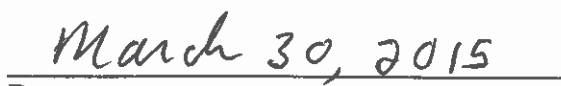
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kimberly Porter

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Eric Burin

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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## ABSTRACT

In early twentieth-century America, white society used white female purity, psychological and racial pressures, and intense physical violence as methods by which to control the sexual behavior of black men and white women. An exploration of the case study of African American boxer Jack Johnson reveals the use of these tools in the public response to his relationships with three white women: Belle Schreiber, Etta Duryea, and Lucille Cameron. As Johnson challenged white men in the boxing ring, he further challenged their supposed racial superiority through his blatant, public sexual relationships with and marriages to white women. Using legal documents and a variety of Chicago newspapers, this thesis explores black-male-white-female interracial relationships through public perception, touching on issues of legality, sexual autonomy, prostitution, mental disorders, abuse, suicide, race suicide, and lynching.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*“Our memories are transmitted mostly by word of mouth, from father to son. White people can’t imagine that we too are proud of our ancestors and that for long days, and even longer nights, when we knew nothing of schools or books, we handed down memories of past centuries. The tales were no doubt modified over time, but the salient facts remained the same. Fable or tradition, it matters little.” Jack Johnson<sup>1</sup>*

John Arthur Johnson’s life was rife with elements of fable, influenced by various social perceptions of his experiences and behavior, creating an intriguing web of historical reality and social rhetoric. Both the white and black public viewed the black boxer in ways which often entered the realm of myth, stereotypes, or blatant misrepresentation.<sup>2</sup> The public perception and discussion of his relationships with white women highlighted these elements in important ways, indicating the methods white society used to control the behavior of black men and, secondarily, white women. However, the somewhat murky details of Johnson’s origins, the background of his

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Johnson, *My Life and Battles*, Ed. Christopher Rivers (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007, 1914), pg. 1

<sup>2</sup> In this work, I have chosen to use the term “black” in order to refer to African Americans although the term is somewhat problematic. Language concerning race in American history is somewhat complicated. In the time period discussed here, the terms “colored” and “Negro” (always capitalized by the preference of those to whom it referred) were most common. In actuality, the term “black” was not as common and may have even been considered somewhat offensive to the growing educated African American community who proudly embraced the word Negro. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that the word “black” became proudly and frequently reclaimed. This movement dramatically challenged the racial structure of the United States to such an extent that it also included a change in language. Within this work, I recognize Jack Johnson’s actions and the function of black-male-white-female relationships within white society to be similarly challenging and an important precursor to the ideological revolution to occur fifty years later. Therefore, in order to avoid current politically and socially out-dated terms such as Negro while paying respect to the dramatic racial reappropriation of language within the twentieth century (i.e. “black,” “nigga,” etc.), “black” will be used exclusively throughout this work.



intimate life and choices, and the social and legal context of the early twentieth century are required in order to fully explore his sexual and romantic relationships with Belle Schreiber, Etta Duryea, and Lucille Cameron. This thesis argues that the white social perception and regulation of interracial relationships, as revealed in the media and legal documents concerning Jack Johnson's life, highlight the ways in which white society used white female purity, psychological and racial pressures leading to mental disorders, and intense physical violence as methods by which to control the sexual behavior of black men and white women, thereby retaining the racial and gender hierarchy founded on white men in the rapidly changing Progressive Era.

Based on the geographical location and time period of his birth, Johnson's formative social experiences should have influenced his life and choices in exceptionally different ways. Johnson was born in Galveston, Texas, to former slaves Henry and Tina Johnson in 1878. Between 1882 and 1968, 352 black individuals were lynched in Texas, third only behind Mississippi and Georgia.<sup>3</sup> Lynching was often in response to reported acts of violence, despite their veracity. In many cases, this rumored violence was supposedly against white women, warranting swift and brutal punishment in order to protect white female purity. Given this foundational context, Johnson's parents undoubtedly raised him with specific ideas concerning how he, as a black male, was supposed to behave within a white-dominated society—particularly how he should, or rather should not, interact with white women.

Nevertheless, despite growing up in an area rooted in the danger of lynch culture, Johnson disregarded or outright challenged the white social definitions of his manhood and behavior. The key to his mindset could arguably be found in his hometown:

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<sup>3</sup> "Lynchings, by State and Race, 1882-1968," The Charles Chesnutt Digital Archive.

No part of Galveston Island was more racially mixed than the Twelfth Ward, in which Johnson grew up. Its most important citizen was Norris Wright Cuney, who, as the son of a Texas planter and his slave mistress, was regarded as black, not white. ... As alderman, labor organizer, collector of customs for the district of Texas, Republican National Committeeman, and leader of the racially mixed “Black and Tan” faction of the state Republican Party, he was ... a constant reminder to neighbors like young Jack Johnson that a black man need not limit his horizons.<sup>4</sup>

Johnson grew up in this “racially-mixed” post-Reconstruction environment, where the rhetoric of the Purity of White Womanhood, examples of interracial relationships, and threats of lynching swirled about in a confusing manner.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, this background—where he viewed black men who were products of interracial relationships in positions of authority as well as possibly witnessing black men being lynched—was formative to his development and future performance of black male gender.

From this environment, Johnson grew up to engage in battles royal, street fights, and eventually the organized sport of boxing, fighting both black and white opponents.<sup>6</sup> He moved out of the South and settled in Chicago, travelling often for fights to further his career. While he beat white men in the ring, he also attempted to socially beat white men outside of the ring. His 1910 World Heavyweight Championship over white boxer Jim Jeffries fundamentally challenged the notion of the racial superiority of the white race. He further challenged the sexual dominance of white men with his first legal marriage to a white woman a few months later in 1911. These quickly subsequent events made

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<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), pg. 8.

<sup>5</sup> In this work, the Purity of White Womanhood has been capitalized in order to indicate its use as a specific term referring to the rhetoric that all white women were innately too sexually pure based on race, despite social or economic status, to desire or consent to sexual relationships with black men. Nevertheless, some white women could be excluded from this rhetoric, a concept that will be explored in Chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson biographer Geoffrey Ward used the words of sportswriter W.C. Heinz to describe a battle royal: ““an enlightened form of entertainment [...] in which half a dozen or more blacks were gloved, blindfolded and pushed into a ring where they were forced to flail at one another until only one remained standing”” (24).

Johnson's public and personal life that had previously predominantly centered on his boxing career increasingly problematic to white society. No longer did Johnson merely challenge the physical strength of white men; rather, he unequivocally seized it and then moved on to the next area of white male dominance in the early twentieth century: white women.

Biographers and historians have often discussed Johnson's racial choice in women in terms of a power dynamic—a purposeful decision in order to confront the white patriarchy.<sup>7</sup> However, Johnson never indicated that his preference for white women was based on challenging social constructions; rather, he claimed that he made such choices due to personal issues he had experienced with black women—the dismissal of women of his race would become a popular critique among the black community. His first recorded relationship with a black woman, Mary Austin, ended badly. Johnson claimed to have married the “light-skinned” woman in Texas as his career was beginning—a career she eventually could not tolerate, causing her to leave him.<sup>8</sup> He then had a relationship with black Clara Kerr who reportedly attempted to sabotage his fights, stole from him, and repeatedly ran off with another man “with his money, his clothes, and his jewelry.”<sup>9</sup> Johnson later was said to have stated, “I just laid down and cried like a baby ... I wished for my mother, just as I prayed down God's curses on white men, and all other Nigger women. All, except the one who bore me.”<sup>10</sup> Throughout his life, Johnson claimed that this emotional suffering he had endured at the hands of black

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<sup>7</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pg. 8; Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*, pg. 226;

<sup>8</sup> Robert H. DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire* (Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Co., 1969), pg. 40; There are no legal records indicating that Johnson and Mary Austin were ever legally married; however, Johnson often called women his wife or said they were married when they were not legally so. See Jack Johnson, *My Life and Battles*, pg 75.

<sup>9</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 46.

<sup>10</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 46.

women was what drove him into the arms of white women: “The heartaches which Mary Austin and Clara Kerr had caused me, led me to forswear colored women and to determine that my lot henceforth would be cast only with white women.”<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of Johnson’s motivation for pursuing relationships with white women, white society had very clear notions concerning the practice of interracial relationships. Since early American history, sexual access to black women by white men was common, almost certainly nonconsensual to some degree, and carried very little consequences for the man; conversely, sexual access to white women by black men was more uncommon and certainly faced greater ramifications for the male party of the situation. However, within the context of interracial marriage, the situation became a bit murkier. While white men were often very happy to have black mistresses or even sexually assault black women for their own gratification, they were far less likely to marry them. As a result, outside of the South from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, the majority of interracial marriages, while still rare, included black males and white females rather than white males and black females. Sociologist Aaron Gullickson furthered some hypotheses in order to explain this distinction: “It is argued, for example, that white men may face less pressure to legitimate nonmarital sexual unions because they are at the apex of the gender-race hierarchy. White men may also pay a higher labor market penalty for interracial marriage than black men.”<sup>12</sup>

Both of these arguments plausibly explain the reason for higher levels of black-male-white-female marriages—white male sexual behavior was altogether separate from white male responsibilities concerning marriage and family. Therefore, while white men

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<sup>11</sup> Jack Johnson, *Jack Johnson—In the Ring—and Out* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1992), pg. 76.

<sup>12</sup> Aaron Gullickson, “Black/White Interracial Marriage Trends, 1850-2000,” *Journal of Family History* 31, no. 3 (July 2006): 300.

controlled gender and racial structures which allowed them free sexual access to black women, those same structures dictated that they should not—and perhaps more importantly, were not required to—legitimize such sexual affairs with marriage. This level of sexual freedom outside of marriage was not available to white women or black men; as a result, an interracial marriage, although often persecuted, was preferable to no marriage at all. Therefore, this project is careful to make distinctions between the social structures concerning interracial sexuality and those concerning interracial marriage of black men and white women. The issue of ideological resistance to interracial marriage in this period is complex. In many areas in the North, interracial marriage had been legal for some time. Interracial marriage had been legal in Illinois since the 1870s; however, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the early movements of black Americans from the South to the North in the Great Migration greatly increased the visibility of race within the city. Therefore, as Chicago society began to discuss Johnson’s interracial liaisons, white society was also fundamentally reacting to the basic issue of increasing black populations.<sup>13</sup> Prior to this movement, relatively low black populations likely made intermarriages generally a non-issue. However, with growing population numbers and Johnson’s blatant flaunting of his sexual prowess with white women, white society became increasingly alarmed.

In the early twentieth century, greater movements of people through migration, urbanization, and immigration caused concerns of sex trafficking of young white women

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<sup>13</sup> The black population in Illinois increased by almost 25,000 between 1900 and 1910 and would gain roughly another 73,000 by 1920. Likewise, the entire Midwest would witness an increase of roughly 300,000 in the black population in the two decades. By the 1930 census, the black population of Illinois would have tripled the 1910 count; Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoop, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, *Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), pg. A-21.

to become more prominent within white society and the middle-class reform organizations. As forced or coerced prostitution of white women came to be framed in terms of white slavery, racial issues began to develop. Attempts to clean up vice districts in American cities, close houses of ill repute, and rehabilitate “worthy” prostitutes often focused on white prostitutes, neglecting the experiences of black prostitutes whom white middle-class society did not view as redeemable.<sup>14</sup> One of the efforts of Progressive Era reform to police sexuality and vice was the White Slave Traffic Act, more commonly known as the Mann Act. Passed in 1910, this act sought to “regulate interstate and foreign commerce by prohibiting the transportation therein for immoral purposes of women and girls, and for other purposes.”<sup>15</sup> Despite its name, the act was intended to protect all women, regardless of race; however, it was overwhelmingly used to protect white women as victims. Furthermore, the vague wording of the act, while supposedly meant to regulate forced prostitution and commercial transportation of such, allowed courts and juries to stretch the phrase “immoral purposes” to include consensual activities that existed outside of social constraints of permissible sexual behavior. This provided a legal opportunity to regulate sexuality outside of marriage—including interracial sexuality—that society or the government deemed unsuitable.

In October of 1912, Mrs. Cameron-Falconet, a white mother from Minneapolis, accused Johnson of abducting and defiling her nineteen-year-old daughter Lucille. With her claim that Johnson had transported Lucille from Minneapolis to Chicago for immoral purposes, the federal government quickly became involved in the situation. The white government and society viewed indicting Johnson on charges of violating the Mann Act

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<sup>14</sup> Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pg. 16.

<sup>15</sup> The Mann Act (1910), 36 Stats., Vol. I, p. 825 (1910).

as a way to challenge his confrontation of white racial superiority and, thereby, his interracial relationships. This intention is evidenced by the government's focused desire to find a witness who could achieve a conviction. When Lucille Cameron proved uncooperative, the United States searched for another woman in order to pursue their case. They located Belle Schreiber, a former Chicago prostitute and Johnson's former mistress, working in a house of ill repute in Washington, D.C. With encouragement from the government, she agreed to testify against Johnson on charges that he transported her from Pittsburgh to Chicago in order to engage in immoral behavior with him and open a house of prostitution in late 1910. This prohibition of interstate movement of women for broadly defined immoral purposes eventually became the method by which white society successfully challenged and sought to regulate Jack Johnson's relationships with white women.<sup>16</sup>

This work has already made several distinctions between the existence of black-male-white-female relationships and white-male-black-female relationships. In order to concentrate on white social control of black male and white female sexual behavior, white-male-black-female relations are absent. This is a purposeful omission. Pre-Emancipation, such relationships were rampant, particularly in the form of rape and sexual assault between slave owners or overseers and black female slaves. Even in the few potential cases of truly romantic affection, in this time period, none of these relationships were completely consensual as the hierarchical power structure of the white

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<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of prostitution, anti-vice activism, concerns of white slavery, and the Mann Act, see Karen Abbot, *Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and the Battle for America's Souls* (New York: Random House, 2007); Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and David J. Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

patriarchy or even outright ownership added some level of coercion, whether explicitly or implicitly. Furthermore, even post-Emancipation, white men had much greater access to sexual relationships with individuals of other races than did their female counterparts. While relations between white men and black women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were not considered socially or, in some places, legally acceptable, they occurred more frequently and sometimes quite prominently within the historical register.<sup>17</sup> These relationships, while considered inappropriate socially, were well within the privilege of white manhood, causing blind eyes to turn based on their socially-granted racial and gender superiority. However, the more neglected reverse side of this issue also speaks to white male privilege and access: if white women could have relationships with black men, white men lost both of these elements, creating a crumbling power structure of both race and gender. For these reasons, this thesis recognizes the historical, gendered, and racial importance of white-male-black-female relations, but, for the sake of focus, will not include them.

Likewise, the narrative of interracial relationships within American history does not solely include white and black individuals. This intersecting conversation of gender, race, and sexuality also shaped the experiences of Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and a huge number of other complex racial and ethnic categories. Even interethnic relationships, such as between a German American and an Italian American, had strong likelihood of being problematic in the early twentieth

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<sup>17</sup> Often there are more records of interracial marriages regarding black men and white women as discussed by Gullickson. As a result, many of these white-male-black-female relationships, while more common, leave little record as they were typically affairs or common-law marriages. For the Progressive Era, see relationships such as Clarence King and Ada Copeland, and Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith. For earlier examples, often involving an enslaved woman, see Richard Mentor Johnson and Julia Chinn, and Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemmings. A later prominent example is, of course, Richard and Mildred Loving.



century. Furthermore, interfaith relationships opened another host of issues and difficulties. In all of these cases, conflicting ideas of intellectual and moral ideologies, cultural and social views of sexual behavior, and differing gender identities, as well as the process of “othering” groups of people, created environments which were unfriendly to relationships that dared step over these invisible, ideological lines. All of these categories of sexual relationships provide slightly different insights into the experience of gender, race, and sexuality in American history in important ways; nevertheless, for the sake of focus, this thesis recognizes these different groups and experiences while choosing to discuss the white social control of black and white interracial relationships only.<sup>18</sup>

In order to explore the function of white control and perception of black male and white female sexual behavior within the public sphere, this thesis draws on a selection of Chicago newspapers. While a broader sampling of American newspapers would have provided a unique social perspective across geographical lines, Chicago was central to the Johnson case and is therefore the appropriate focus for the size of this project. Three prominent white newspapers, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Day Book*, and *The Chicago Examiner*, provide articles and opinions concerning Johnson and interracial relationships ranging from fairly unbiased for the time period to dramatically sensational in tone and nature. This indicates the various levels of importance placed on fact versus myth within these issues of interracial relationships in the public perspective. In order to provide a racial contrast, two important examples from the black press have also been included:

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<sup>18</sup> For a few recent discussions concerning other types of inter-relationships in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century, see Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) concerning multiethnic identity in California; Sharon Davies, *Rising Road: A True Tale of Love, Race, and Religion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) for interreligious and interethnic romantic relationships; and Katherine Ellinghaus, *Taking Assimilation to Heart: Marriages of White Women and Indigenous Men in the United States and Australia, 1887-1937* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009) concerning interethnic marriages between white women and Native American men.

*The Chicago Defender* and *The Broad Ax*. These sources suggest the often-conflicting perspectives of the black community concerning Johnson's behavior and the place of interracial relationships within larger society.

While the press offers a clear indication of social perceptions, the level of bias is often problematic. In order to separate the actual legal proceedings of Johnson's Mann Act trial from the often sordid descriptions in the newspapers, this thesis also relies heavily on the Johnson-related court documents housed in the National Archives and Records Administration in Chicago. These include the complete transcript from the case *The United States v. John Arthur Johnson* in 1913 as well as the original indictment, subpoenas, verdict, assignment of errors, and other relevant documents. Also, a sampling of the Bureau of Investigation's files concerning Johnson provide further insight into the legal and federal perception of him and his interracial relationships. These primary sources build upon the firm historiographical foundation of black manhood and interracial relationships in the Progressive Era and their highly publicized function within the Johnson Affair.<sup>19</sup> While the following historiography explores these issues and their complexities, the focused question of methods of white social control is somewhat absent. This thesis seeks to address that absence through an intersecting conversation of boundaries of white female purity, psychological and racial pressures, and physical violence as these control methods.

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<sup>19</sup> Davarian Baldwin used the phrase the "Johnson Affair" in his work *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007) to refer to the events and social and cultural reaction surrounding the time of Johnson's defeat of Jim Jeffries through his conviction of violating the Mann Act. This work uses the phrase in a similar manner.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

This thesis seeks to contribute an analysis of public perception in the Johnson Affair to the historiography. The three elements of white female purity, notions of consequences associated with interracial relationships, and physical violence as a response to black male sexuality are often present within the recent historiography of black manhood and Jack Johnson. Nevertheless, historians have treated these elements as innate, expected issues or byproducts in early twentieth-century interracial relationships rather than examining the manner in which they discursively functioned as methods of control. By highlighting other historians' acknowledgment that these three elements were common issues within interracial sexuality in general, this thesis argues that their presence reveals the Johnson Affair as a highly-publicized sliver of larger control of black-male-white-female sexual relationships. As such, the case study is not an exceptional example. Rather, the methods of control this thesis identifies in the public response to the Johnson Affair are a transferrable, rhetorical framework, contributing to the existing historiography in a focused manner.

White society began to define early twentieth-century manhood by a list of qualities, relating to Victorian ideals, and a brief nod to Theodore Roosevelt's reinvention of manhood in the American West.<sup>20</sup> Prior to Emancipation, the institution of slavery had

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<sup>20</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pg. 6.

largely defined race—and thereby black gender—indicating the accepted concept of racial inferiority. After Emancipation, a cultural system of white supremacy strongly developed in the South with significant implications throughout the rest of the nation. These concepts of white supremacy informed ideas of gender for not only white society but also black. When early writers and historians discussed black manhood in the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth, they did so by placing definitions of black males against those of white females. While at first consideration this may seem like a strange organization, in actuality, it provides a strong discourse of ideas of race, gender, and power in the period, signifying that the importance of black manhood went far beyond what it personally meant to be a black male. Historians discussed black manhood through the relations between black men and white women, culminating in and defined by lynching. Although the political and social discourse of the time cast lynching as a response to rape and assault, it was actually the method by which to define black manhood and sexuality, particularly as it related to white women.

Of course, the function of early twentieth-century black manhood was far more complex than this simple assumption based on violent sexuality. In her 1995 work *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, historian Gail Bederman argued that during this period Americans became “obsessed with the connection between manhood and racial dominance.”<sup>21</sup> In a fundamental definition of language, Bederman broke apart what “manliness” and “masculinity” meant during the period and argued that the terms refer to dramatically different concepts. These concepts were constructed to define white manhood, but, in

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<sup>21</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pg. 4.

their intricacies, they also sub-defined black manhood in interesting and often paradoxical ways. Manliness, Bederman argued, was essentially a Victorian list of traits and qualities that a manly white middle class man ought to possess.<sup>22</sup> Masculinity, on the other hand, was a response to the desire for men to be more virile. Masculinity therefore suggested elements of sexuality, virility, and even primitivism—a construct that seemed to be antithetical to ideas of superior races and manly self-restraint.

Manliness was therefore discussed in terms of civilized self-restraint—a control over one’s emotions and feelings. In the early twentieth century, this construct was becoming no longer useful. It did, however, serve the distinct purpose of excluding black males from the rhetoric and refusing to define black manhood as “manly.” Black men and their sexuality were increasingly viewed as dangerous, their constant threat to white women relegating them to a different category than that of the manly white man. Bederman recognized that this perception of black manliness, or the lack thereof, was rooted in rape and lynch fear tactics, perpetuated by a white media:

These representations of Southern lynching encouraged Northern white men to set themselves as manly and powerful and gave them a rich ground on which issues of gender, sexuality, and racial dominance could be attractively combined and recombined to depict the overwhelming power of their civilized white manliness. Lynching, as whites understood it, was necessary because black men were uncivilized, unmanly rapists, unable to control their sexual desires. By the 1890s, most white Americans believed that African American men lusted uncontrollably after white women, and that lynchings occurred when white men were goaded beyond endurance by black men’s savage, unmanly assaults on pure white womanhood.<sup>23</sup>

Bederman addressed the idea of the role of rape in concepts of self-restraint and manliness a great deal in her work. Sexual self-restraint was a hallmark of a civilization and manliness. Civilization suggested evolutionary progress and, according to the

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<sup>22</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 46.

accepted racial evolution of the period, African Americans were not as advanced as the white race. Their lack of civilization therefore led to an uncontrollable desire to rape which signaled a lack of self-restraint and, therefore, a lack of manliness. In contrast, the white man's defense of white womanhood through lynching signaled their own manly righteous indignation.

Social rhetoric surrounding lynching made several strong suggestions about black manliness, or the absence thereof, and the idea of black masculinity—a change in terms that proved problematic for white manhood. In conversation of manliness, Bederman wrote, “The explosion of interest in the ‘Negro rapist,’ I would argue, was another example of this burgeoning new attention to sexuality.... ‘Civilization’ positioned African American men as the antithesis of both the white man and civilization itself. As such, black men embodied whatever was most unmanly and uncivilized, including a complete absence of sexual self-control.”<sup>24</sup> The “Negro rapist” was arguably the definition of black manhood. While white manhood was defined by gentlemanly self-restraint and morality, the white public increasingly associated black males with intense sexuality and, although unintentionally, virility. Sexuality and virility suggested masculinity, a problematic development as masculinity began to be phrased in terms of white manhood: “At the same time, however, because ‘the Negro rapist’ represented the opposite of civilized manliness, he also represented primitive masculinity in its purest, most primal form.”<sup>25</sup> These conflicting perspectives suggest the various ways the practice of lynching could potentially define manhood, manliness, and masculinity.

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<sup>24</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 49.

<sup>25</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 49.

Perhaps, Bederman argued, it was simpler to introduce the possibility of black men as masculine rather than as manly. The term masculinity had complexities and connotations of sexuality and virility with a primitive quality—elements that were readily accepted as being innately a part of the black man. However, as white men attempted to create a meaning of masculinity that allowed them to be virile and powerful while remaining civilized with manly self-restraint, it became increasingly evident that black men must be excluded from the rhetoric: “... as civilized manliness lost power, whites grew increasingly interested in a different figure that also combined racial supremacy with powerful manhood—not ‘the white man,’ who embodied civilized manliness, but ‘the natural man,’ who embodied primitive masculinity.”<sup>26</sup> Manhood was increasingly defined in terms of race: manhood of the superior race versus manhood of an inferior race. In this, Bederman pointed again to her argument that race and gender were crucially intertwined, suggesting potential elements of power. Black men were not excluded from the ideology of masculinity because they did not exhibit manliness and a primitive sexual nature; rather, they were excluded because they were not white and, therefore, were incapable of synthesizing these qualities with the grace of a white man. Due to this complex nature, Bederman wrote, “My objective in analyzing the turn-of-the century discourse of civilization has been to contribute to recent scholars’ observations that race and gender cannot be studied as if they were two discrete categories. In the past, as in the present, these two categories of difference have worked in tandem, in ways that are no less real for sometimes not being apparent.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 71.

<sup>27</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 239.

Bederman briefly addressed interracial relationships in *Manliness and Civilization*. Due to her central argument, she framed her discussion in terms of black manhood confronting and challenging white ideals of manliness and masculinity. To do so, Bederman used the case study of the Johnson Affair, suggesting Johnson's life and his career were in conscious challenge to the hegemonic ideals of manhood.<sup>28</sup> She chose to discuss his interracial relationships in the same terms, strongly linking the importance of black gender ideology to these sexual unions. Johnson's actions with white women directly challenged established gender and race roles and almost completely negated white supremacy. Bederman wrote, "White men worried: Did Johnson's success with white women prove him a superior specimen of manhood? The spectacle of dozens of white women in pursuit of Johnson's favor pleased Johnson and infuriated many whites. These women were mostly prostitutes, but racial etiquette held all white women were too 'pure' for liaisons with black men."<sup>29</sup> In this, Bederman recognized the important roles of consent and white female purity in the Johnson Affair. However, she neglected to carefully identify the function of purity in the public perception of Johnson's lovers. Furthermore, her statement that these women were "mostly prostitutes" negates the complex definitions of purity and white female behavior that this work explores in Chapter Three.

In Bederman's analysis of Jack Johnson, the interracial liaisons were merely an outward manifestation of the ideological confrontation of white ideas of manliness and masculinity and the exclusion of black males. She claimed that Johnson was fully aware of the role and influence of these ideologies, no stranger to lynch culture, and shaped his

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<sup>28</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 3.



actions accordingly: “He also dressed both his beautiful blond wives in jewels and furs and paraded them in front of the press.... Therefore, he made certain the public could not view his wives as pathetic victims of Negro lust. Instead, he presented his wives as wealthy, respectable women whose husband was successful and manly enough to support them in comfort and luxury.”<sup>30</sup> In this way, Bederman argued that Johnson forced his way into a white-dominated society and sought to reconstruct definitions of manliness and masculinity, while still supporting concepts of intense black sexuality, shaping a paradoxical blend of manliness and masculinity—a feat that she later argued was only possible through “civilization.” While Bederman accurately identified that Johnson’s interracial relationships certainly confronted white social norms, the public reaction to his relationships reveals that, despite his best efforts, much of white society still viewed his wives as “pathetic victims of Negro lust.” The fact that he was able to provide them with an extravagant lifestyle only further challenged white patriarchal supremacy, reinforcing white social attempts to control interracial sexuality.

In *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore argued that early twentieth-century black men who attempted to function within white middle-class ideals of manhood through education, self-restraint, and morality were systematically excluded by the changing language, defining manhood as a “white only” quality. Changes in terminology and greater attention to evolutionary influence made such an exclusion possible: “Evolution rendered black men ‘half devil and half child’ .... This biological balance

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<sup>30</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 8-9.

meant that because of their constitutional forbearance only white men were capable of political participation and governance.”<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Gilmore pointed out that while white men were increasingly using race as a method by which to define manhood, black men sought to make class the defining element.<sup>32</sup> For these men, the Spanish-American War served as a tremendous opportunity to attempt to assert their manliness through patriotic service to a country that had only recently enfranchised them. Ironically, this was somehow twisted to reinforce white ideas of manhood, evolutionary advancement, or—to use Bederman’s term—civilization, and black sexuality, as distinct from masculinity. Gilmore wrote, “To invoke the trope of the African American as evolutionary child, whites argued that dressing up black men in uniforms only served to point up the absurdity of their manly posturing, much like dressing up children in cowboy costumes.”<sup>33</sup> By reducing the black soldiers’ evolutionary advancement, white society was able to redefine their manliness by essentially negating it as being childlike, a common attribute assigned to individuals of color. Their claims to white masculinity had to be undermined as well, by portraying their virility as being inferior due to their lower stage of evolutionary advancement and therefore merely sexual—if not sexually predatory—in nature: “When black soldiers came to town on leave, they carried themselves with confidence and brimmed with happiness at being home, irritating whites even further. To transform black soldiers from home protectors into sexual predators, whites portrayed them as swaggering phallic

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<sup>31</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pg. 64.

<sup>32</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pg. 75.

<sup>33</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pg. 81.

symbols.”<sup>34</sup> In this, Gilmore showed how the ideology of elements of manhood were systematically broken down for black men by white men in order to purposely exclude them from being considered manly or masculine.<sup>35</sup>

Gilmore also addressed interracial relationships and argued that they became problematic to white—and black—society as definitions of manhood changed. As the demonization of black manhood increased, white womanhood had to also be redefined in order to negate the possibility of consensual relationships between black men and white women, of any class. Gilmore argued, “If New White Men wanted to regulate whiteness in public and private social relations, they would have to put force behind their haphazard efforts to police poor white women’s sexuality.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, definitions of black manhood as sexually aggressive became intrinsically tied to social perception and treatment of interracial relationships. By strictly defining black manhood and white womanhood, white society could police the possibility of interracial relationships between such individuals.

The growth of the ideology of the Purity of White Womanhood created the rhetoric to disregard such a relationship: “At the same time, assuming white women’s purity made it easy to draw clear lines in rape cases involving black men and white women. Henceforth, there could be no consensual interracial sex between white women and black men. White women would be incapable of it.”<sup>37</sup> The incapability of such a

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<sup>34</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pg. 81.

<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that although Gilmore referenced Bederman’s ideas a great deal in this chapter, she did not specify the differences in definition or deeper structural gender meaning of the terms “manliness” and “masculinity.” Perhaps if she had had the full foundational influence of Bederman’s argument in *Manliness and Civilization* she would have incorporated these elements to a greater extent in her own argument. Nevertheless, Gilmore presented many ideas and phrased concepts in a way which certainly support Bederman’s argument.

<sup>36</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pg. 72.

<sup>37</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pg. 72.

relationship was thus phrased in much the same way as black manliness. Black manliness and masculinity was considered impossible because of the lack of evolutionary advancement, leaving black men as primitive and sexually aggressive. Black men were incapable of being manly and white women were incapable of desiring sex with black men. Gilmore argued that such rhetoric was intentionally developed in order to “put both black men and white women in their places.”<sup>38</sup> Once again, the nuances of white women’s incapability of desire for black men are largely absent from the historiography. As such, this thesis contributes the argument that because white women were *not* incapable of desiring sexual relationships with black men, the notion of their purity became a landscape on which white society could negotiate and control their behavior.

In 1997, Kevin Mumford published *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* in which he sought to use interracial sexuality as a category of analysis. By framing black manhood in terms of attractive animal sexuality, he developed a specific structure of interracial relationships between black men and white women. As a result, Mumford saw lynching of black men in response to sexual relations as a punishment for challenging the sexual supremacy of white men. This contrasts with other interpretations of lynching and prevention of interracial relationships as a response to black manhood as sub-evolutionary to white manliness and masculinity. Rather, Mumford argued that black male sexuality was a way by which white men asserted their supremacy: “White power holders could with relative

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<sup>38</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pg. 96.

impunity curtail black freedom; sexuality represented the symbolic arena in which this could be demonstrated.”<sup>39</sup>

Like Bederman, Mumford also discussed Jack Johnson, but in order to interpret interracial sexuality between black men and white women. Interestingly, as a result, he focused a great deal of his argument on Johnson’s primitive sex appeal rather than the complexities of black manhood. Mumford wrote, “Johnson’s sexual predicament reflected the long-standing paradox of black male sexuality, in which the black figure is both feared and desired. [...] White women—and white men—must have glimpsed something alluring, perhaps even erotic, in Johnson’s brash demeanor and ostentatious lifestyle. ...At least in part, it was the unsettling combination of sexual desire and racial fear that shaped the white social response to Johnson.”<sup>40</sup> The intersection of sexual obsession and fear in the Johnson Affair is key to the often violent public response to his interracial relationships. Mumford’s assessment is accurate but leaves space for further analysis concerning the way such obsession intersected with threats of violence—analysis this work performs in Chapter Five.

In 2004, Martin Summers produced a work focusing specifically on the gender of black males in the early twentieth century, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*. Summers attempted to focus on the words of black men in his work. Making a similar argument to Bederman and Gilmore, Summers discussed that these men attempted to establish their manhood in a cultural and racial system that sought to exclude them in any way possible: “Economic discrimination and the inability of most black families to survive solely on a male

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<sup>39</sup> Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pg. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Mumford, *Interzones*, pg. 8.

breadwinner's income militated against the patriarchal organization of the black household, further making it difficult to obtain manhood by dominant cultural standards."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, not only was it difficult to assert their manhood in the economic sphere and the ability to provide for their families, Summers also pointed to the previous argument that lynching was used as a way to force black men to operate under white social constructs and eliminate them from the newly developing rhetoric of masculinity: "The ever-present threat of lynching and mob violence, which purportedly sought to police an aggressive black male sexuality and often incorporated the horrific act of castration, made any assertion of independence of brazen behavior a potentially perilous action."<sup>42</sup>

As a result of these difficulties and hindrances, black men had to define their manhood themselves, in reply and contrast to the hegemonic discourse of white manhood. Like Gilmore, Summers argued that middle-class respectability became the method by which black men argued for their participation in the discourse of masculinity. While Gilmore used the example of black soldiers, Summers focused on the specific participation of African Americans in Masonic groups. This type of social group suggested respectability and "respectability represented for blacks a necessary tool to combat popular cultural images of their race as lazy, dirty, unintelligent, morally lax, and sexually rapacious."<sup>43</sup> However, for black men, middle-class—or even upper-class—respectability was ultimately insufficient to gain access to white definitions of manhood. This, once again, provides a space for further analysis of Johnson's performance of black

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pg. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, pg. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, pg. 42.

manhood in response to socioeconomic status and the manner in which the white public responded.

Summers work certainly paid homage to Gail Bederman's heavily influential work; however, he critiqued her in one small, but intriguingly insightful, way. In his footnotes, he wrote:

Even the best scholarship that posits the centrality of race in constructions of manhood fails to attribute agency to black men. In Gail Bederman's brilliant examination of the ways in which ideas of race and 'civilization' shaped dominant definitions of manhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an abstracted black masculinity hovers above the individuals who are articulating discourses of manliness and masculinity. These include two white men ..., one black woman ..., and one white woman .... Bederman does discuss the legendary African American boxer, Jack Johnson, and how he manipulated the dominant cultural ideas of manhood, but his voice is not heard to the same extent as the others, which reproduces, on some level, his non-agency.<sup>44</sup>

This lengthy passage clearly highlights Summers' critique of Bederman's work, a critique that has a great deal of merit. Bederman skillfully identified the ways in which ideologies of race, civilization, and manhood intertwined in the life of Johnson and structured his behavior as well as the public responses to his behavior; however, as Summers indicated, Johnson's voice is never clearly heard in her work, creating a space to be filled with discussions of manhood, social constructions of gender and interracial relationships, and Jack Johnson. Although Summers provided agency and voice to other black men in his work, he did not approach the Johnson Affair. As such, this work, while focusing on public perceptions, has allowed Johnson to speak whenever his voice can be heard on a topic, attempting to support his agency which is somewhat absent throughout much of the historiography.

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<sup>44</sup> Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, pg. 293-294.

Biographers of Johnson did not fully address the intersection of black manhood, interracial sexuality, and white social control either. The specific historiography—or rather biography—of Johnson reveals evidence of his voice but largely lacks an in-depth discussion of the gender ideology and social constructions that shaped his behavior and the public response thereof. Acknowledgement that his interracial relationships were problematic, while useful, does not sufficiently tackle elements of white social control used in the Johnson Affair. Six major historiographical works concerning Johnson provide a nice description of how the discipline interpreted his case study throughout the past fifty years. Finis Farr produced one of the first major works concerning Johnson's life in 1964. His biographical work discussed Johnson's career as well as the social and legal challenges he faced as a result of his relationships with white women. This discussion is clearly organized and well-researched: Farr did an excellent job exploring the multiple layers of racial issues at play within the situation. However, a full discussion of social control by gender construction is lacking due to his work preceding the growth of gender historical theory by over twenty years.

Within the following decade, a few other works concerning Johnson appeared including Robert H. DeCoy's *The Big Black Fire* in 1969 and *Bad Nigger!: The National Impact of Jack Johnson* by Al-Tony Gilmore in 1975. DeCoy claimed that he wrote his book based on personal, intimate conversations he had with Johnson before his death. This highlights one of the significant issues with early biographies and histories of Johnson: Johnson's own claims, ideas, and opinions influenced them heavily, creating a somewhat biased presentation. In 1983, Randy Roberts added a key piece to the historiography of Johnson's life: *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes*.



In his bibliographical note, Roberts tackled the issue of biographical sources: “There are a handful of biographies about Johnson. All of them, however, depend heavily on Johnson’s autobiography, *Jack Johnson Is a Dandy* . . . , which is an odd mixture of fact and fancy. To use it as a basis of a biography is to be hopelessly misled.”<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Roberts recognized the usefulness of these works to the social perception of Johnson’s life and behavior and added them to the bulk of primary sources he used to develop a well-researched discussion of Johnson’s life.

In 2004, author and editor Geoffrey Ward published *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, a lengthy and definitive biography, working with producer Ken Burns to adapt the work for a PBS documentary also entitled *Unforgivable Blackness*. Although not a historian, Ward’s work is a skillfully written, engaging and exhaustive narrative of Johnson’s life. However, like the other largely biographical works before him, he did not include argument concerning gender constructions of social control beyond indicating that Johnson’s life challenged the supremacy of white society. Furthermore, his background lacks extensive education in historical methodology which is evident in his sometimes faulty connections, slight issues with accuracy of facts, and several statements which should have included a citation, preventing the reader from effectively being able to check his sources.

Theresa Runstedtler’s 2012 book *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* is the most recent substantial work concerning Johnson with arguably the most unique approach. In this meticulously researched project, Runstedtler explored the ways in which Johnson’s personal life and career functioned in the global arena, challenging and changing ideas of race in boxing as well as society as a

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<sup>45</sup> Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes*, pg. 265.

whole. In this, she presented dramatically different cultural and social results as a result of Johnson's actions but contributed an important new discussion to the larger conversation of gender, race, leisure, and society. Her assessment of Johnson's black manhood as performed in his boxing career makes her a prominent voice within larger discussion of his race as an integral part of his sexual relationships.

Therefore, the historiography of black manhood, interracial relationships, and Jack Johnson provides a firm foundation of the function of these identities and experiences within the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, they lack a targeted discussion of how white female purity, ideas of interracial relationships' consequences, and obsessive violent control intersected to provide a clear image of methods of white social control. This thesis addresses this missing piece, building on the legacy of this previous work with careful analysis and synthesis of primary sources. Historians largely, if not completely, accept the notion that white society, particularly the white patriarchy, controlled the lives, actions, and movement of black men and white women in this period. However, it is somewhat less widely practiced to break down and identify these methods, examine them based on racial and gender rhetoric, and analyze how they actually operated in the public conversation concerning black-male-white-female interracial relationships.

### CHAPTER III

#### “MAKING LOVE TO A COLORED MAN”: CONTROLLING WHITE FEMALE PURITY

White society clearly recognized that the notion of white female purity controlled the behavior of black men. As such, the lines and boundaries of white female purity were often consciously moved in order to include or exclude women, condemning specific people and specific relationships while tolerating others which created fluid identities for social control, effectively retaining the status quo of white patriarchy. As revealed in the historiography, black manhood was increasingly defined in contrast to the growing ideology of the Purity of White Womanhood. This popular social discourse clearly argued that white women—perhaps even white prostitutes—were simply too innately pure, due to the combination of their race and gender, to actually consent to sexual intercourse with sexually primitive and forceful black men. If this were indeed true, white women who consciously and assertively chose interracial relationships were intensely problematic.

In this way, the problem with interracial relationships focused on white female sexuality. White society almost exclusively defined black men as overly sexual and, in some cases, viewed them as “swaggering phallic symbols.”<sup>46</sup> Conversely, the early

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<sup>46</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pg. 81.

twentieth century was still grappling with the Victorian notion of white womanhood as unsexed. Women were not expected to enjoy sex or—more scandalous—seek it. White female sexual relationships were largely, if not exclusively, predicated on social advancement—marriage to a respectable man, creating a family and a comfortable life, and retaining a good name. Typically in this period, a black man could offer a white woman none of these things. As a result of these social constructs of unsexed white women and oversexed black men, consensual interracial relationships greatly challenged socially constructed gender and racial binaries as well as white patriarchy and supremacy. Therefore, definitions of white female purity were essential to controlling interracial sexual behavior.

The Johnson Affair highlights the social myths of this gender ideology in numerous important ways. The media and public were exceptionally vocal concerning the morality and reputations of two of Johnson's white lovers, Belle Schreiber and Lucille Cameron. Both women found themselves wrapped up in the case against Johnson on charges of violating the Mann Act. As the case overwhelmed the papers and created a courtroom scandal, the public desired to know about the women involved, using the rhetoric of white female purity to comment on these women, their behavior, and their relationships with Johnson. Although this was an exceptional case, these definitions helped to shape how Chicago society, both black and white, dealt with interracial relationships.

The notion of purity was particularly strange when applied to Johnson's former mistress, subsequent chief witness on his Mann Act violation trial, and "the prettiest

white whore ... in the Windy City,” Belle Schreiber.<sup>47</sup> The Chicago public, particularly white society, defined the lines of purity in order to include her innocence due to victimization. As white slavery became an urban issue in early twentieth-century America, white reformers increasingly viewed prostitutes as victims of abduction and sexual assault. To a certain extent, victims were innocent and innocence indicated a level of purity, providing a way in which even a prostitute could carefully participate within the Purity of White Womanhood. Isabella Schreiber’s background inserted her squarely within a narrative of an innocent American girl who was a “good girl” prior to her descent into the world of prostitution.<sup>48</sup> She was born in 1886, the eldest daughter of a Milwaukee police station telephone operator, Philip, and his wife, Amalia. Both had been born in the United States, birthing her into a well-assimilated German-American family who, more than likely, did not face the same type of discrimination that greeted new immigrants at the turn of the century.<sup>49</sup> They were financially capable of providing Belle with an education sufficient to gain employment as a stenographer in Milwaukee from 1905-1907.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Robert H. DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire* (Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Co., 1969), pg. 57

<sup>48</sup> In *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), Geoffrey C. Ward makes the unsupported claim that Belle Schreiber’s original last name (she had several aliases throughout her ill-reputed career) was Becker. However, because Belle’s testimony and other secondary authors’ narratives largely line up with the federal and Milwaukee records cited here, I believe that Belle Schreiber’s original last name was indeed Schreiber and she is the individual discussed in these records. The only notable discrepancy is her father’s occupation. Most sources claim he was a police officer rather than a telephone operator at the police station but these are quite similar and not an irreconcilable difference.

<sup>49</sup> 1900 U.S. Census, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, Population Schedule, Milwaukee, pg. 6A, Dwelling 67, Family 128, Isabella Schreiber; Digital Image, Ancestry.com; Direct Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Parkin, *The United States v. John Arthur Johnson, otherwise known as Jack Johnson, 04/30/1913-11/11/1920*, Criminal Case Files 1873-1991, Record Group 21, National Archives and Records Administration-Great Lakes Region (Chicago).

<sup>50</sup> The effect of white social control on black-male-white-female interracial relationships is an intimate topic. However, in order to explore social perceptions and their influence, sources used here are resolutely not intimate. In a decision based purely on style and tone, I have chosen to largely use the first names of Johnson’s lovers in order to suggest a level of intimacy, thereby attempting to humanize them and deviate from the static, sterile discussion they endured at the record of the press and legal system. Conversely, due

During this time, she continued to live with her family, as would be expected for a young, unmarried woman at this time in order to preserve her innocence and purity.<sup>51</sup> However, the historical record is absent concerning issues such as Belle's personal ideas and morality during this time. With such a respectable upbringing and appropriate career for a young woman, it is somewhat surprising that in December 1907, Belle Schreiber found her way to the most infamous bordello in Chicago, the Everleigh Club. A few years later as she discussed her relationship with Jack Johnson before a courtroom, she gave very little description of how she came to the Everleigh but indicated that it marked the turning point in her career path: "I came to Chicago from Milwaukee when I was twenty years old. Several months after that I became a sporting woman, and became an inmate of the Everleigh Club, a sporting house. That was my first."<sup>52</sup>

Belle's inclusion in the Purity of White Womanhood rests upon her definition as a victim, making the nature of her entrance into prostitution incredibly important. While the exact circumstances that brought Belle to the Everleigh on a cold December day in 1907 are unknown, it is not difficult to argue that she arrived there of her own accord. Sisters Minna and Ada Everleigh designed the Everleigh Club to be the most opulent, exclusive bordello in the Midwest. Not only were they selective about the men admitted

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to the long history of white society refusing to deference black males with the title "Mister" and simply using their first name or the dehumanizing, generalizing term "boy," I have pointedly refused to use Johnson's first name without his surname.

<sup>51</sup> *Milwaukee City Directories*, 1905, 1906, 1907, Ancestry.com; 1905 Wisconsin State Census, Milwaukee County, Population Schedule, Milwaukee, pg. 708, Family 331, Isabella Schreiber, Digital Image, Ancestry.com.

<sup>52</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR; The term "inmate" is a period term to refer to women who resided and worked in a bordello. The census record of the Everleigh Club in 1910 uses the term to indicate the occupations of the women within the household; see 1910 U.S. Census, Cook County, Illinois, Population Schedule, Chicago, pg. 2B, Dwelling 28, Family 39, Digital Image, Ancestry.com

to the club, they were also selective concerning their girls, or their “butterflies.”<sup>53</sup> The sisters were not interested in participating in white slavery and contributing to the lurid tales of respectable innocent young white girls being kidnapped, repeatedly raped, and then sold into prostitution. Rather they insisted that any young woman must come to them of her own accord and be at least eighteen years of age, healthy, attractive, and not addicted to drugs or alcohol.<sup>54</sup>

Both Belle’s testimony and Everleigh policy provide strong indication that Belle was not coerced into a life of prostitution—at least not at the Everleigh—and was therefore not a victim. While Belle claimed that the Everleigh was her first house of ill repute, this contradicts Ada Everleigh’s commentary on the Club’s practices: “[Each girl] must have worked somewhere else before coming here. We do not like amateurs. Inexperienced girls and young widows are too prone to accept offers of marriage and leave. We always have a waiting list. . . . There is no problem in keeping the club filled.”<sup>55</sup> This inconsistency is best resolved by one of three plausible scenarios: either Belle was not as pure as she claimed to be in Johnson’s trial, she lied to the Everleigh sisters in order to gain entrance to the exclusive bordello, or the sisters were not as selective as Ada claimed. Either of the first two would have worked in Belle’s favor. However, in her role as chief witness in the government’s case against Johnson, highlighting her inexperience prior to her engagement at the Everleigh was probably the second best alternative to proving she had been sold into prostitution through white slavery. This ironic and murky definition of Belle’s prior “innocence” was crucial to the

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<sup>53</sup> Charles Washburn, *Come into My Parlor: A Biography of the Aristocratic Everleigh Sisters of Chicago* (New York: Knickerbocker Publishing, Co., 1934), pg. 40.

<sup>54</sup> Washburn, *Come into My Parlor*, pg. 67-68, 110.

<sup>55</sup> Washburn, *Come into My Parlor*, pg. 110.

prosecution for it was at the Everleigh that she first met Johnson and there became a victim of his seduction. Establishing Belle's strangely defined purity was necessary in order to incriminate Johnson and negate the possibility of a completely consensual relationship. While certainly no one would have tried to make the argument that Belle was truly pure and innocent, by virtue of her race, she was still much too pure for a black man. Even the owners of the houses where she was an inmate subscribed to this rhetoric.

Belle met Johnson at the Everleigh Club in April 1909 where he was barely granted admittance, highlighting the notion that even white prostitutes were too racially pure to consort with black men sexually. However, Johnson was a man of wealth who was used to getting his way and enjoying the finer things in life—and he loved white prostitutes. Therefore, it was arguably inevitable that he would eventually seek entrance to the Midwest's most prestigious bordello. By their own admission, the Everleighs were not prejudiced against black men generally, but they recognized that interracial relationships could cause problems—problems they did not want in their establishment.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, luckily for Johnson, his manager, George Little, was also in charge of protection for the Club. Using some persuasion, and perhaps a bit of coercion, Little gained admittance to the Club for Johnson, but only for dinner with no upstairs accommodations.

Even in the underworld society of prostitution, the knowledge, or perhaps the mere suggestion, that a prostitute had been associated with such a black man would limit her earning potential with white clients and was therefore grounds for dismissal.

Reputedly, the supposed primitive sexual appeal of the large, muscular boxer drew the

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<sup>56</sup> Karen Abbott, *Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and the Battle for America's Soul* (New York: Random House, 2007), pg. 180.



women's attention; however, the sisters did not want them to associate with him and threatened to fire anyone who did as it would undermine their racial purity, ruining them for white clients.<sup>57</sup> "Miss Everleigh talked with me a couple of hours and asked me not to go out and associate with him," Belle recalled.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, she met Johnson away from the Everleigh elsewhere in Chicago in the days after they initially met: "I met the defendant ... not at a hotel, it was some room. I received gifts from him in the way of theater tickets and money."<sup>59</sup> Belle's innate racial purity, her flagrant disregard thereof, and her embrace of black men inevitably led to her expulsion from the Everleigh Club as well as the Paynter sisters' house of ill repute in Pittsburgh. During Johnson's trial, testimony by the sisters revealed why. Lillian Paynter declared, "My sister put her out of the house because she heard that Belle was mixed up with a colored man. ... I don't know if Mr. Jack Johnson was the colored man, the name wasn't mentioned to me."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, this policy concerning interracial relations was not only a policy of the Everleighs.

The public, both white and black, typically condemned white women for such behavior—if they believed consensual interracial sex between a white woman and black man were possible at all—and, despite her profession, Belle Schreiber was no exception. The black press was particularly outspoken concerning her so-called purity. During Johnson's trial, the black newspaper *The Broad Ax* derided Belle: "She would embrace White gentlemen during the day time and late in the evenings; then she would slip away from their loving embraces and later on she could be found somewhere making love to at

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<sup>57</sup> Direct Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR; Abbot, *Sin in the Second City*, pg. 180-181.

<sup>58</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR.

<sup>59</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR.

<sup>60</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness Lillian Paynter by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR.

least one or two colored men.”<sup>61</sup> However, the paper was most certainly commenting on Belle’s immoral lifestyle in general and indicated that if Johnson were determined to have a relationship with a white woman, he should find one who was physically sexually pure, creating a confusing web of definitions of white female purity. While white society viewed white female purity as being indicative of a combination of race, gender, and behavior, black society seemed to hold a standard definition of female purity as related to sexual experience. Therefore, *The Broad Ax* quietly condoned interracial relationships between sexually respectable white women and black men and utterly condemned Belle, declaring that Johnson should cease in “recklessly squandering his money upon White Ladies whom no decent gentleman Black nor White would wipe their dirty feet on.”<sup>62</sup>

When Johnson was first indicted on charges of violating the Mann Act by transporting Belle from Pittsburgh to Chicago, the media had a great deal to say. Prosecutors declared that the Mann Act was intended to protect all women, regardless of innocence. Nevertheless, within white society, as the case developed, there was a clear attempt to paint Belle as a victim in general in her relationship with Johnson and not merely a victim of sexual transportation. The black press was largely critical of this strategy and often critiqued the idea of Belle’s purity as a white woman. “Johnson,” *The Broad Ax* quipped, “is accused of bringing this highly cultured and refined lady [Belle] from Pittsburgh, Pa. to Chicago to reside.”<sup>63</sup> The message was clear. To them, the attempt to paint a prostitute as “refined” and an innocent victim of a sexually savage black man was ridiculous. Belle’s innocence could not have been so maintained had her lover been

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<sup>61</sup> *The Broad Ax*, May 17, 1913.

<sup>62</sup> *The Broad Ax*, May 17, 1913.

<sup>63</sup> *The Broad Ax*, November 9, 1912.

white. Rather, Belle's innocence was wholly dependent upon the fact that Johnson was black and she was white.

In the black press, Belle was not a victim and, because she was not a victim, she could not claim the innocence associated with victimization that allowed her access to white female purity. *The Broad Ax's* comments on Belle grew increasingly disparaging in response to the more sympathetic tone of the white press. For example, *The Chicago Tribune* spoke of Belle as a "white woman from Pittsburgh" and buried her occupation at the end of the article.<sup>64</sup> A few days later, *The Broad Ax* wrote:

... Miss Belle Schreiber, who according to the Chicago Tribune had for sometime [sic] prior to that time had made her home at the notorious Everleigh sisters' Club ... and after leaving that place Miss Schreiber was glad and willing to make love to Jack Johnson for his money which they hated to admit that a lady of her high social standing would consent to accept money and other things from a big "Black Nigger" as they refer to him and all other Colored men in private conversation, so he was promptly indicted for transporting this first class White lady ....<sup>65</sup>

In this, the black press attempted to challenge the white press for how they treated Belle's innocence and Johnson's guilt as well as the intensely strange way in which Belle's occupation and reputation seemed to be forgotten by white society.

In an attempt to retain a semblance of this purity for the sake of the government's case against Johnson, Belle made it clear that her relationship with him was purely for lucrative gain and she had no desire or affection for him. This, once again, highlights the strange way in which prostitution could fit within the rhetoric of white female purity. As a victim of the institution of prostitution, Belle could be pure and innocent in her victimization. However, it was essential that she did not indicate any true level of consent due to affection as that would negate her victim status. In her cross examination,

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<sup>64</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, November 8, 1912.

<sup>65</sup> *The Broad Ax*, November 16, 1912.

Johnson's defense attorney, Benjamin C. Bachrach, asked Belle, "Were you in love with him?"

"I don't know," she responded simply.

"Don't you know now—did you think you were then?" the attorney pressed.

"I don't know what love is."

Not to be dissuaded by Belle's refusal to admit her feelings for Johnson, Bachrach pushed further, "The favors that you extended to him, were they extended simply for money?"

Belle once again responded with an unsure declaration, leading to an objection by the prosecution. Finally, she said that she did not believe she had ever been in love with Johnson and that she had given herself to him for "[c]ompensation mostly."<sup>66</sup>

The white press responded to this courtroom exchange in interesting ways, choosing to place Belle within the Purity of White Womanhood based on innocence associated with victimization. *The Day Book* insisted on referring to Belle as a "white girl," using the word "girl" to seemingly suggest a youthful innocence in conjunction with the clear racial purity of "white." The paper highlighted her respectable beginning in Milwaukee, the horror of her move to Chicago, and the "lure" of the Everleigh Club, setting up a narrative of the troubles of a young white girl seduced by a life of glamour, sex, and a black man. In reporting the exchange above, *The Day Book* portrayed Belle as meek and nervous, blushing when asked if she loved Johnson, looking at her lap as she haltingly answered that she did not know. The ensuing quotations from Belle that they printed are, at best, a rough paraphrase of Belle's actual court record statements combined with supposed inferences and, at worst, a complete and utter twisting of the

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<sup>66</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR.

exchange that would have proved slanderous under other circumstances. They quoted her as saying, "... I had lost all my friends through him. I was an outcast even in the dives because I was Jack Johnson's sweetheart. ... They were bad places these I was in, some of them were very bad. But bad as they were, I was too bad for them and they wouldn't have anything to do with me."<sup>67</sup>

This dialogue proves to be a dramatization of her actual words. In her testimony, Belle admitted that she was "known" in the cities of Pittsburgh and Cleveland and could not find employment; however, she did not specify exactly for what she was known and how this prevented her from finding employment, but she almost certainly referred to being unable to gain a position in a white bordello as her previous interracial sexual interactions had the potential to turn away white customers. Furthermore, she never explicitly blamed her loss of friends on her relationship with Johnson. Perhaps her body language and tone insinuated such, but the words of *The Day Book* are most certainly a quotation of the reporter's inferences made from her statement rather than her actual words.<sup>68</sup> While it would have been impossible to argue Belle's physical sexual innocence, a narrative of seduction, particularly seduction by a black man, allowed the white press to construct a picture of victimized innocence, fitting Belle within the boundaries of white female purity, carefully constructed to emphasize race rather than sexual experience.

Another way in which white society attempted to define Belle as too pure for a true intimate relationship with Johnson was through classifications of certain sexual acts. The sixth and eleventh indictments against Johnson, although eventually thrown out by

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<sup>67</sup> *The Day Book*, May 10, 1913. Note: On the same day, *The Chicago Examiner* published a similar story, although slightly less sensationalized, that also refers to Belle as a "white girl" and highlights her shy behavior and blushes. *The Chicago Tribune's* report of the day appears far more objective with less emotion.

<sup>68</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR.

the judge for lack of evidence, concerned his alleged transportation of Belle for the purpose of “committing the crime against nature with and upon her.”<sup>69</sup> Historically, crimes against nature have referred to any type of sexual act that deviates from penile-vaginal intercourse. Although the legal system most frequently applied crimes against nature to male homosexuality through sodomy laws, other behaviors ranging from masturbation to bestiality were also included.<sup>70</sup> In this case, it is most likely that the charges were related to fellatio or perhaps, although less likely, cunnilingus or anal intercourse.

These reputedly deviant acts further painted Belle as a victim. In Johnson’s trial, the assistant district attorney, Harry A. Parkin, included a discussion of these acts in his opening statement, remarks that eventually fueled the defense’s call for a re-trial on grounds that they prejudiced the jury. As he explained the indictments against Johnson to the jury, Parkin stated, “Another immoral purpose is one which is too obscene to mention, almost ... the purpose being for the defendant to compel these women to commit the crime against nature upon his body. ... I do not purpose ... to parade before you unnecessarily the amount of obscenity and indecency charged here, which will be demonstrated from the witness stand.”<sup>71</sup> Although the charges concerned the transportation of Belle Schreiber for immoral purposes, the prosecution attempted to

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<sup>69</sup> *U.S. v. John A. Johnson* Grand Jury Indictments, NARA-GLR.

<sup>70</sup> The term “homosexuality” is somewhat problematic in this context. Traditionally perceived homosexual acts were largely grouped under the term “sodomy” in early American history. The term “homosexuality” was not coined until the mid-nineteenth century; prior to this time, specific sexual acts usually associated with what we now term homosexuality were not viewed to be indicative of a different sexual orientation. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw a growing homosexual culture and the term became increasingly used in its present context. Nevertheless, when most laws concerning crimes against nature were drafted in the United States, they would not have applied to “homosexuality” in the sense of sexual orientation. Rather they would have applied to the specific acts, most likely anal intercourse. See Kevin Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, and the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>71</sup> Opening Statement on Behalf of the Government, NARA-GLR.

present a narrative of Johnson's immoral behavior with and mistreatment of other women in order to testify as to his poor character. The other women referenced here, both white, were Hattie Watson and Etta Duryea.<sup>72</sup> To the white patriarchal system prosecuting Johnson, Belle Schreiber and the other women were far too racially pure to consent to such obscene sexual acts and Parkin attempted to prove this.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, to the white public, not only was Belle a victim of unnatural sexual demands, she was also a victim of physical abuse as a result of those demands. Parkin confided to the jury, "It will appear that these women whom he carried about the country with him were, very, very many times, when he either had a fit of anger, or when the girls refused to do some of the obscene things which he demanded of them, —that he practiced the manly art of self defense upon them, blackening their eyes and sending them to hospitals ...."<sup>74</sup> In this, the prosecution made the argument that not only was Belle too pure to consent to performing fellatio upon Johnson, but that he also physically abused her when she refused, further painting the image of her as a victim and even suggesting the possibility of rape, creating a link to the rhetoric of the Primitive Black Rapist.

This particular definition of purity and victimization is almost laughable in its inaccuracy. Minna and Ada Everleigh's business model directly contradicted this argument; in the Everleigh Club, "[c]ourtesans would be encouraged to perform orally as

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<sup>72</sup> Hattie Watson had several aliases and her real name is not clear. In the trial, although she took the stand under that name, Johnson indicated that he did not know her by the name Hattie but rather Anna McClay and called her Mac. Biographers of Johnson often refer to her as Hattie McClay and as the first white Mrs. Jack Johnson, although they were never legally married. See Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson By Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

<sup>73</sup> Hattie was also a prostitute but Etta was not (in the traditional sense at least) and eventually became his legal wife. Johnson's defense attorney objected to Etta being included in a list of "fast women." See Assignment of Errors, NARA-GLR.

<sup>74</sup> Opening Statement on Behalf of the Government, NARA-GLR.

often as possible; there was less risk and more money involved.”<sup>75</sup> Most likely, Belle had performed fellatio innumerable times before she even became acquainted with Johnson. Nevertheless, her race in contrast to Johnson’s allowed her to be oddly defined as a vulnerable, innocent girl who had been the victim of the seductive brothel life and an abusive, sexually unnatural black man. Although there was a lack of evidence of this topic in the trial and the judge dismissed the associated indictments, it revealed a crucial way in which white society applied white female purity through victimization to Belle in an attempt to condemn Johnson and negate the possibility that their relationship was truly consensual.<sup>76</sup>

In a further attempt to paint Belle as a victim, the prosecution highlighted the ways in which she had supposedly reformed and turned from her earlier lifestyle of debauchery, setting her in contrast to the seemingly unrepentant Johnson.<sup>77</sup> She made it clear that she had not received any gifts or clothing from the government, repeating this point several times, and that everything she wore she had purchased with the money she had earned while working respectably. “I have earned money since I have been locked up,” she testified, “... doing stenography work for a new reform association in connection with the Department of Justice ... it is a new reform association which is going to be kept up by all the wealthy people in the country.”<sup>78</sup> Reforming fallen women

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<sup>75</sup> Abbot, *Sin in the Second City*, pg. 46.

<sup>76</sup> It seems that if the prosecution had been allowed to continue its line of questioning with Hattie Watson, she would have provided evidence of the crimes against nature. See Brief for Plaintiff in Error, *John Arthur Johnson vs. United States of America*, No. 2017, U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, National Archives and Records Administration-Great Lakes Region (Chicago).

<sup>77</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 154.

<sup>78</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber By Mr. Bachrach , NARA-GLR.



was certainly one of the favorite hobbies of upper and middle class white women and Belle would have been a prime candidate for their “assistance.”<sup>79</sup>

Belle’s statement on this topic reads as rehearsed, clearly promoting the reform association, perhaps despite her own feelings on the topic. It is entirely possible that Belle did not wish to be “reformed.” With the lack of evidence that she initially entered a life of prostitution under coercion, it seems likely that she chose the profession based on the opulent lifestyle a prostitute could have at the right house or with the right man. She certainly claimed to begin her career on a high note at the luxurious Everleigh Club where the sisters cared for the girls, paid them well, and ensured they were well-fed and in good health. Even after her dismissal, Belle still greatly benefitted from her occupation as she travelled extensively with Johnson and he lavished her with gifts. She testified, “I would not say that I received quite a bit of money from him,—but clothes, jewelry and diamonds,—and I made a great many trips, and my expenses were paid. . . . I always received money from him when I asked him for it.”<sup>80</sup>

Johnson claimed that he made \$2,500 a week.<sup>81</sup> This amount of money would have been sufficient to keep Belle cared for in a way she could never attain on a stenographer’s salary. She admitted that she had given herself to Johnson primarily for compensation; her “immoral” lifestyle was not without its benefits. Furthermore, Johnson’s testimony showed that he typically complied with Belle’s requests: “. . . she asked me if I would furnish a flat for her. I said certainly, I will do anything to make you

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<sup>79</sup> Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pg. 37.

<sup>80</sup>Cross Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR.

<sup>81</sup>Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR; According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator, \$2,500 had the same buying power in 1913 as roughly \$60,000 in 2014. < [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)>

happy ....”<sup>82</sup> While Belle described their relationship as being for her personal gain, Johnson seemed to indicate a level of affection. Despite Belle’s true feelings, it is evident that she had much to gain from her occupation and relationship with Johnson and other wealthy men. However, a prostitute who made love to black men and was not interested in reform would not have been able to fit within the bounds of victimization and the Purity of White Womanhood and would have undermined the government’s case that was largely based on her status as the victim of a dangerous, oversexed black man.<sup>83</sup>

The black press did not see Belle as a victim who had sought reform in order to leave her life of sin. Perhaps in an attempt to prevent seeming too harsh in its critique of her, *The Broad Ax* suggested that Belle could reform if she so desired and return to decent, respectable work and “in time become united in marriage to a wealthy White gentleman who will never know that at one time in her past life, she felt that it was a great honor to hug, kiss, and make true love to a big black Colored man.”<sup>84</sup> In this statement, the writer points out the tremendous irony in white perception of interracial relationships: it was possible that Belle’s past as a prostitute might not impede her ability to marry a respectable white man; however, the knowledge that she had sexual relations with a black man would be a tragedy.

Because Belle presented her life as terrible as a result of her sexual relationship with a black man, the white public took a sympathetic tone with her and the government and white press attempted to highlight her seduction, victimization, and associated

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<sup>82</sup> Direct Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR.

<sup>83</sup> It is worth noting that another of Johnson’s former lovers supposedly reformed as well, a point that the Bureau of Investigation felt was important enough to include in its report on the Johnson case in 1937: “[Name blacked out] was another victim of his brutality but she finally quit him, reformed, and later married a hard working farmer named [named blacked out] at Portland, Oregon.” John Arthur (Jack) Johnson Part 1 of 3, FBI Records: The Vault, pg. 37.

<sup>84</sup> *The Broad Ax*, May 17, 1913.

innocence. However, if a white woman failed to speak disparagingly of her interracial relationship, their tone was noticeably different as would be made apparent in their discussion of Lucille Cameron. When Mrs. Cameron-Falconet arrived in Chicago from Minneapolis, protesting her daughter's alleged abduction and seduction by Jack Johnson, the white press was quick to declare the evils of Johnson and the beauty and naivety—and associated innocence—of the misguided Lucille. Even in their description of the missing woman, *The Chicago Examiner* seemed to include an element of innocence and purity: “Lucille Cameron is nineteen years old and beautiful. Almost 5 feet 4 inches tall, she weighs about 130 pounds, has an attractive figure, deep blue eyes fringed with long lashes, fair hair and beautiful, even teeth.”<sup>85</sup>

This, following the headline “Jack Johnson Hiding White Girl,” attempted to clearly present the real issue to the white public: Johnson was having some type of intimate relations with a white girl, too young to know better. *The Chicago Examiner* and other white newspapers continued to set up this narrative of purity through naivety, despite clear indications that Lucille had autonomously decided to leave her mother's home on various occasions and insisted on frequenting the interracial black-and-tan cafes in Minneapolis.<sup>86</sup> Unlike Belle Schreiber and several others of Johnson's white lovers, there is no reliable evidence that Lucille was ever a prostitute, although some sources did choose to call her such.<sup>87</sup> As a result, highlighting her inclusion in the Purity of White Womanhood was a different process than it had been with Belle. The white press painted Belle as a victim and attempted to paint Lucille as naïve. However, while Belle was

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<sup>85</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 17, 1912.

<sup>86</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 17, 1912.

<sup>87</sup> Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*, pg. 310; Al-Tony Gilmore, *Bad Nigger: The National Impact of Jack Johnson* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1975), pg. 115.

willing to reform—or at least say she was reformed in front of the jury—Lucille was brazenly unrepentant for and conscious of her behavior, negating the possibility of naivety and, thereby, purity.

Her background was oddly similar to Belle Schreiber's which initially allowed the white press to set up a similar story of the seduction of a young girl in the large city of Chicago; however, Lucille's story blatantly included a willful dismissal of parental desires that is missing from Belle's. For the amount of disgrace that an interracial relationship could bring upon a white family, Mrs. Cameron-Falconet was surprisingly eager to speak about the sensitive subject with reporters, which eventually earned her the criticism of the black press.<sup>88</sup> "I had Lucille go to a business college after she had been through high school, as I thought the training would be good for her. She came to Chicago with my consent to take up a business position. I had reason to believe she was under the best influence here."<sup>89</sup> Like Belle, Lucille had been trained in business and was undoubtedly well-educated and prepared for a respectable position in Chicago. While the opulent lifestyle at the Everleigh likely seduced Belle, it seems as though Lucille's love for black-and-tan cafes, perhaps more specifically Johnson's Café de Champion, caused her path to cross with the boxer's.

An individual who had learned of Lucille's visit to Johnson's cafe and meeting with him asked her if she were not ashamed and repentant of her behavior. *The Chicago Examiner* reported Lucille's response as flippant: "No, I am not ashamed of it. Other girls do it—lots of them, and they are all white girls. He is a great big, fine looking man and

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<sup>88</sup> *The Broad Ax*, December 7, 1912.

<sup>89</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, October 18, 1912.

champion of the world. Why shouldn't I drink with him?"<sup>90</sup> In this, Lucille situated her behavior as antithetical to the white media's agenda of presenting white women as too pure to desire relationships with black men—she was neither a victim nor naïve. Unlike Belle who was willing to express at least a level of remorse and reformation of her actions, Lucille denied any wrongdoing. Beyond that, she expressed appreciation for Johnson's physical appearance—a direct confrontation of the notions of white masculine appeal and thereby white male superiority and patriarchy—and happily admitted to publically imbibing alcohol with him, another indication of female misbehavior.

Mrs. Cameron-Falconet succeeded in drawing suspicion against Johnson and, in October of 1912, he and Lucille were both arrested—he on charges of abduction and transportation of a white woman and she for disorderly conduct and as a witness in the Johnson case. However, it soon became clear to the public and the authorities that Lucille would not assist in prosecuting Johnson; rather, she steadfastly maintained her adoration for him, becoming indignant when pressed. *The Chicago Examiner* reported Lucille as hostile when her mother tried to hug her: “Get away from me .... How dare you try to kiss me after you have brought all of this disgrace and humiliation upon me? I love Jack Johnson and I'll never give him up. I shall marry him and you can't prevent it ....”<sup>91</sup> Likewise, *The Chicago Tribune* called Lucille “defiant” in her emotion for Johnson: “I don't care whether he is white or black, I love him ....”<sup>92</sup> While Belle Schreiber refused to admit any affection for Johnson, Lucille proudly announced it. The white press dealt with Belle as a victim of Johnson's lust. Lucille, on the other hand, refused to be naïve or a victim, leaving society no choice but to condemn her and her relationship with Johnson.

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<sup>90</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 17, 1912.

<sup>91</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 19, 1912.

<sup>92</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1912.

There was a brief moment in the events surrounding Johnson and Lucille where the media reported Lucille as being remorseful for their relationship. It is unlikely that Lucille was actually regretful of her relationship with Johnson at this time. Rather, her words in this instance were probably intended to persuade her mother and the authorities to finally release her from the federal building, lying in order to manipulate the situation. *The Day Book's* report is almost certainly exaggerated and written to highlight the supposed social ramifications for a white woman who willingly entered a relationship with a black man, beginning with a melodramatic “quotation” by Lucille: “I never want to hear Jack Johnson’s name again. He ruined my past, and the memory of him will ruin my future.”<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, the rest of her statement fit within the white social rhetoric of sexually bestial black men:

“There are times when I waken up in the night and seem to see his black, hideous body towering over me, threatening me with awful things, and jeering at me. The face is always grinning, always taunting. It seems to be saying to me: ‘You are a white woman, but I got you. I did with you as I wanted. I used you, and then I cast you aside to be the shame of all the men of your own race.’ I can never forget. The past will always haunt me. Jack Johnson will always haunt me. Only on my dying day will I know peace.”<sup>94</sup>

This image of Johnson is certainly conducive with the narrative of the black male rapist. Although Lucille did not try to argue that Johnson forced her into the relationship, the language was carefully chosen in order to highlight elements of black male coercion of white female sexuality: “towering,” “threatening,” “taunting,” “cast aside,” and “shame” all evoke a tone of rape. Or perhaps, rather than fear of rape, the fear in this case was white female sexual slavery to a black master. Lucille’s cautionary statement continued,

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<sup>93</sup> *The Day Book*, November 25, 1912.

<sup>94</sup> *The Day Book*, November 25, 1912.

highlighting this rhetoric: “‘I would like to tell all girls of my experiences. Of how I fell and how I kept on falling until at last I became the slave of that black man.’”<sup>95</sup>

If Lucille had continued to express remorse over their relationship, the white press may have treated her as they treated Belle Schreiber and called her a victim, condemned Johnson, praised Lucille’s desire to reform, and thereby included her within white female purity. However, a white woman who unrepentantly made conscious, autonomous choices to be with a black man could not be pure. Mere days after *The Day Book* reported her remorse, Lucille married Johnson in a small ceremony in his mother’s home that the white press called “strangely tragic” and “infinitely pitiful.”<sup>96</sup> Her race and gender were no long sufficient to preserve her purity. At the ceremony, she acted in ways which society did not consider appropriate for a respectable white woman—she drank champagne until she was inebriated, spoke and laughed loudly, and threw herself at Johnson. The paper openly mocked the idea that she might have any purity: “... Johnson swept his white bride into his arms and hugged her until the bouquet of white carnations—for purity—at her breast were crushed in shapelessness.”<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, some of the reporters present at the wedding were not content to save their editorializing comments for their articles. A female reporter stated, “‘Just think of that brazen hussy standing up and being married to a black man ...’”<sup>98</sup> Johnson had her promptly thrown out.

The consensual marriage removed the possibility that Lucille could return to the Purity of White Womanhood and placed her firmly outside of white society. None of her

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<sup>95</sup> *The Day Book*, November 25, 1912.

<sup>96</sup> *The Day Book*, December 4, 1912.

<sup>97</sup> *The Day Book*, December 4, 1912.

<sup>98</sup> *The Day Book*, December 4, 1912.

friends and family reportedly attended the wedding. Furthermore, the vast majority of guests were black and their greeting and congratulations of the bride shocked the white press: “The negro guests raised a shout of triumph. They rushed on the bride, clamoring for kisses. And she kissed them all, every last black one of them, and seemed to enjoy it.”<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the marriage directly confronted white patriarchal racial and gender ideologies. As a black man, Johnson was not supposed to be able to offer a white woman a comfortable life and good marriage. However, his vast amounts of money allowed him to provide his wife with a lifestyle that many white men would have been unable to attain at the time, showering Lucille with expensive clothing, furs, jewelry, and even an automobile.<sup>100</sup> This undermined the superiority and exclusivity of white males as husbands for white women and effectively limited sexual access to white women by white men, increasing the sexual autonomy of both white women and black men. The happily celebrated marriage highlighted these problems. Historian Al-Tony Gilmore echoed Finis Farr’s earlier assessment when he wrote, “The Johnson-Cameron marriage ... presented the anti-Johnsonites with a bothersome contradiction: it legitimized a relationship, they contended, that should have never begun anyway. Consequently, the marriage ... overflowed into the political arena where the general question of interracial marriage surfaced as a national issue.”<sup>101</sup>

As the white press bemoaned the loss of Lucille’s purity and her racial and moral decline into black society through marriage to a black man, the black press vacillated on

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<sup>99</sup> *The Day Book*, December 4, 1912; *The Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1912.

<sup>100</sup> *The Day Book*, December 4, 1912; *The Chicago Examiner*, December 4, 1912; *The Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1912; *The Chicago Defender*, December 28, 1912; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pg. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Gilmore, *Bad Nigger*, pg. 106; Finis Farr, *Black Champion: The Life and Times of Jack Johnson* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1964), pg. 164.



their opinions, initially critiquing the notion of her purity and then, once their marriage was legally sanctioned, arguing that she was a sweet, kind girl who was in a mutual loving relationship with the boxer and should be accepted by both the white and black communities. *The Chicago Defender* was hesitant to comment on Lucille's purity, or lack thereof. Nevertheless, they indicated that if her innocence had indeed been compromised, it was compromised long before she took up with Johnson who had "never been accused of seduction, whether practiced against woman white or black."<sup>102</sup> Indeed, evidence and biographical accounts suggest that Johnson never had to persuade an unwilling woman into a sexual relationship. Although they may have expressed remorse afterwards, the appeal of Johnson's sporting life and his hyper-masculine physique seemed to draw women.<sup>103</sup> Likewise, *The Broad Ax* scoffed at the idea of Lucille retaining purity until she met Johnson. They referred to her as "fast and wayward," claiming that Johnson was not her first black lover and even indicated that Mrs. Cameron-Falconet was perhaps not of the best moral repute.<sup>104</sup> Challenging the Purity of White Womanhood was the simplest way to confront the notion of black male seduction and guilt. It would be more difficult to argue wrongdoing on Johnson's part if the woman, or women, in question was not a victim and did not fit within the ideology of their race and gender.

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<sup>102</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, November 23, 1912.

<sup>103</sup> Biographers and historians have presented the accounts of both an unnamed white woman in California and white Lola Toy in Australia and their (likely) sexual relationships with Johnson. Johnson claimed that the unnamed California woman "clamored for the 'sight and feel of my private'" saying that she would have screamed if he refused. When he refused to repeat the encounter, she claimed to have been raped. Likewise, Lola Toy was quite friendly with Johnson during his time in Australia. After he left and rumors of their sexual relationship spread throughout Australian society, Toy went to court to preserve her purity and reputation, even offering to submit to a medical test for virginity if it were necessary. See DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 59; Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness*, pg. 105; and Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pg. 43.

<sup>104</sup> *The Broad Ax*, November 30, 1912.

Unlike the white press, *The Broad Ax's* opinion of Lucille improved after the couple married as the legal sanction returned her purity. They reported the wedding to be a happy affair where both black and white guests “freely mingled” and congratulated the happy couple, and Johnson looked upon Lucille “as being mighty nice, sweet, very beautiful and ever so loving and charming ....”<sup>105</sup> This note of affection between Johnson and Lucille is striking, largely because love and intimacy between them—other than Lucille’s criticized declarations of love—did not appear in the other media reports. To the black press, the couple’s marriage set Lucille apart from the sporting women who often shared Johnson’s life and provided legitimacy to their union which should serve as an example to other interracial couples—particularly white men who consorted dishonorably with black women. For them, purity and respectability of women—white or black—resided in the legitimacy of their sexual unions, regardless of the man’s race. As the weeks went by, *The Broad Ax* became increasingly friendly in reference to Lucille, eventually referring to her as “ravishingly beautiful, with fine and well chiseled features,” noting that she “wears a kind expression on her face, and her brilliant eyes, seem to be full at all times with love and sympathy.”<sup>106</sup> She was unlikely to receive such kind words from the white press, standing in stark contrast to the sympathy and kindness Belle Schreiber found therein.

A relationship with a black man was not sufficient to permanently exclude a white woman from the rhetoric of white female purity if she could claim victimization or naivety and then reform her behavior. Even a prostitute who reformed and repented of such a union could be found to be a victim of seduction and, in some small way, still

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<sup>105</sup> *The Broad Ax*, December 7, 1912.

<sup>106</sup> *The Broad Ax*, January 4, 1913.

racially and even somewhat sexually pure. Conversely, from the perspective of the white media and public, a woman who refused to be a victim or naïve and consciously expressed affection for a black man and then had the audacity to marry him was unredeemable. She could no longer claim to be misguided or a victim of a seductive man or lifestyle, leaving no return to the Purity of White Womanhood. Therefore, marriage to a black man was the end for a white woman. She could no longer achieve the ideology of her race and gender and would almost assuredly pay a serious price for her actions—with her sanity, mental health, reputation, or even her personal survival and the survival of her race.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE “HORRIBLE DREAD”: MENTAL, PHYSICAL, AND RACIAL CONSEQUENCES AS CONTROL

White women who chose relationships with black men faced white social fears and myths of permanent mental and physical ramifications. In 1896, Frederick L. Hoffman, a reformer in issues of public health, wrote a book entitled *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* in which he discussed issues of interracial intimacy and highlighted problems that such unions between white women and black men inevitably faced:

The result of the twenty-nine case of race mixture prove that of the women, twelve were known prostitutes, three were of ill repute, charged in addition with cruelty and abuse of children, two were murdered by their colored husbands, one committed suicide, one became insane, two sued for divorce, two deserted their husbands, five were apparently satisfied with their choice, while for four the information could not be obtained.<sup>107</sup>

Hoffman clearly portrayed his opinion on the issue and argued that interracial relationships were indicative of poor character of the individuals involved and would ultimately end poorly.

Many of these white women were of ill repute, abusive, abused, or emotionally and mentally disturbed. The relative minority of happy interracial unions seemed to indicate their problematic nature. While these ramifications were supposedly caused by the natural pressures of interracial unions, they were actually precipitated by the white

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<sup>107</sup> Frederick L. Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1896), pg. 205-206.

social rhetoric as a means of sexual control. The intense pressure placed on such relationships often caused mental strain leading to these issues, particularly if individuals already struggled in this area. This social rhetoric caused questions of sanity, feeble-mindedness, and depression to surround white women who entered relationships with black men. Furthermore, if these relationships were not ended, they could be disastrous to the women's mental health and could prove to be physically tolling and perhaps fatal through issues of physical abuse, suicide, or, perhaps even more frightening to early twentieth-century Anglo Saxons, race suicide.

Historically, in the United States, white men have always closely guarded white female sexuality, ensuring their own access while limiting access by others. In many ways, this is one of the most problematic elements of white-female-black-male interracial relationships. Such a situation effectively removed sexual access to that white woman from white men, challenging not only their racial superiority over black men but also their gendered control of white women. Interracial relationships gave both white women and black men a level of sexual autonomy. White women were making conscious decisions to have sexual relationships and marriages with men of their choosing—fathers, brothers, or other types of male guardians were likely not making these interracial arrangements for them.

For black men, a relationship with a white woman confronted every tenet of Jim Crow society, challenging the notion of black “place” within society and providing this othered group with a degree of racial mobility not sanctioned by white society. Typically, white society structured the movements of black society—where they could live, work, and play, and most certainly who they were allowed to marry. Fundamentally, white-

female-black-male relationships undermined white patriarchal authority and supremacy on every level. This prevented Johnson and his white lovers from comfortably existing within the social boundaries of the early twentieth century.<sup>108</sup> His first wife, Etta Terry Duryea, experienced a great deal of this discomfort. The white public proclaimed her experiences with anxiety, depression, and suicide as inevitable consequences of interracial relationships, threatening similar challenges to other white women and warning them from such unions. However, the “consequences” Etta experienced were, in fact, consequences of white social and racial pressure used as tools to control sexual behavior.

Unlike the other women in Johnson’s life, Etta was a well-to-do socialite. She was born in 1881 to David and Elizabeth Terry in New York, the children of English and Scottish immigrants and New Yorkers, identifying her as predominantly Anglo Saxon, and lived with her family in Brooklyn in a home her father owned.<sup>109</sup> As an educated debutante, Etta was intended for a comfortable life as a respectable upper or middle-class housewife. For some time, her life appeared to follow this socially expected path. On June 5, 1902, she married Clarence Duryea, also of a prominent New York family.<sup>110</sup> The details and quality of their marriage are largely unknown beyond that Duryea was ill with tuberculosis and Etta was unhappy. Eventually Etta’s path crossed with Johnson’s at a New York race track in 1909.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, First Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pg. 107-108.

<sup>109</sup> 1900 U.S. Census, Kings County, New York, Population Schedule, New York City, pg. 9A, Dwelling 138, Family 195, Etta Terry, Digital Image, Ancestry.com.

<sup>110</sup> Kings County, New York, Marriage Certificate no. 3548 (1902), Terry-Duryea, New York Marriage Indexes 1866-1937, New York, Digital Record, Ancestry.com.

<sup>111</sup> *The Day Book*, September 12, 1912.

How this meeting influenced her divorce from Duryea is slightly vague although almost certainly related. In his trial on the Mann Act violation, Johnson denied he was involved in causing or obtaining the divorce: “I didn’t afterwards procure her divorce in Chicago; I did not pay the attorney for doing it. ... I certainly do tell you that I did not furnish the money to pay the attorney.”<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, he could not recall how much time had passed between her divorce and when their relationship started. Nor could he recall exactly when they met, but he remembered it was sometime in 1909 and in New York City: “From that time on, during the rest of 1909 and all of 1910, it is not a fact that I was living with her. Sometimes she would go home, or go for a vacation, and I would give her money to go to different parts of the world. And sometimes when she was not doing that I was with her, and she with me, —not for that purpose alone, but for companionship.”<sup>113</sup> Whatever problems and unhappiness Etta may have experienced in her first marriage that she believed would be cured with Johnson, they would only be exacerbated in the next few years.

Although Etta was the first legal Mrs. Jack Johnson, a great deal is unknown about her and the details of her relationship with Johnson. Furthermore, her individual voice is largely absent from the historical record, leaving little to learn about how she perceived her own relationship and the intense racial implications of it. The most intimate view of her is presented in Robert H. DeCoy’s 1969 “uncensored biography” of Johnson, *The Big Black Fire*. In his preface, DeCoy claimed, “I knew Jack Johnson well and lived with him for a brief span of time, before his death. ... I knew long ago, as I asked him

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<sup>112</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, *The United States v. John Arthur Johnson, otherwise known as Jack Johnson, 04/30/1913-11/11/1920*, Criminal Case Files 1873-1991, Record Group 21, National Archives and Records Administration-Great Lakes Region (Chicago).

<sup>113</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

questions, that one day I wanted to write his true story as he told it to me—piece by piece.”<sup>114</sup> Therefore, what he created is an intriguing blend of biography, autobiography, and perhaps more than a small amount of legend voiced by Johnson himself.

Nevertheless, his work serves as a unique type of primary source as he had arguably the greatest insight into Johnson’s feelings toward Etta and “... if ever a man loved a woman, Jack Johnson loved Etta Duryea.”<sup>115</sup>

Etta began to experience stress and anxiety—precipitated by white social constructions meant to control her behavior—early in her relationship with Johnson. DeCoy claimed that Johnson’s white manager, George Little, wished to marry Etta and attempted to pressure her with ideas of the intense racial and social ramifications she would face due to her relationship with Johnson: “George Little had first begun by slyly suggesting to Etta, ‘Stop kidding yourself. That evil black ape isn’t going to marry you. Why do you want to marry him? He’s not your class. You come of good stock.’ ... The taunts and pressures began to take their toll on Etta Duryea. She developed crying fits, periods of melancholy.”<sup>116</sup> This statement highlights a series of issues—both Johnson’s race as being somehow dangerous to Etta and her social standing, as well as the role of fidelity. Johnson sought multiple, congruent relationships with white women including Etta, Belle Schreiber, and Hattie Watson. Therefore, DeCoy’s representation of George Little’s statement provides a further glimpse into the problems Etta was facing. Not only was her interracial relationship fundamentally problematic to society, but she was also heavily pressured by the assumption that he would not marry her. Perhaps for a prostitute the situation was not quite so unusual; however, for a formerly respectable New York

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<sup>114</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire* (Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Co., 1969), pg. 7-8.

<sup>115</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 105.

<sup>116</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 105-106.



socialite, an ongoing sexual affair without the sanction of marriage—even an interracial marriage—would be a tragedy. No doubt, Etta procured her divorce because she believed Johnson would marry her.

Beyond issues of infidelity and the fear of no engagement in the foreseeable future, the social perception of the dangers of her sexual life also created stress. White society viewed venereal disease as an innate element in black sexuality. This was perhaps one of the most immediate, physically damaging ramifications a white woman was told she could suffer due to a sexual relationship with a black man, thereby attempting to control her sexual behavior. DeCoy claimed that Little used this aspect to dissuade her from the relationship. Etta had developed a rash from extensive sun-exposure, but Little told her it was a result of having intercourse with Johnson: ““Everybody in the world knows you can’t get too much sun; it’s healthy. You’ve simply picked up a blood disease from that nigger. “Raging black-pox,” it’s called. Few doctors know anything about it. They know it’s some form of syphilis though.’ Jack came into his quarters to find Etta broken down completely, hysterical, threatening suicide. Screaming and irrational.”<sup>117</sup>

This notion was not uncommon among the white public in the early twentieth century. Frederick L. Hoffman viewed black individuals to be the descent of a diseased race and that black manhood and womanhood was cursed with venereal disease.<sup>118</sup> In fact, he suggested that venereal disease might, in fact, be caused by interracial intercourse—a practice in “violation of a natural law.”<sup>119</sup> He wrote quite emphatically:

There is ... abundant proof that there is a natural aversion between some races and that attempts to cross this natural barrier, determined by the “law of similarity” have invariably led to the most disastrous consequences. It is largely to

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<sup>117</sup>DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 106.

<sup>118</sup>Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, pg. 95.

<sup>119</sup> Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, pg. 198.

the frequency of illicit intercourse between white males and colored females that we must attribute the wide prevalence of syphilis .... All are the consequences of a union of two races in violation of a natural law ....<sup>120</sup>

In this view, not only was a woman at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease from a diseased black man, but interracial intercourse might actually be the *cause* of the diseases.

The other sexual ramification, possibly more widespread in its belief by white society, was the notion that the black male body was physically sexually incompatible with the body of a white woman. Beyond concerns of disease transmission, a white woman's physical body would be forever altered by having sexual relations with a black man. Black men were oversexed, exhibiting beastly sexual desires and libido; these perceived character traits were only made worse by the idea that they also had unnaturally large penises. Popular rhetoric argued that white women were far too small and delicate to endure such an experience, almost certainly assuring her physical, and consequently mental and social, ruin. The public often portrayed Johnson in this image and he, according to DeCoy, purposely chose to play into this myth of black male virility: "He began to appear for his sparring sessions with his penis wrapped in gauze bandages, enhancing his size for the benefit of his 'admirers' ...."<sup>121</sup>

The legendary physical manhood of black men and Jack Johnson played into public discourse concerning the physical effect these men would have on white women, supporting the rhetoric that black male sexuality was dangerous to white women. In Johnson's case, there were several situations in which, specifically, the size of his penis reputedly ruined a white woman. After engaging in sexual intercourse with an

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<sup>120</sup> Hoffman, *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, pg. 197-198.

<sup>121</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 60. This performance by Johnson of his manhood will be further analyzed in Chapter Five.

innkeeper's daughter—supposedly at the girl's coercion—her father protested that Johnson had raped her and declared that he “ruin[ed] his poor little baby, with his gigantic, oversized “thing”.’ ”<sup>122</sup> Johnson's size had reportedly ruined Etta's body as well. DeCoy claimed that white men specifically were concerned with the status of her physical body as a result of their relationship: “‘She's ruined. Crippled for life because of the gigantic size of that nigger.’ Some explained that it was a ‘scientific fact,’ white women weren't ‘emotionally constructed’ to consort in sexual intercourse with Negroes.”<sup>123</sup> White society perceived of interracial sexual intercourse as being fundamentally damaging to a white woman's body, whether through the notion of venereal disease being innately tied to interracial sexuality or through purely size-related concerns.

In January of 1911, the couple married, exposing Etta to a new realm of pressures associated with interracial reproduction. Despite his sexual philandering and multiple marriages, Johnson never officially fathered a child, for arguably pragmatic reasons. DeCoy claimed that Etta refused to have children because of the racially stressful and prejudiced society they would be born into:

“I'll never bring children into the world,” she had told him over and over, “knowing what they will have to go through.” “They'll go through no more than I've gone through!” he had told her. “They'll have a head start. I'm fighting to give that to them.” “You can't even protect me from what I have to go through. How can you think you could protect the children we'd have?”<sup>124</sup>

According to DeCoy, Etta's voluntary infertility in order to avoid social consequences for her children was a problematic area in the Johnsons' marriage, causing strife between the couple and sending Etta into a deeper spiral of depression. Eventually Etta came to a

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<sup>122</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 59.

<sup>123</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 131.

<sup>124</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 133-134.

solution: the couple would adopt a child through surrogacy. She selected Ada Banks, a light-skinned black woman who worked at Johnson's café. Johnson would father a child with her, she would carry the baby—for a price—and then give them the child. Although the plan would prove unfruitful, to Etta, this seemed to be the only possible way to save her marriage while also saving her child from the racial implications of being born to a black father and a white mother.<sup>125</sup> A white woman giving birth to a black child was the ultimate affront to white society.

Nevertheless, while Etta allowed white social pressure to control and define this element of her marriage, she was still concerned that she would lose Johnson as a result: “Etta was beginning to show obvious signs of strain, feeling for certain that her husband would leave her for the first of many beauties that shared his bed who came forth bearing a child. Nearly all of these were white, like herself.”<sup>126</sup> Her fears were perhaps well-founded. In 1913, Belle Schreiber testified that in January of 1910 she was pregnant with Johnson's child—news with which he was seemingly pleased. “He wanted me to have it,” she stated. “He asked me to have this child and not to do anything to get rid of it.”<sup>127</sup> She further testified that only a few weeks later she was in a house of ill repute in Pittsburgh and then later in Atlantic City, presumably no longer expecting. What became

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<sup>125</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 137-138. According to DeCoy, Ada Banks became angry when Johnson and Etta ended the surrogacy agreement, threatened the couple with a gun, and shot Johnson in the foot. The Chicago newspapers reported that Banks had shot Johnson but they were hazy on the details. According to the papers, the incident occurred in mid-October, several weeks after Etta's death, and most reports indicated that the shooting was due to a lovers' quarrel with *The Chicago Examiner* claiming it was related to the Lucille Cameron situation. As in many of DeCoy's descriptions, the timelines do not quite match up. However, it is probable that Johnson and Ada Banks were certainly intimately involved at some level and it is not surprising that if there were a surrogacy agreement that the press would not be aware of it. Furthermore, Willard Davis, Banks' husband, sued Johnson for \$25,000 in damages associated with the alienation of his wife's affections. While the complete details of the situation are unclear, other than the timeline, DeCoy's representation of the surrogacy issue is at least plausible. See *The Day Book*, October 19, 1912; *The Chicago Examiner*, October 20, 24, and 25, 1912; *The Chicago Tribune*, October 20, 22, and 24, 1912; and *The Chicago Defender*, November 2, 1912.

<sup>126</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 137.

<sup>127</sup> Direct Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

of the pregnancy is unclear. However, it is clear that Johnson desired a child, reinforcing DeCoy's representation of Johnson's wishes with Etta and the ensuing marital strain that came at her refusal to conceive. Most likely, Etta was aware of this earlier pregnancy and she was afraid that a similar situation, due to her husband's infidelity, would result in divorce, not by her choice, highlighting the intense importance of reproduction in early twentieth-century marriage, despite issues of race.

Social pressures did not only come from white society but from black society as well. While the white objective was to control sexual behavior of white women and black men, the black objective was a confrontational response to the racial structures placed on them by white society. While white men were angry that Johnson was challenging their sexual access to white women and their dominant manhood, black women were angry at Etta for appropriating a wealthy, marriageable black man—the only race of men they were socially allowed to marry. Furthermore, Etta fit easily within early twentieth-century notions of beauty— notions that firmly excluded black women.<sup>128</sup> These factors combined created an environment within black society—particularly the female society—that largely rejected Etta as a means of protest against further white control. Black opinion was divided on this response and *The Broad Ax* was critical of the behavior of these women, saying that they should have been more kind and receptive to Etta and her marriage to Johnson, “driving from their minds ignorance and race prejudice, so that all men and women of any and all races can by the natural and inherent rights which they possess freely mingle together even to the extent of lawfully intermarrying.”<sup>129</sup> Not only had white society rejected her as a result of her marriage to

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<sup>128</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 131.

<sup>129</sup> *The Broad Ax*, September 21, 1912.

Johnson, her white female purity gone, but her black peers criticized her as well.

According to the white press, Etta was an outcast from both racial groups, due to the challenge she posed to white male sexual access and black female marriage opportunities: “Johnson’s negro friends treated her as an outcast from the white race. They resented the implied slur in the pugilist’s refusal to choose a wife from his own color.”<sup>130</sup>

Adrift in society, caught between two groups and a part of neither, would eventually take a tremendous toll on Etta’s mental and emotional state leading to a tragic end—a repercussion of which white society had warned white women, although it was their specific control that precipitated such pressure. In the late hours of September 11, 1912, Etta retired to her chambers in the apartment above Johnson’s Café de Champion, “with blacks and whites singing and drinking” below.<sup>131</sup> She changed into her nightgown, sent her maids away with instructions to pray for her, and then shot herself in the head, passing away in a Chicago hospital early the next morning.<sup>132</sup> Her suicide was the culminating consequence in white society’s list of ramifications white women faced as a result of interracial relationships. The white press wasted no time, printing sensational stories mere hours after her passing. *The Day Book* included an exceptionally tabloid-esque tale, under the headline, “Jack Johnson’s White Wife Has ‘Paid in Full,’” arguing that all races of society reviled Etta and that she had paid for the folly of her interracial marriage with death, attempting to dissuade other women from such behavior.<sup>133</sup>

Discussion of Etta’s sanity became central to the white public’s explanation of her death and even her mother, Elizabeth Terry, participated in this rhetoric. *The Chicago*

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<sup>130</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 1912.

<sup>131</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 1912.

<sup>132</sup> Cook County, Illinois, Death Certificate (1912), Etta Johnson (Etta Terry), Division of Vital Records, Springfield, Illinois, Digital Record, Ancestry.com

<sup>133</sup> *The Day Book*, September 12, 1912.

*Tribune* reported on the older woman's opinion: "Mrs. Terry said that she believed her daughter was insane when she took her life. 'She [Etta] was injured when young,' said Terry, 'and often showed signs of insanity. When she last visited me in Brooklyn she continually said, "Don't leave me alone, mother; I'm afraid I might kill myself".'"<sup>134</sup> In this, Terry made a specific argument concerning Etta's sanity, claiming that her daughter had always had mental health issues. While this did not directly blame her interracial relationship for affecting her sanity, it highlights another important connection—perhaps white women entered interracial relationships because they were *already* insane. To the white public, either possibility seemed to plausibly respond to the issue. For Terry, this was the only answer that adequately explained her daughter's behavior: "'My daughter was insane, else she would not have married Johnson,' said Terry. 'Some years ago she received an injury to her spine and this affected her mind. When she met Johnson we did everything in our power to prevent her marrying him, but he had money and we had none, so she would not be dissuaded.'"<sup>135</sup> Etta's family may have further questioned her sanity when she reportedly attempted to justify her relationship with Johnson by claiming some small percentage of black ancestry, much to the horror and disdain of her siblings.<sup>136</sup>

If a white woman entered into a legally-sanctioned union with a black man, society largely questioned her sanity, as can be seen in a brief examination of Johnson's other white lovers. And if she were not yet insane, as Terry believed Etta was, after some time, she most assuredly would become so. Belle Schreiber's behavior was somewhat

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<sup>134</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, September 14, 1912.

<sup>135</sup> Associated Press Article, *The Chicago Examiner*, September 13, 1912; *The Day Book*, September 13, 1912.

<sup>136</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, September 14, 1912; Such an attempt at legitimizing an interracial relationship in this way was actually quite common.

easily explained: she was immoral, a prostitute. She had sunk so deep into depravity that she consented to being the mistress of an oversexed black man; however, she also realized her descent, turned from her ways, and reformed. Lucille Cameron did none of those things. Something else had to explain her relationship with Johnson—because it certainly could not be based on actual love and intimacy. After Mrs. Cameron-Falconet had her daughter detained to keep her away from Johnson, she requested that the authorities hospitalize her and evaluate her sanity.<sup>137</sup> Lucille’s stepfather was even more dismissive of her behavior based on his assumptions of her mental condition: “The girl is nothing to me. I have no interest in her. In my opinion she should be locked up in some institution for a few years. It would do her good.”<sup>138</sup> Institutionalization had long been a common response when young white women chose to be in relationships with black men, even persisting well into the mid-twentieth century, providing yet another means by which to control sexual behavior.<sup>139</sup>

Beyond questions of sanity, feeble-mindedness—the vague period term meant to include any type of mental state that deviated from the socially defined normal—was often cited as another reason white women chose relationships with black men.<sup>140</sup> Following Johnson’s marriage to Lucille Cameron in December 1912, Chicago newspapers expressed outrage at similar situations, declaring that the Johnson-Cameron marriage was to blame for the increasing number of white-female-black-male marriages.

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<sup>137</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 19, 1912; *The Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1912.

<sup>138</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 29, 1912.

<sup>139</sup> Renee Christine Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-White Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pg. 67.

<sup>140</sup> For further discussion concerning issues of race, interracial relationships, and feeble-mindedness see Susan Cahn’s *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Although this work specifically examines the southern United States between 1920 and 1960, Cahn skillfully dealt with the issue and its earlier origins in the Progressive Era as well as its long legacy.



One incident, particularly offensive to the white public, was the Michigan marriage of a forty-two-year-old black Chicago man to a “feeble minded” fifteen-year-old white girl.<sup>141</sup>

*The Broad Ax* also discussed the marriage between the man, George Thompson, and the girl, Emma Hansen, whom they referred to as “epileptic” as well as “feeble-minded.” The article lacked any clear bias but the tone seemed to suggest that, like the white press, the paper found some element of the union problematic. The first predominant issue in the situation was certainly that Hansen was young and suffered some type of disability that, supposedly, prevented her from being able to consent. Secondly of course, the girl was white. Furthermore, Thompson gained personal justification for the marriage due to the Johnson-Cameron marriage. The man was quoted as declaring, “If Jack Johnson has a right to marry Lucille Cameron, why can’t I marry a White girl? ... If I want that girl, why can’t I have her?”<sup>142</sup> One of the primary white public protests to Johnson’s general behavior was that he would influence other black individuals to behave in ways outside of the socially constructed racial boundaries of the period, breaking down the system of white control. His flaunting of his relationships with white women particularly incensed the white patriarchy who claimed such unions would encourage further white-female-black-male interracial relationships—the worst kind of interracial unions. The Thompson-Hansen marriage served as an example and validation of this growing fear.

However, other opinions firmly asserted that Etta’s rejection by both races due to her relationship with Johnson was specifically to blame for her declining sanity and increasing depression and anxiety. The white press made the issue very clear: “Remorse

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<sup>141</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, January 31, 1913.

<sup>142</sup> *The Broad Ax*, January 25, 1913.

for having left her place in the exclusive Long Island society colony to become the wife of the world's champion prize fighter and to associate herself with those of his race is the cause to which her ... suicide ultimately can be traced, according to her close friends.”<sup>143</sup> This statement is particularly interesting in its credit given to Etta's “close friends.” The prevailing narrative was that Etta did not have friends and was alone due to her poor choice in pursuing an interracial marriage. However, the presence of “friends” whose statements align quite closely to the opinions of the white press appear to be a tool used to lend legitimacy to the white media's claims that social pressures contributed to Etta's declining mental health, reinforcing gender and racial assumptions and the consequences white women faced as a result of interracial sexual behavior.

Infidelity was another supposed consequence of interracial relationships. According to the white public, particularly the white press, the knowledge of Johnson's infidelity—with Belle Schreiber and others—also eventually led to Etta's suicide. Infidelity influenced their relationship from the start. Not only was Etta still married to Clarence Duryea at the time of their meeting, but Johnson was still consorting with both Hattie Watson and Belle Schreiber. Furthermore, he did not end these relationships before he began one with Etta, an issue that the white press claimed likely influenced Etta's mental health. In 1909, Etta began travelling with Johnson, along with the other two women. Belle recalled Johnson introducing her to the “Duryea woman” on the telephone: “... I heard him say,—‘I want to introduce you to a girl of mine.’ ... [Etta] just said, ‘How do you do, Good Evening’ ... I just told her to put him on the wire.”<sup>144</sup> In this, she suggested a derision and dislike for Etta—elements that the latter woman would

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<sup>143</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, September 12, 1912.

<sup>144</sup> Assignment of Errors, NARA-GLR; Cross Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Bachrach, NARA-GLR.

experience from Johnson's other lovers, his family, and both white and black society generally. Belle further testified that even when Etta was travelling with Johnson as his wife—before they were legally married—she also travelled to the same locations and the two continued their sexual relationship as before: "... he had Etta Duryea with him. I saw him every day during the week at Montreal. The same relations were maintained between me and the defendant as had been in other places."<sup>145</sup>

As a black man, white society perceived of Johnson as overly sexual in nature. Because black men were considered sexually voracious, his infidelity was viewed as an inherent racial flaw, rather than a personal moral flaw. Beyond the usual scandal mongering of the media, Johnson admitted to his several coexisting affairs—including his continuing relationship with Belle Schreiber as he prepared to marry Etta—in his testimony during the Mann Act trial. His affair with Belle became increasingly problematic in late 1910. Belle became upset at Johnson's lack of attention and eventually left: "... she said I had not paid her enough attention. I did not go to see her after that, she came to see me."<sup>146</sup> Even though at this time he was already engaged to Etta—a fact Belle had learned from his mother around Christmas of that year—he continued to stay with Belle at her apartment.<sup>147</sup> It was only a mere week before the wedding that Johnson finally took steps toward ending the relationship: "I told Belle while I was up in Milwaukee on this trip that I had become engaged and that I could not pay any more attention to her because of my approaching marriage."<sup>148</sup> While Johnson attempted to end his sexual relationship with Belle prior to his marriage, Etta was most

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<sup>145</sup> Direct Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

<sup>146</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

<sup>147</sup> Direct Examination of the Witness Belle Schreiber by Mr. Parkin; Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

<sup>148</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

assuredly aware of the ongoing affair: Johnson had introduced her to Belle over the telephone and both women had travelled with him extensively.

The white press was intent on convincing the public that Johnson was responsible for his wife's death either directly or indirectly. *The Chicago Defender* wrote that "God Almighty alone" had saved Johnson from murder accusations by ensuring he was not in the cafe at the time Etta shot herself in the above apartment.<sup>149</sup> The Cameron affair provided the perfect opportunity to further blame Etta's death on Johnson and his infidelity. Johnson's troubles with Lucille and her mother entered the public eye barely a month after Etta's death. The white media took full advantage of the suspicious timing. "It is said," wrote *The Day Book*, "that Mrs. Johnson [Etta] killed herself fifteen minutes after she discovered her husband in a private room with his arms around the Cameron girl."<sup>150</sup> In order to counteract these rumors of an affair with Lucille preceding Etta's death, Johnson argued Etta's role in the situation. He claimed that his wife had brought Lucille to the café and introduced them and this acquaintance had in no way influenced his wife's death.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, the white press continued to highlight his alleged affair with Lucille, questioning its role as a primary cause of Etta's death.<sup>152</sup>

Not only did white society view black men as oversexed but they also considered them to be violent. Hoffman highlighted this in his discussion of problems he viewed as being associated with interracial relationships. Domestic violence was a rather widespread issue in early twentieth-century American society, both white and black. Associations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union focused on this issue,

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<sup>149</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, September 14, 1912.

<sup>150</sup> *The Day Book*, October 18, 1912.

<sup>151</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, October 18, 1912.

<sup>152</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 1912.

often finding alcohol to be a fuel in causing domestic violence. However, the organization leader Frances Willard was particularly critical of black men, arguing that alcohol not only pushed black men to physical violence but also to sexual assault of white women.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, while domestic abuse was a growing concern among many segments of white society, the white public largely saw the issue exacerbated in black men, particularly those in relationships with white women. Abuse was a physical consequence that white women could potentially—if not probably—face if she were romantically or sexually linked with a black man.

The white media added physical abuse to elements of insanity, anxiety, depression, and infidelity in order to explain Etta's suicide. It was likely not much of a stretch for the white public to accept that an oversexed, violent black man who made a living by physically beating white opponents in the boxing ring was also guilty of beating his white wife. After Etta's death, stories of the abuse she suffered at Johnson's hands abounded. The day of her passing, *The Chicago Tribune* reported on these allegations: "One day about a year ago she was taken to the Washington Park hospital, her face beaten until it was hardly recognizable. It was said Johnson had grabbed her by the throat and used his pugilistic fists upon her until she lost consciousness."<sup>154</sup> In its reference to Johnson's "pugilistic fists," the newspaper highlighted his career and a perception of his innately violent nature. It was bad enough for a man to abuse a woman in any way; however, Johnson's career arguably made his hands more violent and physically damaging than those of the average man.

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<sup>153</sup> Louis Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pg. 68.

<sup>154</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 1912.

It was not until details of his relationship with Lucille Cameron began to enter the public discourse that the extent of the public's arguments concerning Johnson's abuse of Etta truly emerged. It was also at this time that Terry stepped forward with intimate details of his treatment of her daughter, supposedly in order to save Lucille from the same fate. *The Day Book* published an article from New York with a lengthy statement written by Terry, declaring the brutality of her former son-in law.

I believe she killed herself, not in a fit of madness, but in a fit of sudden clear-seeing and understanding. I believe the mental fog lifted from her for a moment, and revealed her position in all its hideousness. No one will ever know how cruel Johnson was to Etta. She was mortally afraid of him. He beat her so she had to go to the hospital for treatment. ... I have seen Etta with her eyes black, and great bruises all over her face.<sup>155</sup>

Terry certainly believed that Johnson had abused Etta extensively and that the knowledge of what her life had become proved to be too much for her mental state, forcing her to suicide. Furthermore, she seemingly suggested that suicide was perhaps the only way for Etta to escape the situation. She was "mortally afraid" of Johnson and was therefore perhaps too afraid to leave him. In her mother's opinion, Etta realized how terrible her life had become due to her marriage to a black man and death was the only way she could permanently be free.

While other sources seemed to draw a connection between the abuse and the nature of Johnson's career, Terry did not mention this aspect. Rather, she included comments of his race several times in her statement concerning the abuse, even referring to him as a "giant ... black man," seemingly attempting to link the two elements. She summed up her statement, indicating that she hoped to save Lucille Cameron from

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<sup>155</sup> *The Day Book*, October 24, 1912.

Johnson or perhaps another young woman from “his like.”<sup>156</sup> “His like” could potentially refer to abusive men—or it could arguably refer to his racial like, black men who white society often believed were abusive by their very nature. Therefore, it is somewhat ambiguous from what type of men Terry wanted to save young white women—abusive men or black men—if she in fact thought there were a distinction between the two.

Johnson’s alleged abuse of Etta and other white women was a prominent part of the federal case against him in the Mann Act trial. In his opening statement, assistant district attorney Harry Parkin referenced these instances of abuse, once again drawing a parallel between the alleged abuse and Johnson’s career as a boxer:

Now, it will appear, of course, that the defendant is a prize fighter; and in that connection it will be interesting, as the evidence develops to see upon what victims he practiced the manly art of self defense. ... when he ... had a fit of anger ... he practiced the manly art of self defense upon them, blackening their eyes and sending them to hospitals, where he took care of them and paid their expenses until they recovered from the wounds which he had inflicted upon the faces and bodies of these women.<sup>157</sup>

Although the charges against him specifically dealt with his alleged transportation of Belle Schreiber from Pittsburgh to Chicago for immoral purposes, the prosecution sought to shape an argument of his poor moral character and violent nature. The white press took this statement by the prosecution and sensationalized it, highlighting the role of race in order to reinforce negative perceptions of interracial relationships. *The Chicago Examiner* reported Parkin as saying, ““In the course of this trial ... we are going to show that Johnson frequently directed the same fistic accomplishments he used against his rivals in the ring against the *white* [emphasis added] women with whom he travelled

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<sup>156</sup> *The Day Book*, October 24, 1912.

<sup>157</sup> Opening Statement on Behalf of the Government, NARA-GLR.

about the country. . . . the girls were frequently sent to hospitals with blackened eyes and bruised bodies.”<sup>158</sup>

In an attempt to highlight Johnson’s poor character and abusive nature, the government delved into his affairs prior to his marriage with Etta, attempting to identify other instances of abuse against the white women with whom he had relationships in order to present these issues as consequences of all white-female-black-male interracial relationships, not just his union with Etta. They believed they had sufficient evidence to establish an abusive pattern of behavior and questioned him on such concerning a time in San Francisco in 1909, the judge overruling Johnson’s attorney’s repeated objections.

“Hattie was in the hospital while you were there, was she?” asked Parkin.

“Not that I know of,” Johnson replied.

“Did you have any difficulty with her about putting her in a hospital?”

“No,” Johnson simply answered.

The assistant district attorney continued pressing the line of questioning, “Did you have any similar difficulty with Belle,—fisticuff difficulty? . . . You had struck Belle on various occasions?”

Johnson responded, perhaps indignantly, “Never in my life.”

“Do you remember using an automobile tool on her? . . . You never did that?”<sup>159</sup>

After Johnson repeatedly denied that he had abused Hattie or Belle, the prosecution continued, making a statement of Belle being terrible bruised, after which the judge finally instructed Parkin to turn to a new line of questioning. Nevertheless, a clear

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<sup>158</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, May 8, 1913.

<sup>159</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.



attempt was made to highlight Johnson's abusive and violent tendencies in his relationships.

The prosecution also prominently included questioning concerning the incident that put Etta in the hospital about a week prior to their marriage. When Parkin inquired as to the nature of Etta's hospitalization, Johnson replied that she was ill and adamantly denied that it was due to any abuse. The prosecution persisted, "Was it not caused by blows received by Etta Duryea in Pekin Theater here in Chicago at your hands? ... Did you not carry her out or have her carried out and put in the automobile and taken to the Washington Park hospital after you had beaten her up?"<sup>160</sup> Johnson replied, "No, no, and I will take an oath on it, no."<sup>161</sup> He also denied that he had taken Belle Schreiber to the hospital to see Etta at that time or that he had convinced a man named Roy Jones to go there and speak to Etta on his behalf. Jones' testimony indicated a different matter:

Why, Mr. Johnson asked me to go out to the hospital with him to call upon his wife ... he told me that his wife was sick, that she had been in a little trouble, and they had had a fight or something. ... he said he had had a fight with her. ... I guessed there was some misunderstanding between them, and he asked me—he told me that she always—that she had always had a lot of confidence in me and had known me for quite a little while and he tried to get me to intercede and bring them together again.<sup>162</sup>

After further questions, Jones also testified that part of the reason Johnson wanted them to visit Etta in the hospital was to convince her to not bring prosecution against him. This discussion of the alleged abuse Etta suffered corresponded with the report that the press printed after Etta's death.

The issue of abuse is particularly complex in the larger conversation of consequences of interracial relationships versus the individual case of the violent

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<sup>160</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

<sup>161</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, NARA-GLR.

<sup>162</sup> Assignment of Errors, NARA-GLR.

tendencies of one man. The white press and the Mann Act trial prosecution did not explicitly state that Johnson abused white women *because* of his race, but Mrs. Terry seemed to suggest such in her statement. Nevertheless, the very sensational, scandalous nature of the Johnson Affair in the white press was largely, if not wholly, due to the fact that he was black and the women with whom he was involved were white. Likewise, the subsequent conviction of Johnson in the trial, despite the overwhelming lack of evidence, indicated a high level of racism within the proceedings. In the appeals case, Johnson's defense argued that the line of questioning concerning alleged abuse of Hattie, Belle, and Etta was intended to serve a very useful purpose for the prosecution and highlight his bestial manhood and issues of race: "If this negro pugilist had admitted that he had 'beaten up' white women he might well have been characterized as 'a brute.' ... These matters ... have been given to show the atmosphere of prejudice that pervades the record."<sup>163</sup> Both Johnson's race and the race of the women involved are presented as crucially important in this appeals argument. The notion that he may have abused white women was used to turn the jury against him. Therefore, the issues of racism and abuse were central in judging Johnson and, thereby, judging his interracial relationships as well as other similar situations.

The rhetoric of primitive black men made the argument of abuse as a consequence of interracial relationships appear rational to a white audience. Because of the relative normality of such intimate partner violence in the early twentieth century, it is difficult to make arguments concerning prevalence based on race. In his article concerning domestic violence in Chicago during the period, Jeffrey S. Adler argued that the effect of

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<sup>163</sup> On Rehearing, *John Arthur Johnson vs. United States of America*, No. 2017, U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, National Archives and Records Administration-Great Lakes Region (Chicago), pg. 4.

urbanization and industrialization on gender identities was a precipitating force behind Chicago's domestic homicide rates tripling between the 1870s and the 1910s: "In more than half of domestic homicide cases, a man killed a woman, usually his wife or lover, often explicitly to defend his sense of manhood. Husbands shot wives who disobeyed them, refused to turn over money to them, complained about their alcohol consumption, or otherwise threatened their identities. For many Chicago husbands, wife beating was a routine component of family life."<sup>164</sup> Beyond the effect of gender roles, Adler further argued that race and ethnicity returned different statistics concerning types of violence. In his research, he found that, statistically, black families were more likely to suffer domestic homicide than their counterparts, citing gender tensions created from situations of extreme poverty and the emasculation of failure to provide, as well as the desire to establish control and autonomy within households.<sup>165</sup>

With domestic abuse rates already soaring as a result of shifting gender definitions, it was certainly problematic for white society to argue that this was a consequence of interracial relationships. Furthermore, there is a distinct possibility that many white women who pursued such unions were not frightened away at this potentially socially normative behavior. If women expected to be physically reprimanded by their intimate partners, despite their race, then the supposed brutality and heightened physical violence of black men were potentially not extremely troubling. The case of an interracial couple in Massachusetts in the early twentieth century presents an intimate glimpse into this aspect. Alice Hanley, a working-class woman of Irish descent, carried on a relatively long-term affair with a working-class married black man by the name of Channing Lewis.

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<sup>164</sup> Jeffrey S. Adler, "'We've Got a Right to Fight; We're Married: Domestic Homicide in Chicago, 1875-1920,'" *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 28.

<sup>165</sup> Adler, "'We've Got a Right to Fight; We're Married,'" pg. 42, 48.

This brief information immediately creates a nice counterpoint to the case of Jack Johnson and his lovers. Unlike the Johnson case, Hanley and Lewis were of lower economic means and finances did little to structure their relationship—although Hanley did expect Lewis to provide her with new, fashionable clothing. The topic of abuse is interesting in its apparent permissibility. In 1908, Hanley wrote to Lewis, “Did you get my letters. I wrote you when I got through washing, but I was feeling pretty sick then. You may think I was fooling but you certainly shook me up awfully.”<sup>166</sup> She immediately switched the topic to a mundane discussion of clothing and encouraging Lewis to write to her soon, closing with “love & kisses.” In this, Hanley indicated a certain level of abuse within their relationship and yet she apparently did not find it out of the ordinary.

The key issue in this discussion is not whether or not domestic violence was normal, if it were proportionally more common within interracial relationships, or if Johnson were indeed abusive. The argument resides in how white society, typically the white press, presented abuse as being indicative of the damaging nature of white women’s relationships with black men, using the threat of domestic violence in order to prevent such unions. Undoubtedly if Hanley and Lewis’s relationship and the abuse it contained had been publicized and sensationalized, the white press would have responded with similar rhetoric as they had in the Johnson case.

The black press recognized this racial disparity in the white press’s presentation of violence and abuse within families. The editor of *The Broad Ax* brought attention to the case of a white Chicago man who was accused of raping his nine-year-old daughter.

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<sup>166</sup> Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz and Kathy Peiss, *Love Across the Color Line: The Letters of Alice Hanley to Channing Lewis* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pg. 21.

The editor argued that the white press neglected this case of the brutality of a white man in favor of the Johnson case and other representations of animalistic black men.

Mr. Williams, is a White gentleman, so the daily newspapers were so busy in their attempt to send Jack Johnson to the Pen, without giving him a trial, for attempting to make love to a White lady, who at one time hustled for business at the Everleigh Sisters' Club, that they could not devote any space to Mr. Williams and his raping of his own little daughter, but if he was only a Negro it would be far different, for then these same daily papers would have contained a full account of the horrible crime of the big burly black brute, as they greatly delight to refer to all Colored criminals.<sup>167</sup>

Although this abuse is sexual in nature rather than physical beating, it highlighted an important distinction being made between the races in the issue of family violence and the way in which it was portrayed by the white media. Furthermore, the editor clearly stated his opinion concerning the heavily biased portrayal of black men within the white press.

In the case of Etta's death, the white press viewed her suicide as a result of insanity, depression, and anxiety caused by Johnson's infidelity and abuse. However, the underlying argument claimed that, ultimately, Etta committed suicide because the man she married was black. This can be seen in a variety of ways. In the issue of Lucille Cameron, there was an assumption that Lucille would meet a tragic fate as Etta had. A mere few days after Johnson and Lucille married, *The Day Book* published a snide comment: "Lucille Cameron, who married Jack Johnson, has not yet sued for a divorce, nor has she committed suicide."<sup>168</sup> This brief commentary presented the notion that it would not be unusual for another of Johnson's white wives to be desperately unhappy in her marriage, resulting in another suicide. While the argument could be made that this

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<sup>167</sup> *The Broad Ax*, November 23, 1912.

<sup>168</sup> *The Day Book*, December 6, 1912.

was due to his poor character, infidelity, and violent nature, there was also the idea that his race was centrally significant.

This prevailing notion of the link between interracial unions and suicide is further supported by another incident reported in April of 1913. In St. Louis, a white woman, Mrs. Gerhart, divorced her well-to-do white husband and married a black butler. The article stated that she was tremendously unhappy in the marriage, “became an outcast” among her former white society, and eventually committed suicide by poisoning herself.<sup>169</sup> The white press wasted no time drawing connections to the death of Etta: “There is a deadly parallel between the lives of Mrs. Gerhart and Etta Duryea, the first white wife of Jack Johnson. Both women came of highly respected and wealthy families. Both gave up everything to marry negroes. Both committed suicide.”<sup>170</sup> This is where the article ends, providing no further analysis of the situation. To the audience, the insinuations were clear. Etta Duryea Johnson left the high society of New York to marry Johnson. Marriage to a black man, however, was too troubling for her due to infidelity, abuse, or the simple issue of his race, and she committed suicide. The real trouble, for both Etta and Mrs. Gerhart from St. Louis, was that they had stooped to marry a black man—a relationship with real physical consequences, such as suicide.

Most likely, in addition to the pressures created by social control, life-long struggles with depression and anxiety combined with stress due to her father’s death several months earlier eventually led to Etta’s tragic death. Shortly before her death, she wrote a letter to her mother, intending for it to be delivered in case of tragedy. In it, she indicated a level of unexplained anxiety and a concern that it would eventually

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<sup>169</sup> *The Day Book*, April 2, 1913.

<sup>170</sup> *The Day Book*, April 2, 1913.

overpower her, providing a brief glimpse into how she viewed her life: “Jack has done all in his power to cure me but it is no use. Since papa’s death I have worried myself into the grave. I haven’t been worrying over papa’s loss, only over some horrible dread—I don’t know what. I want to be buried here in Chicago. Never try to take my body to Hempstead only to be a mark for curiosity seekers—let me rest for once.”<sup>171</sup> In this rare example of her personal voice, Etta revealed not only her immensely troubled mind, but also the way in which she felt that her relationship had transformed her existence into an object of public scrutiny, expressing weariness at being treated as sideshow oddity.

The threat of physical damage and suicide as a result of interracial relationships in white society corresponded neatly, and even reinforced, the larger fear of race suicide. The notion of race suicide widely circulated through white society particularly in the first decade of the twentieth century under the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, providing yet another means of social control. Roosevelt was concerned with declining white fertility rates; he believed that the Anglo-Saxon, American race was the most advanced, “most civilized” race and, therefore, must be preserved.<sup>172</sup> He spoke out against the willful decision of white couples to not have children when infertility was not an issue: “... the man or woman who deliberately avoids marriage and has a heart so cold as to know no passion and a brain so shallow and selfish as to dislike having children, is in effect a criminal against the race and should be an object of contemptuous abhorrence by

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<sup>171</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, September 28, 1912.

<sup>172</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pg. 179.

all healthy people.”<sup>173</sup> In this statement, he clearly presented his perspective on the topic: refusing to have children was “criminal against the race.”

Dropping fertility rates among white, native-born Americans meant a decline of that race in the coming generations as less ethnically desirable immigrants such as those from Eastern and Southern Europe, Mexico, and Asia continued to swarm into the country. Furthermore, movements of black Americans from the South to the North during the beginning of the Great Migration increased the visible presence of their race in previously predominantly white cities and communities. Roosevelt sought to preserve the civilization of America through fertility and the virile masculinity of white manhood. Native-born white Americans and desirable white immigrant groups could contribute to this race-preserving mission by having children—preferably several. White Americans began to present their large families with pride, cheerfully declaring “No race suicide here!”<sup>174</sup> However, those who chose to not have children or those who had children outside of the normative boundaries were certainly pressured by the notion of willfully contributing to race suicide. To white society, white women who had intimate relationships with black men were arguably some of the worst offenders.

Beyond issues of sexual access and autonomy, these relationships directly contributed to the suicide of the white race. This specific issue highlights one of the major differences between white-female-black-male and black-female-white-male relationships in terms of social impact. Men could father far more children than women could give birth too. It was not entirely problematic for a white man to have a sexual

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<sup>173</sup> *Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Bessie Van Vorst*, October 18, 1902, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Manuscripts Division, The Library of Congress, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University.

<sup>174</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, pg. 202-204.



relationship with a black woman who then gave birth to a racially-mixed child. Because of widespread acceptance of the “one-drop rule,” a black woman would always give birth to a black child, regardless of the race of the father; hence, such a union would not directly influence the suicide of the white race, although it would contribute to the growth of another inferior and uncivilized race. Conversely, a white woman was seen as a pure vessel who always had the possibility of giving birth to a white child, thereby, strengthening the race. Having a black child with a black man almost certainly ensured that she would never have a white child, directly contributing to—if not causing—race suicide.

Madison Grant published the first edition of his work on scientific racism, *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History*, in 1916. In it, he argued the superiority of the white “Nordic” race and the absolute essentiality that it be preserved, with special emphasis placed on responsible human breeding. He heavily criticized the idea of interracial relationships due to the nature of the children they would produce:

When it becomes thoroughly understood that the children of mixed marriages between contrasted races belong to the lower type, the importance of transmitting in unimpaired purity the blood inheritance of ages will be appreciated at its full value and to bring half-breeds into the world will be regarded as a social and racial crime of the first magnitude. The laws against miscegenation must be greatly extended if the higher races are to be maintained.<sup>175</sup>

Children born to parents of different races would always be defined within the race considered less socially superior. This once again highlights the notion of the one-drop rule: a child born to one white parent and one black parent would always be black,

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<sup>175</sup> Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History*, Fourth Edition (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), pg. 60.

regardless of the race of either sex. Therefore, these children presented significant challenges to the idea of racial superiority and boundaries of inclusion or exclusion.

In regards to race suicide, the issue became further muddled. Grant argued that white men procreating with black women did not infringe upon the white race because the children of this mother would always be black: “This miscegenation was, of course, a frightful disgrace to the dominant race but its effect on the Nordics has been negligible, for the simple reason that it was confined to white men crossing with Negro women and did not involve the reverse process, which would, of course, have resulted in the infusion of Negro blood into the American stock.”<sup>176</sup> In this statement, Grant firmly placed the blame of race suicide through interracial procreation on the shoulders of white women, clearly indicating that, while white men’s behavior may be shameful, those types of interracial relationships did not affect the white race. As the sex biologically designed to bear reproduction, white women were responsible for perpetuating the race and preventing any other race from being able to gain access. While white society would certainly define the child of a white mother and black father as black and not white, that child would still pose a greater threat to the white race because it impeded its white mother’s ability to bear white children. Therefore, this specific parentage would have been more damaging to white superiority and race permanence than that of a white father and a black mother.

In arguing for the political and social advancement of white women, Charlotte Perkins Gilman presented intriguing ideas concerning the mixing of races or degrees of civilization. She relegated the responsibility of retaining the superiority and civilization of the white race to the shoulders of white women, thereby making them responsible for

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<sup>176</sup> Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, pg. 82.

race suicide. In her work published in 1898, *Women and Economics*, Gilman argued, “Race-preservation has been almost entirely a female function, sometimes absolutely so. But it has been proven better for the race to have two highly developed parents rather than to have one.”<sup>177</sup> In this passage, Gilman did not use the term “race” in the ethnic and cultural sense; rather, she employed the term in order to refer to the human race. However, her reference to “highly developed” parents most certainly refers to the concept of civilization and evolutionary advancement. Gilman built on the nineteenth-century perspective of less evolutionarily advanced races; thereby, to her, white individuals, were certainly further evolved than the primitive Negro. In this, she condemned interracial relationships, almost completely negating even the possibility, based on her perception of the under-developed quality of black individuals. By presenting women with the responsibility to perpetuate the “highly developed” human race, Gilman made an implicit statement about the irresponsible possibility (however slight it may be) of producing an under-developed race through sexual relationships with black men and thereby contributing to the suicide of the white race.

At the end of *Women and Economics*, Gilman more explicitly referenced interracial unions by subscribing to the construct of the Primitive Negro Rapist, threatening the Purity of White Womanhood. While arguing for the civilization of white women and their right to stand equally with white men, Gilman evoked a metaphor of miscegenation to support her construct of the harm done by a civilized man procreating with a woman who has been barred from true equality of civilization:

Marry a civilized man to a primitive savage, and their child will naturally have a dual nature. Marry an Anglo-Saxon to an African or Oriental, and their child has a

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<sup>177</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relations Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1898), pg. 131.

dual nature. Marry any man of a highly developed nation, full of the specialized activities of his race and their accompanying moral qualities, to the carefully preserved, rudimentary female creature he has so religiously maintained by his side, and you have as result what we all know so well,—the human soul in its pitiful, well-meaning efforts, its cross-eyed, purblind errors, its baby fits of passion, and its beautiful and ceaseless upward impulse through all `this wavering.<sup>178</sup>

In this evocative passage, Gilman argued that procreation resulting from mixing, in this case the mixing of the civilized and uncivilized, was just as harmful as race mixing and would result in simple, uncivilized, and under-developed children. Although she used the example of a white man and a woman of supposed lesser racial advancement, the message was clear. Children born to parents of two races were damaging to the superiority and continuity of the white race.

Not only were issues of race and physical suicide, infidelity, insanity, anxiety, and depression presented as almost certain ramifications that white women would face as a result of interracial relationships, there was also an overarching feeling of pity. To white and black society, these relationships were innately tragic. Johnson buried Etta in one of Chicago's most prestigious cemeteries and publicly mourned her loss, appearing for several weeks with a black band on his sleeve. He fought to prevent film of her funeral from being shown publically, continuing to try to protect her from the "curiosity seekers" even after her death. However, to white society, and black society to a lesser extent, the issue was not whether or not legitimate affection was part of these relationships. Despite the emotions of the individuals involved, society perceived interracial relationships as being innately flawed with tragic consequences. So while it was somewhat begrudgingly admitted that perhaps Johnson truly did care for Etta, it was largely inconsequential. Therefore, an argument of affection was not enough to persuade society's acceptance

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<sup>178</sup> Gilman, *Women and Economics*, pg. 332.

when concerns of permanent individual damage to white women and larger concerns of the decline of white racial superiority were at the forefront. The public discourse surrounding Etta's life and suicide as well as certain situations concerning Lucille Cameron and Belle Schreiber highlight the ways in which society perceived of the threat interracial relationships posed to the white race and the ways in which supposed consequences were used as a method by which to control the sexual behavior of white women and black men.

## CHAPTER V

### STRANGE FRUIT: THREATS AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AS METHODS OF CONTROL

In addition to ideologies of white female purity and threats of consequences associated with interracial relations, white society often attempted to structure sexual behavior of black men and white women through physical violence, ultimately revealing the white patriarchy's obsession with black male sexuality. In terms of these relationships, lynching of black men was typically the physical control employed. Although the North saw fewer cases of such violence than did the South, the threat was still very present. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the movement of black individuals into the North and Midwest helped develop growing prejudice and discrimination in these areas which overflowed into several cases of lynching in places such as New York, Duluth, and Chicago. The official justification of lynching of black men was usually the protection of white female virtue, drawing clean lines of vigilante execution of black men in order to punish their accused sexual assault of white women. To a white patriarchal and supremacist society, Jack Johnson's relationships with and marriages to white women signified ongoing, consistent, legally-sanctioned rape as the logic of the Purity of White Womanhood argued that white women could not truly consent to dangerous, primal black men.

Although interracial marriage had been legal in Illinois since the 1870s and there appeared to be little widespread public protest when Johnson married Etta Duryea, his 1912 marriage to Lucille Cameron and charges and conviction on violating the Mann Act incensed a segment of the white American public to threats of violence. These threats of physical violence against Johnson were yet another method white society employed in order to control interracial relationships between white women and black men and the challenge they posed to white racial superiority, citing his dangerous black manhood as being further threatening to all white women. Black manhood confronted white male supremacy on almost every front. The media discussion of the topic revealed contrasting definitions of Johnson as somewhat honorable by the black press and innately dangerous and a threat to white women by the white press. His perceived threat was ironic in many ways: white men had structured the social framework that made him dangerous, while their own actions concerning black women should have included them in the rhetoric of the dangerous rapist; however, their race prevented them from being categorized as such.

Perhaps the most blatant method of white control of the sexual behavior of black men was physical, violent control through lynching. However, the justification of such violence was not quite as transparent. Typically in situations involving white male mobs executing black men, the alleged crime was most often sexual assault or threat towards a white woman although other issues were usually involved. Nineteenth-century black social commentator and activist Ida B. Wells was one of the first to confront the perception of lynching as a response to rape or sexual assault and, in doing so, attempted to redefine black manhood. She refused to accept the idea that black men were innate sexual predators and overwhelmingly attacked white women which, thereby, justified

their brutal murders by lynching. She supported the idea that black men responded to outside pressures and did not act irrationally and violently of their own accord: “The daily papers bring notice this morning that 13 colored men were shot down in cold blood yesterday . . . . O, God when will these massacres cease—it was only because they had attempted to assassinate a white man (and for just cause I suppose). Colored men rarely attempt to wreak vengeance [*sic*] on a white one unless he has provoked it unduly.”<sup>179</sup> In this relatively early instance in her career, Wells already considered black on white violence to be largely instigated by some outside force, negating the notion that black men were innately violent and, perhaps more disturbingly, sexual predators.

Wells blatantly confronted this definition of black manhood as sexually predatory towards white women and even challenged the morals of the white women in question in her 1892 pamphlet, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases*: “White men lynch the offending Afro-American, not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women.”<sup>180</sup> In this, she attempted to change the definition of black men from that of sexual predator to that of a victim of seductive white women, calling into question the rhetoric of the Purity of White Womanhood. Wells recognized that although white society was defining black manhood in terms of rape and lynching, there was a significant possibility that many of the sexual encounters originated as consensual, with sexual assault only being cried by the discovered white woman who took a black lover. For Wells, this signified the possible lack of purity in white women and signaled the idea of civilized manliness in black men.

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<sup>179</sup> Miriam Decosta-Willis, Ed., *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells: An Intimate Portrait of the Activist as a Young Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), pg. 54-55.

<sup>180</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases* (1892; Project Gutenberg, 2005), paragraph 23.



However, she also recognized that the white socially constructed concepts of black manhood—and white womanhood—prevented true expressions of romantic union between the races; as a result, the white South was only too happy to charge black men with rape when their unions with white women were discovered. In *Southern Horrors*, she not only defended black manhood, but she also dared to describe several such consensual relationships. In description of one example, she wrote, “a young girl living on Poplar St., who was discovered in intimate relations with a handsome mulatto young colored man, Will Morgan by name, stole her father's money to send the young fellow away from that father's wrath. She has since joined him in Chicago.”<sup>181</sup> In her discussion of lynching as a response to consensual interracial relationships, Wells identified an inextricable link in the idea that white mobs used lynching and other types of violence as tools to control the sexual behavior of black men and white women.

Therefore, fundamentally, the violent act of lynching expressed a desire to control black male sexuality and a fear of their perceived sexual prowess. In many ways, the culture surrounding lynching was performative, often complete with commemorative postcards.<sup>182</sup> These photographic prints often highlight the extent to which black male sexuality was a critical element in lynchings. In many situations, the mob stripped their victims naked, sometimes covering their waists as they hanged, but other times revealing the legendary physical manhood of black men in a graphic, strangely sexualized display.

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<sup>181</sup> Wells, *Southern Horrors*, paragraph 33.

<sup>182</sup> In this work, I have used the terms “performative” and “performance” to define the intersecting nature of specific actions as performances with clear actors and audience while borrowing from Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity—the notion that individuals constantly perform their gender based on social constructions and expectations. Therefore, I argue that lynching of black men by white mobs was performative—or a performance of black male gender, despite the lack of agency of the black men, with the white male lynchers as actors and bystanders as audience. See Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519-531.

Simultaneous lynchings could reveal stark images of the racial nature of social violent control through different styles of execution. In 1909, Cairo, Illinois was the scene of an intense and brutal lynching of a black man by the name of Will James, accused of raping and murdering a young white woman named Mary Pelley.<sup>183</sup> A white mob hanged James, “riddled [his body] with bullets” when his body fell still alive, dragged his corpse through the town, and then burned it.<sup>184</sup> The white public commemorated his violent murder with a series of fifteen postcards, celebrating different aspects of the event including his charred head, the tracking dogs used to find him, and a group of boys standing around his ashes. After the crowd finished with James, they also stormed the jail and lynched a white murderer; however, unlike James, “they did not mutilate or parade his corpse or set it on fire,” showing a clear differentiation between treatment of black manhood and white manhood.<sup>185</sup>

The sexualized nature of lynching can be seen more explicitly in other images. A set of commemorative cards from an unknown location around 1900 serves as a good example of the preoccupation with the black male body. The first two images in this series portray the lynching victim before the mob hanged him, revealing a full, graphic presentation of all sides of his stripped body. His body is covered with wounds, indicating an element of torture prior to physical execution. Furthermore, his hands are carefully handcuffed in front of his genitals, suggesting the restraint of dangerous sexuality, while his back and buttocks are completely naked, exposing a defined

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<sup>183</sup> Stacy Pratt McDermott, “‘An Outrageous Proceeding:’ A Northern Lynching and the Enforcement of Anti-Lynching Legislation in Illinois, 1905-1910,” *The Journal of Negro History* 84, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 61.

<sup>184</sup> James Allen and John Littlefield, Without Sanctuary online photo gallery, image 41.

<sup>185</sup> Allen and Littlefield, Without Sanctuary, image 47.

masculine muscularity, fundamentally addressing the changing notions of virility and the masculine physique in this time period.<sup>186</sup>

The full-body presentation is somewhat strange and sexualized, suggesting a strange mix of obsession with the black male body in the desire to produce live, naked, full-body photographs and a fundamental fear of black male sexuality in the covering of the genitals, an arguable attempt to symbolically castrate the overly-sexualized victim of lynching. Without Sanctuary's extensive digital collection of lynching images does not include any other example of a live victim forced to pose for the camera, revealing their entire naked body. It seems somewhat probable that the physical build of the unnamed victim precipitated such a pictorial record. While lynch mobs stripped many of their targets naked at the time of execution, they typically did not take the time to photograph their live, naked bodies. Furthermore, in this case, although he is completely naked in the photographs taken while he was alive, the mob wrapped a blanket around the lynching victim's waist as he hanged in order to hide his genitals.<sup>187</sup> In all three photographs in this series, a clear attempt is made to physically conceal while still somewhat reveal the most physically symbolic element of the man's sexuality.

In many cases, mobs often attempted to cover the nudity of their lynching victims, rarely choosing to hang them completely naked. This could be due to a desire to protect decency and modesty—not of the hanged, who were without agency and modesty, but of the audience which often included white women and children. However, this perspective opens another area of conversation: if modesty was important even in the case of lynching, for what purpose did the mobs sometimes choose to strip the accused? Nudity

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<sup>186</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pg. 84.

<sup>187</sup> Allen and Littlefield, *Without Sanctuary*, images 38-40.

could have been strictly utilitarian for purposes of torture and mutilation. Nevertheless, even in cases of physical castration, lynchers would often attempt to cover the lower body of their victims with some type of fabric such as a blanket or even an apron.<sup>188</sup> One notable deviation from this practice included within the Without Sanctuary database is an image of a lynched black man from an unknown location. Although the corpse wore a torn and open shirt, his lower body is completely bare, explicitly revealing his genitalia.<sup>189</sup> This indicates that the mob purposefully removed some of his clothing while leaving other pieces. The remaining presence of the shirt suggests that revealing his upper body was less important than revealing his lower body, creating a strange presentation of black male intact genitalia. In this, the lynchers performed no symbolic or physical castration, but somehow viewed the removal of the man's lower body clothing as important, clearly emphasizing black male sexuality.

Although mobs did not strip, partially or completely, all black male lynching victims, only one of the few incidents of lynching involving a white male included in the Without Sanctuary database depicted a naked victim in a similar manner. However, in this situation, when a newspaper included the image of the nude white lynching victim on their front page, the white male patriarchal authority in the area demanded that the edition be removed, highlighting a dramatic difference in the permissibility of violent nudity in response to the race of the lynched.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, this is the only example within the collection that reveals a lynch mob using performative nudity in the case of a white male

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<sup>188</sup> Allen and Littlefield, Without Sanctuary, image 73; In this image, a semi naked black male lynching victim's front body is covered with an apron; Without Sanctuary's commentary indicates that the presence of blood running down his legs suggest castration. Therefore, in this example, the mob physically castrated the man and yet still covered his lower body, despite the gruesome absence of genitalia. This is also seen in image 18: the black male lynching victim's pants hang about his knees with a cloth around his waist, once again strongly suggesting modestly concealed castrated genitalia.

<sup>189</sup> Allen and Littlefield, Without Sanctuary, image 81.

<sup>190</sup> Allen and Littlefield, Without Sanctuary, image 68.

victim.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, the greater frequency of this action in the case of black male lynching victims suggests two possible explanations: the first would argue that because of the greater overall prevalence of lynching black men there are more examples of the inclusion of nudity; the second would indicate that white mobs placed greater emphasis on the sexuality of black men than they did white men, leading them to mutilate or otherwise hint toward their genitalia, revealing a white cultural obsession with the rumored sexual virility of black men.

Robyn Wiegman discussed this obsession and attempts to emasculate black men and restore white masculine superiority when she argued that lynching was an act rooted in sexual violence. In her article “The Anatomy of Lynching,” she wrote, “. . . not only does lynching enact a grotesquely symbolic—if not literal—sexual encounter between the white mob and its victim, but the increasing utilization of castration as a preferred form of mutilation for African American men demonstrates lynching’s sociosymbolic realm of sexual difference.”<sup>192</sup> Wiegman continued to argue that the rhetoric of sexual assault of white women led to a culture of rape surrounding the lynch of black men. In this lies the argument of white male obsession with black male genitalia—the symbolic, and yet physical, representation of black male sexuality and the threat it posed sexually to white women and, perhaps more concerning, its political threat to white manhood.

Jack Johnson was never the victim of lynching with his bodily autonomy seized and nudity displayed by a violent mob. However, his body was exposed in a variety of

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<sup>191</sup> The exception to this would be the lynching, skinning, and partial cremation of two white men, Ami “Whit” Ketchum and Luther H. Mitchell, murdered in Nebraska in the 1870s. However, *Without Sanctuary* notes, “Torture, such as skinning and burning, was virtually never practiced on Anglo Americans” and the mob did not hang these lynching victims with exposed bodies in a performative manner; see Allen and Littlefield, *Without Sanctuary*, image 59.

<sup>192</sup> Robyn Wiegman, “The Anatomy of Lynching,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 3, Special Edition: African American Culture and Sexuality (January 1993), pg. 446.

other ways and execution and public violence could often be found in the public rhetoric surrounding him. Because of his career, his muscular physique was almost constantly on display for his audience, making his life and body also performative.<sup>193</sup> White public perception of his half-naked body in the boxing ring was once again a mix of strange fascination and fear. DeCoy discussed this, claiming that both white male and female spectators clamored to get a good look at Johnson's legendary physique although white men attempted to shield white women from the knowledge or image of his genitalia as much as possible.<sup>194</sup> Fear of his sexuality was exposed in the public mythology surrounding the black penis and Johnson's specifically. Chapter Four explored the ways in which Johnson's genitalia was supposedly dangerous to white women and also touched on the idea that Johnson played into the myth of his supposedly larger-than-average penis: "whither the legend [of his physical manhood] had followed him, he would enter the ring [his penis] so wrapped [in gauze] and bulging at his groin."<sup>195</sup> He was comfortable with the notion of his body and sexuality as performance and chose to emphasize it as such, operating under a bodily autonomy and sexual agency that lynching victims lacked.

The press often sexualized not only Johnson's body, but his social expression of manhood. For the white press, this sexualization was often portrayed as being dangerous and threatening in nature, particularly offensive to white women. After Etta Duryea's suicide, Southern papers reportedly banned Johnson's name, declaring "that in marrying

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<sup>193</sup> The notion of performative and performance in Johnson's life once again refers to the intersecting notions based on audience and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Because Johnson was a public figure, there was an ever-present audience to his performance of his gender as a black man.

<sup>194</sup> Robert H. DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire* (Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Company, 1969), pg. 60.

<sup>195</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 60.

the white woman who recently killed herself Johnson offered an affront to every white woman in the land.”<sup>196</sup> In this sense, his actions became a physical performance of the danger his black manhood presented to the white female population. This danger and affront was, of course, even more prominent when connected to the alleged violation of the Mann Act and abduction of Lucille Cameron. Johnson’s reported performance of his sexual prowess in this case was particularly incensing to the white media. Mrs. Cameron-Falconet claimed that when she appealed to him for Lucille’s release, he haughtily responded that he could “get” any white woman in Chicago he desired.<sup>197</sup> In this, the white media recognized the manner in which he was performing his black manhood as being innately sexually charged and predatory to white women—the group who was supposedly most vulnerable to black males. Furthermore, the wording Mrs. Cameron-Falconet chose for her interpretation of Johnson’s statement framed his meaning in potentially forceful terms: the notion that a black man was able to “get” a white woman suggests an element of rape or that he may choose to acquire her against her will. This implication in Mrs. Cameron-Falconet’s accusation is perhaps more blatant when laid beside her additional accusation that Johnson had abducted her daughter.

Jack Johnson’s moral—or rather immoral—character is largely without question. Despite biased contemporary white social condemnation of his actions based on perceptions of the black race, historical evidence argues that he was indeed most likely a womanizing, philandering, abusive man. Nevertheless, the white press demonized him in a way that was far more extreme than their discussion of white men and similar behavior. Beyond questions of his sexual threat to white women, the white media also highlighted

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<sup>196</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, September 17, 1912.

<sup>197</sup> *The Day Book*, October 18, 1912.

Johnson as being innately animalistic, an idea that was largely accepted in the public understanding of black men in the period. Discussion of his primal manhood began early in his career as his victories over white boxers began to challenge the notion of white supremacy. His bestial quality only grew in the media as his sexual relationships became more public. *The Chicago Examiner* published an article discussing the evolutionary advancement of man, subsequently comparing Jack Johnson to a gorilla: “The gorilla, huge and powerful, depended upon his strength, his teeth, his wonderful arms. And he stayed a gorilla. He never learned to think.”<sup>198</sup>

The white press often employed this type of violent, animalistic rhetoric concerning Johnson. For Johnson and other black men, they used terms such as “brute” to structure and demonize their physical manhood as well as their performance of manhood. Furthermore, this rhetoric often linked animalistic qualities with race as the term “brute” was typically preceded by “black,” clearly tying dangerous and primal sexuality with notions of race. One white newspaper published an editorializing article, claiming that money was Johnson’s downfall as it made him want to sexually behave as a white man when he could not—and should not—due to his race. As a result, money made a “brute monkey out of him.”<sup>199</sup> The article continued to refer to him as a “brute” and a “big brute” and finally made a summarizing assessment of the issue: “It seems to be a failing of colored men, when they gain wealth and a certain kind of popularity, to attempt to beat the white man at his own game. They want white women.”<sup>200</sup> The author of the article noted that the desire for white women specifically challenged the role of white men and created a problematic environment in which “brute” black men attempted to usurp the

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<sup>198</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, September 29, 1912.

<sup>199</sup> *The Day Book*, November 9, 1912.

<sup>200</sup> *The Day Book*, November 9, 1912.



carefully defined guidelines of Jim Crow black male behavior. By flaunting his wealth and popularity in order to attract white women, Johnson disregarded the place in society created for him by white men.

After Johnson married Lucille Cameron, several states and politicians became vocal concerning their ideas of the circumstances. Governor Coleman Livingstone Blease of South Carolina functioned prominently within this conversation after he made comments hinting that Johnson would have been lynched if he had married a white woman in his state. He further declared that he would not attempt to offer protection from mob violence to a “black brute who laid his desecrating hand upon a white woman . . . .”<sup>201</sup> Contextually, Blease was not even referring to issues of alleged rape and sexual assault. He was speaking specifically to the Johnson-Cameron marriage, hinting that in white supremacist society, any type of interracial sexual interaction between a black man and white woman, whether legal or illegal, was highly challenging and problematic. White women were “the ultimate commodity in a racist world:” even in a consensual, and arguably respectful, relationship such as a marriage, the black male hand that dared to touch the purity of a white woman was a desecration, arguably affecting her value to white male consumers.<sup>202</sup> Georgia representative Seaborn Anderson Rodenberry expressed a very similar sentiment around the same time period. While Blease viewed all types of interracial relationships between black men and white women as a desecration, Rodenberry identified these types of interracial marriages as the fundamentally problematic issue. He declared, “But in all the years of Southern slavery there was never

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<sup>201</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, December 7, 1912.

<sup>202</sup> Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), pg. 199.

such brutality, such infamy as the marriage license authorizing that black African brute, Jack Johnson, to wed a white woman and to bind her in the wedlock of black slavery.”<sup>203</sup>

Johnson’s black manhood was largely sexualized and defined as being brutal and dangerous. However, there was a segment of the white voices who argued that it was not his race that made him a brute but rather his behavior. While this distinction between race and behavior seems as though it would be useful to the advancement of the black community in the period, in reality, it only further splintered it into small groups.

Although it was more beneficial than simply referring to all black men as animalistic brutes, this distinction also created an environment in which black individuals were forced to judge and comment on the behavior of other members of their race, destroying unity and community in a time when both were in upheaval and necessary for the overall social, political, and economic advancement of the race. A white female proponent of eugenics offered her critique of Johnson’s behavior aside from race, adding a somewhat strange comment about eugenics, “‘It is tragic,’ said Mrs. Laundauer, ‘that this should have happened just now that we are beginning to teach and profit by the efficiency of eugenics. The fact that Johnson belongs to the black race has absolutely no weight. Personally, I would welcome a fine and refined colored man at my own table, but this man Johnson is a brute. The whole affair is deplorable, lamentable.’”<sup>204</sup>

Some of Johnson’s more visible behavior in the public eye only furthered the notion of his brutality and animalistic tendencies. When he was arrested in November 1912 as a result of the circumstances surrounding his relationship with Lucille Cameron,

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<sup>203</sup> *The Day Book*, December 12, 1912.

<sup>204</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 20, 1912; A first name is not included for Mrs. Laundauer.

the white press reported a violent interaction between Johnson and a photographic reporter:

In his free hand the prize fighter carried a heavy cane. A photographer with flashlight and camera was waiting to snap the party as they entered the jail corridor. The photographer had made many pictures of Johnson before under somewhat different circumstances. At sight of the photographer the negro's eyes rolled wildly. He thrashed his manacled hand about, dragging the helpless deputy marshal like a palm leaf fan. He raised the stick and brought it down on the photographer's wrist. Then he tossed his captors about while they pleaded: "Please don't, Jack. Be a gentleman."<sup>205</sup>

The use of words such as "wildly," "thrashed," and "captors" all suggest animalistic qualities, reinforcing the white public's perception of Johnson as a violent brute.

Furthermore, an accident at one of his boxing demonstrations further thrust his violence against white women, most often represented through his alleged abuse of Etta Duryea and Belle Schreiber, into the public opinion. While he was demonstrating his boxing abilities at a Chicago theater, the punching bag came loose and struck the face of a young, unmarried woman named Ruth Mehl who took Johnson to court and sued for \$25,000 in damages.<sup>206</sup> The injury of a young white woman who claimed to require such a tremendous amount of money to compensate for her injuries, highly suggested Johnson's violent, injuring nature. While Mehl did not receive the amount of money for which she sued, she did receive an extremely respectable \$2,500, indicating that the judge also viewed Johnson's actions as somehow problematic although the incident was widely referred to as an accident.<sup>207</sup>

Because Johnson was a "brute" and his manhood was sexualized, dangerous, and directly confronted white male superiority on several levels, he received numerous threats

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<sup>205</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 1912.

<sup>206</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, June 18, 1913.

<sup>207</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, June 22, 1913.

of violence, particularly after the Lucille Cameron and Mann Act issue became public. Although various forms of violence were suggested, the social environment of the time made threat of lynching most common. The threats arrived in all forms: some Johnson received directly, others were sent to newspapers who then published the threats publicly. On October 19, 1912, very early in the Cameron debacle, *The Day Book* fully described the violent atmosphere in Chicago society that had begun to threaten Johnson: “A sullen crowd, inflamed by the suggestions of certain newspapers, followed Johnson wherever he went. Members of the crowd muttered to themselves, and every once in so often a voice would be raised above the clamor. ‘Shoot the nigger! Lynch him!’ were the most frequent cries heard. That Johnson himself fully realizes his danger is proved by his employment of Burns detectives.”<sup>208</sup> In this, the paper suggested that although the crowd was protesting Johnson’s behavior, the public conversation as furthered by the media was integral in incensing them to desiring violence.

Threats of lynching sometimes arrived along with other acts of violence. As he attempted to withdraw money from the bank in order to pay Lucille’s bond when she was held as a witness against him, the public reacted strongly. *The Chicago Examiner* reported, “a man in an upper window of the First National Bank Building hurled a heavy glass inkwell, which barely missed the negro, while an excited crowd menaced the negro with cries of ‘Lynch him’ and ‘Kill him.’”<sup>209</sup> This article and the former *Day Book* article seem to refer to the same incident. Despite violent verbal protests calling for his death, Johnson appeared largely unconcerned by these events, performing his black manhood to the white press with self-confidence or even a degree of arrogance: “‘They can’t kill me,’

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<sup>208</sup> *The Day Book*, October 19, 1912.

<sup>209</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 20, 1912.

Johnson bragged, walking with a pronounced limp, which he refused to explain. ‘I am the biggest man in the United States—bigger than President Taft, because he is president of only one country, while I am champion of the world.’”<sup>210</sup> In this statement, Johnson not only dismissed the violent control white society attempted to place upon his sexual behavior but he also completely disregarded the notion of white male superiority, unabashedly placing himself above the presidential role that served as the symbol for American manhood.

When Johnson was briefly held in jail as a result of the situation with Lucille Cameron, he also received death threats from white prisoners, suggesting that, to a white male audience, his actions surpassed mere issues of legality and ventured into a realm of behavior that was even tremendously problematic to criminals. As he walked past several hundred white prisoners they yelled to ““Hang him”” and ““Lynch the nigger.””<sup>211</sup> Their feelings toward him were so violent that eventually the jail had to make other arrangements: “The sentiment among the 500 white prisoners against the negro pugilist became so strong that the jailers were forced to remove him, first to the hospital section and later in the day to the negro quarters. The removal of the prisoner was decided upon after the clamor against him by the other prisoners became incessant.”<sup>212</sup> White society viewed Johnson’s sexual relationships as being against nature and therefore far more detrimental than merely an issue of criminal behavior. In reality, there was nothing illegal about the relationships. Although Mrs. Cameron-Falconet and other members of the white public claimed and believed that Johnson had abducted and defiled Lucille, Lucille was quite adamant in her love and affection for Johnson, clearly suggesting his

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<sup>210</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 20, 1912.

<sup>211</sup> *The Day Book*, November 9, 1912

<sup>212</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, November 10, 1912.

innocence, which should have quelled any notion of illegal behavior. Therefore, the issue was controlling black male and white female sexuality rather than an issue of a truly criminal nature.

Lynch threats against Johnson did not always arrive verbally. Another tactic of violent social control manifested in the form of effigies. In several instances, the white public mutilated effigies of Johnson in order to send a dramatically clear message of the consequences of his deviation from socially constructed boundaries of black male sexual behavior. In October 1912, *The Chicago Examiner* reported that a group of forty men, presumably white, hanged three effigies of Johnson around the area of the city in which he resided. In case there were any questions regarding the identity of their symbolic victim, the men included Johnson's name on one of the effigies.<sup>213</sup> As these violent demonstrations occurred, Johnson apparently surrounded himself with several bodyguards while continuing to present a nonchalant attitude towards the danger.

The public seemed equally nonchalant concerning the intensity of violent symbolism: "Curious crowds gathered at North State street, near Walton place, last night where the figure of a huge negro, labeled Jack Johnson, dangled from a telephone post. Nobody seemed to know who had hanged the negro pugilist in effigy, and no effort was made to remove it."<sup>214</sup> The lack of desire to remove such a violent representation of white public sentiment from the Chicago streets indicated a degree of approval. The following night, symbolic violence against Johnson increased and spread, revealing the rampant white desire to control Johnson's sexuality even as Lucille Cameron declared her love for him and her consent to the relationship, adamantly denying allegations of abduction and

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<sup>213</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, October 20, 1912.

<sup>214</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, October 20, 1912.

rape. As a result, both Johnson and his place of business were potentially in danger: “Detectives are guarding both Johnson and his cafe today. The negro champion was burned in effigy in several parts of town last night.”<sup>215</sup>

Rumors of violence against Johnson also revealed white public opinion on the matter. Both of the major rumors occurred at roughly the same time as the widespread verbal threats and burning of effigies. When news began to spread that Johnson had been shot, numerous individuals began to speculate concerning the veracity of the information. Some reports indicated that he was shot by a vigilante group attempting to control his behavior or a man who wanted to guard Lucille Cameron’s reputation; others reported that it was due to a lover’s quarrel with a black woman. Nevertheless, the police station dealt with many questions surrounding the incident: “The chief and assistant chief were kept busy during the morning answering telephone inquiries concerning a report that Johnson had been shot. ‘Most of the telephone inquiries were from women,’ Assistant Chief Schuettler said, ‘and most of them expressed disappointment when I told them the rumor was without basis.’”<sup>216</sup>

This report revealed more than one issue of white public response to the Johnson Affair. Not only did this report indicate the desire for Johnson to be violently controlled due to his behavior, but it also brought the role of white women to the forefront. Although Johnson’s greatest social confrontation was the challenge he posed to white male superiority, public rhetoric furthered the notion that his behavior was the largest threat to white women. If white women—his first choice for sexual partners—desired Johnson injured or dead, this presented an even deeper condemnation of his behavior. If

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<sup>215</sup> *The Day Book*, October 21, 1912.

<sup>216</sup> *The Day Book*, October 20, 1912.

the majority of white women provided public degradation of Johnson's sexuality, it also allowed the white press and public to dismiss his white lovers as not indicative of proper white female behavior and outcasts from their gender and racial group.

Stories of a bomb at Johnson's home a few days before he married Lucille Cameron continued the rumors of violence against him in attempt to control his sexual behavior and dictate his choice in marriage partners. Johnson's mother reported that someone had attempted to dynamite his Wabash Avenue house. Johnson denied the incident.<sup>217</sup> *The Chicago Tribune* claimed that the rumor was due to a mishearing of the word "bum" as "bomb" and that a homeless individual had accidentally set a wagon on fire in the alley behind Johnson's house.<sup>218</sup> Despite the fact that the incident was apparently not a violent attempt against Johnson's well being, the public report and reception of the incident suggest that white society continued to harbor ill-will against Johnson, largely due to his relationships with white women.

The national impact of Johnson's behavior and the widespread desire to violently control black male sexuality are revealed in messages from around the country supporting violent actions sent to Johnson and some white public sources. Johnson stated that he had received several anonymous death threats in the mail, including some from areas outside of Chicago.<sup>219</sup> The white press also reported receiving several messages from people offering to kill Johnson or wishing to financially contribute to his federal prosecution. *The Chicago Tribune* received a telegram from New Orleans reading, "Will TRIBUNE receive money from southerners for Johnson prosecution fund? Many here would

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<sup>217</sup> *The Day Book*, November 30, 1912.

<sup>218</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, November 30, 1912.

<sup>219</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1912.



give.”<sup>220</sup> Likewise, a woman from Oklahoma wrote to the same paper, suggesting that Johnson’s behavior would have never been tolerated in her area of the country: “Why does not your splendid paper, that is read the world over, have the Illinois legislature enact laws to prevent such disgraceful happenings as the late marriage of Jack Johnson? Down in this part of the country he would never have lived to marry the second white girl.”<sup>221</sup>

It was not only Johnson specifically and the white press who received various letters and messages threatening his safety and encouraging his downfall. Even the police station received messages suggesting that the sender would be happy to do away with Johnson. On the day of the Johnson-Cameron wedding, *The Day Book* reported, “Chief McWeeny today received the following telegram, dated yesterday: ‘I see that Jack Johnson is to marry Lucille Cameron in your city today. I just want to know if the people of Illinois know what sea grass ropes were made for. Respectfully yours, J.T. Ruddle, 515 Market St. Shreveport.’”<sup>222</sup> A few days later, the police chief received another similar message: “Police Chief McWeeny was offered \$5,000 today if he would deliver Jack Johnson anywhere in the state of Louisiana.”<sup>223</sup> Evidently, the police station did not view these mailed threats against Johnson as problematic and no indication is given that they did anything to prosecute the senders—individuals who brazenly signed their messages and even included their addresses. For the white public, death threats against a black man who had defiled a white woman—within the sanctity of marriage or not—would likely not garner any legal backlash and were therefore freely made.

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<sup>220</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1912.

<sup>221</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, December 9, 1912.

<sup>222</sup> *The Day Book*, December 4, 1912.

<sup>223</sup> *The Day Book*, December 6, 1912.

It was not only his expression of sexual behavior that white Chicagoans attempted to control; his physical movement was also worthy of white social interference. Johnson's performance of black manhood also challenged white male superiority through his financial circumstances. He was an incredibly wealthy man—particularly for a black man in the early twentieth century—as evidenced by his reported \$2,500 weekly income, several automobiles, and the dozen gowns his wife easily purchased in one shopping trip.<sup>224</sup> When he attempted to use some of his great wealth to purchase a summer home in an all-white part of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, his would-be neighbors reacted strongly with threats of physical violent control. Johnson stated that he intended to purchase the home as a gift for Lucille who was still presumably upset at being thrown out of a respectable dining room a few weeks earlier due to who she was and the scandal that surrounded her marriage; nevertheless, the residents of Lake Geneva did not find his intentions honorable.<sup>225</sup> “Jack Johnson ... is fixing for a fine mess of trouble if he carries out his declared intention of making his summer home ... in the exclusive Lake Geneva summer colony,” wrote *The Day Book*. “Residents of the colony talked threateningly of tar and feathers, horsewhipping and other forms of punishment when they learned who their neighbor was to be.”<sup>226</sup>

In addition to threatening Johnson if he should move, Lake Geneva residents expressed disbelief that the former white owner of the home would knowingly sell his property to a black man. One of Johnson's would-be neighbors declared, “If [the former

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<sup>224</sup> Cross Examination of the Witness John A. Johnson by Mr. Parkin, *The United States v. John Arthur Johnson, otherwise known as Jack Johnson, 04/30/1913-11/11/1920*, Criminal Case Files 1873-1991, Record Group 21, National Archives and Records Administration-Great Lakes Region (Chicago); *The Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1913; *The Broad Ax*, July 5, 1913.

<sup>225</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, December 25, 1912.

<sup>226</sup> *The Day Book*, December 23, 1912.

owner] sold his property directly to Johnson, knowingly, he should receive scant consideration . . . . He may regret it.”<sup>227</sup> In this, not only did the white society of Lake Geneva attempt to control Johnson’s physical movements with threats of violence, but they also suggested physical harm and attempted to control the actions of a white man who would allow Johnson to enter a white-dominated area, thereby placing him on a level of social and economic equality with his white neighbors. Not only did Johnson’s actions have to be controlled in order to protect the white nature of the geographic area, but, in this case, the actions of a white man had to be controlled because they undermined white male superiority and threatened the protection of white Lake Geneva.

Black Chicago society had conflicting opinions concerning Johnson’s performance of his black manhood and the threats of violence he received as a result. One segment of the population recognized the threat of violence against him as a white social method of controlling black sexual behavior and commended his expression of manhood as honorable, both in his relationship with Etta Duryea and with Lucille Cameron. After Etta’s death, the black Chicago press was quick to come to Johnson’s defense. While much of the white press used Etta’s suicide as an opportunity to discuss Johnson’s alleged abusive behavior and brutal animalistic body, *The Broad Ax* discussed these elements in very different terms. The black newspaper shaped a perception of Johnson as honorably masculine, citing Etta’s “frail form” and the way Johnson tenderly held his dying wife in his “powerful strong arms.”<sup>228</sup> Beyond this image of gentle masculine care for a white woman of the “weaker sex,” *The Broad Ax* used this expression of manhood to describe Johnson’s material provisions for his wife. Those same “powerful strong

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<sup>227</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, December 23, 1912.

<sup>228</sup> *The Broad Ax*, September 14, 1912.

arms” were responsible for enabling Etta to “dress in the finest and most expensive raiment, to decorate herself with costly diamonds from head to feet, to have maids and other servants to disappear at the raising or the lowering of her little finger and to otherwise live in the grandest of style ....”<sup>229</sup> In this, Johnson performed his physical manhood in a respectable manner, attempting—although failing—to protect a woman. Furthermore, he certainly fulfilled the economic requirements of manhood by providing sufficient, if not exemplary, financial care for his wife, thereby challenging claims that black men were incapable of properly caring for white wives.

After Johnson married Lucille Cameron, *The Broad Ax* once again supported Johnson and commended his behavior. Although the morality of the relationship may have been in question, the black newspaper recognized Johnson’s handling of a delicate situation as admirable. “He must be given the credit,” wrote the paper, “however distasteful it may seem to many; for having the courage and manhood, to stand by [Lucille] and to lawfully marry her; after he had gotten her into so much serious trouble.”<sup>230</sup> In many ways, this perspective echoed that of the black community who did not agree with Johnson’s immoral behavior but also did not view it as indicative of an innate representation of diseased racial manhood. By doing the civilized, manly thing by marrying Lucille, Johnson managed to partially atone, in the black community at least, for his poor behavior. The paper went on to express its hope for the influence of the marriage upon Johnson’s manhood:

As Jack Johnson, seems to be rather hard, for one woman to handle or to hold down; let us all hope, that the new Mrs. Johnson will be able to successfully, handle or control him—that she will prove as true to him in the future as she has in the past three or four months; that he will treat her kindly and with the greatest

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<sup>229</sup> *The Broad Ax*, September 14, 1912.

<sup>230</sup> *The Broad Ax*, December 7, 1912.

consideration and prove to the world of mankind; that he is not naturally brutal in his make up, when it comes to dealing with delicate and frail women and; that he can become or make a model and dutiful husband.<sup>231</sup>

This statement indicated that the concept that Johnson's behavior was innate to his race—or even innate to his character—was untrue and that, given the opportunity, Johnson should be sure to prove to white society that he was capable of expressing manly behavior—behavior that aligned closely with white ideals of Victorian restrained manliness transitioning into notions of civilized masculinity. To the black community, by expressing his physical strength while still gently caring for his white wife, Johnson had the opportunity to gain access to constructions of white manhood, thereby expanding the social function of black men.

Beyond arguing that Johnson should be included in ideals of white manhood due to his honorable behavior, the black press also pointed out that in marrying Lucille he showed more honor than the white American men who had illegitimate families with black women and refused to care for or acknowledge them. *The Broad Ax* published a letter from the St. Louis black newspaper *The Argus* shortly after their own discussion of Johnson's admirable behavior. The St. Louis paper stated:

The persecution of the press and the state, city and federal authorities at Chicago has forced Jack Johnson to do just what they desired most to prevent—marrying the Cameron girl. What man is there, who when a woman had been jailed and persecuted on his account and ostracized by her friends, would not marry her under the circumstances? Such a man would be little better than a brute. In marrying Miss Cameron, Johnson has acted more honorably than many of the white “gentlemen” who are rearing octoroon families alongside their legitimate offspring.<sup>232</sup>

This analysis revealed several important issues. First, it acknowledged that Johnson's manhood was in competition with white manhood in the topic of honor. Second, it

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<sup>231</sup> *The Broad Ax*, December 7, 1912.

<sup>232</sup> *The Broad Ax*, December 14, 1912.

directly challenged the honor of a specific group of white men, pointing out the hypocrisy of their attempts to regulate interracial relationships as they pertained to white women and black men. And third, it highlighted the important—and little talked about—issue that white society’s attempt to control Johnson’s behavior was largely antithetical.

The notion that Johnson’s behavior was not merely part of his nature as a black man and he was capable of performing honorable manhood influenced the black perception of violence as a method of white social control of black sexuality to a great extent. In identifying the use of violence to control black men, the black community also recognized similar sexual control in the treatment of black women by white men, once again highlighting the double standard that existed in interracial relations. In addition, they also pointed out the method of violent control white society, particularly white men, used to control black behavior. In a brief editorial comment, *The Chicago Defender* quipped, “The Southern white gentleman is the Negro’s best friend. He puts his arms about the neck of the women, and a rope about the neck’s of the men. Good, eh!”<sup>233</sup>

This sardonic comparison clearly highlighted intersecting issues of different types of interracial relationships and the white male hypocrisy involved in violent control of black men. *The Broad Ax* expressed a similar critique although far more bluntly and graphically: “These same white gentlemen who spend most of their leisure time with their Colored mistresses and not in the company of their own wives and sweethearts, are ever ready to mob and lynch any Negro, burn his body at the stake or swing it up to the limb of some tree and riddle it with bullets, if he is merely suspected of looking at a white woman.”<sup>234</sup> To the black press, this social construct hinted at several types of sexual

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<sup>233</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, October 26, 1912.

<sup>234</sup> *The Broad Ax*, November 9, 1912.

control. White men controlled the sexuality of the black women with whom they chose to have affairs while black men had little, if any, recourse to protect black women's virtue from white men. Likewise, white men controlled the sexuality of black men by dictating what race of women they were allowed to have relations with and then enforcing such guidelines through violent, largely socially-sanctioned, means.

White society sexualized and demonized black manhood in order to create acceptable social structures of behavior. Beyond this, violence against black men was used as a method to socially control the sexuality of black men and white women, particularly as it related to this type of interracial relationships. In order to justify this control, white society established rhetoric of black men as animalistic and dangerous. By supporting this ideology within the public conscious, it became far easier to support violent actions against black men in order to protect white women while refusing to acknowledge violence as a method of racial control and a consequence for daring to challenge the white patriarchy.

The white press heavily subscribed to the rhetoric of Johnson's manhood as dangerous which undoubtedly influenced the tremendous public backlash and threats of violence he received as a result of his behavior and visible interactions with white women. As Johnson's sexualized manhood was threatened with violence in much the same way that mobs emphasized lynch victims' genitalia in torturous displays, the black community identified the intensely problematic double standard of sexual control and demonization of black male behavior. Therefore, in this context, while violence was arguably the most direct and public method of control by white society, it was also the most implicit, hiding beneath layers of rhetoric pointing to the brutality of black men, the

danger they posed to white women, and the necessity of curbing their lustful assaults through lynching.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

“I have been severely criticized because of my several marriages and because of my love affairs, but in none of these did I go beyond my legal privileges or conduct myself differently from prevailing customs, observed by thousands of my fellow citizens,” Jack Johnson wrote in his 1927 autobiography, highlighting the intense double standards that existed for black men and white men in the realm of interracial relationships. “They have involved me in scandal, it is true, and imaginative newspaper writers and maliciously minded persons have seized on them to bring condemnation and misfortune upon my head, while others doing exactly as I have, were dismissed with little more than a knowing and forgiving gesture.”<sup>235</sup> White men openly carried on extramarital and premarital affairs with white women and black women with little, if any, significant social repercussions—a freedom that was not also extended to Johnson. Furthermore, the Mann Act was not supposed to apply to consensual romantic or sexual relationships; nevertheless it became a legal avenue by which to prosecute otherwise lawful interracial relationships in addition to other methods of white social control such as definitions of white female purity, intense mental and racial pressures threatening consequences, and violent physical control.

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<sup>235</sup> Jack Johnson, *Jack Johnson—In the Ring—and Out* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1992), pg. 232.

On May 13, 1913, an all-white jury found Johnson guilty of transporting Belle Schreiber from Pittsburgh to Chicago for immoral purposes and the judge sentenced him to a year and a day in prison and a \$1,000 fine. After his conviction, Belle seemingly disappeared from the public eye. Never one to willingly submit to white control, Johnson packed up his household and fled with Mrs. Lucille Cameron Johnson to Canada by hiding amongst a travelling Negro baseball team in late June.<sup>236</sup> The U.S. requested his extradition but the Canadian government stated that as long as Johnson left their country promptly it would not become involved. A few days later, Johnson and Lucille boarded the *Corinthian*—much to the dismay of their white fellow passengers—and set sail for France with “two automobiles and eighteen trunks and valises.”<sup>237</sup> The couple and their entourage spent the next seven years in Europe, South America, Mexico, and Cuba. During this time, Johnson fought several boxing matches; some of his more outlandish rumored European activities included a drinking contest with the Russian mystic Rasputin, an affair with the seductive German spy Mata Hari, and covert intelligence during World War I, all three almost certainly fanciful.<sup>238</sup> Finally, in July of 1920, he and Lucille returned to the United States where he served his year-long prison term at Leavenworth. By the time of his return, his boxing fame had declined and he no longer held the world title.

A few years later, Lucille divorced him on grounds of infidelity. “Our love, after many years of trials and tests through which it endured, was destined to fade,” wrote Johnson. “She had been in my life longer than any other woman and had enjoyed with me some of my greatest triumphs and suffered with me some of my greatest hardships and

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<sup>236</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, June 27, 1913.

<sup>237</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1913.

<sup>238</sup> DeCoy, *The Big Black Fire*, pg. 183-184.

sorrows. She was always loyal and steadfast and she possessed a pluck and a courage that enabled her to stand up bravely under many arduous experiences.”<sup>239</sup> Lucille disappeared from the historical record after their divorce, likely remarrying and changing her last name and perhaps finding her way back to white female purity as she removed herself from Johnson.

Soon after his marriage to Lucille ended, Johnson’s intimate life experienced a degree of déjà vu. In the autumn of 1924, he met a married white woman named Irene Pineau at a race track. Roughly a year later, she divorced her husband and married Johnson, calling to mind the circumstances of his earlier relationship with Etta Duryea fourteen years prior. Irene Pineau Johnson was infatuated with her husband, as many of Johnson’s women had been. “Mr. Johnson is everything that he possibly could be,” she wrote. “He is loving, considerate ... generous ... loyal and kind. To any of the people who might be a bit skeptical about marrying a man of a different race, let me say that there could not be a man of any race in the world more worthy of being loved and honored than is my husband.”<sup>240</sup> Johnson and Irene remained married, apparently happily, until he passed away in 1946 due to injuries sustained from a high-speed car accident. The third and final Mrs. Johnson laid him to rest next to Etta in Chicago’s Graceland Cemetery.

The two decades following Johnson’s death would reveal a dramatic demand for black civil rights as well as the federal rejection of any law restricting marriage based on race in *Loving v. Virginia*. Johnson and his white wives were legally allowed to marry; however, despite the legality of his marriages several decades before *Loving v. Virginia*,

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<sup>239</sup> Johnson, *Jack Johnson—In the Ring—and Out*, pg. 138-139.

<sup>240</sup> “My Husband by Mrs. Jack Johnson,” in *Jack Johnson—In the Ring—and Out*, pg. 17.

the white social and legal reaction to his relationships reveal a glimpse into the control of black male and white female sexuality. Regardless of what the law stated concerning the permissibility of Johnson's marriages, in the real-world application of social functioning, his relationships—and performance of black manhood in general—confronted the social and sexual hierarchical position of white men. In the early twentieth century, white male anxiety grew dramatically: black men were asserting masculine authority in larger ways and white women were pushing harder for suffrage and greater autonomy and movement. These changes produced anxiety and the response to this type of anxiety was heightened control.

Therefore, the Johnson Affair reveals common white social reactions to black-male-white-female interracial relationships to be far more than mere reactions. Rather, the legal and public records indicate the underlying, often manipulative, manner in which these “reactions” were actually methods by which to control the behavior of black men and white women. White women did not avoid sexual relationships with black men because they were too innately pure for such relationships; instead, white society hinged their purity on their racially appropriate choice in sexual partners. Likewise, white women did not experience mental disorders because of any fundamental, biological problem resulting from engaging in sexual intercourse with black men. Rather, the intensely damaging racial rhetoric and mental pressure white society placed upon white women created an environment that encouraged these issues of anxiety and depression to flourish—particularly if women were already struggling in this area. And finally, physical violence against black men was rarely a justified response to the actual sexual assault or rape of white women. In practice, it was a blatant, tangible tool used to control

black male and white female consensual sexuality in physical ways, serving as a warning to other such couples. Therefore, while white society represented these three elements as being in passive, reactionary, and consequential response to black-male-white-female interracial relations, in reality, they were fundamentally and absolutely actively structuring and controlling in nature.

A critique of this work might argue that Johnson was such an atypical black man of the period that his experiences are therefore an insufficient structure upon which to gauge the white public perception of black-male-white-female relationships. In rebuttal, the first part of this statement is true. Johnson was most certainly an atypical black man of the early twentieth century. While many other black men carefully operated within social and racial boundaries, fearing Jim Crow and the likelihood that they could be assaulted or killed for the slightest insult to white womanhood, Johnson blatantly and publicly disregarded the structures white society attempted to place upon his behavior. His intense athletic celebrity ensured his presence in the public conversation, dramatically setting him apart from the average black man who lived in Chicago in the period.

However, it is the very nature of Johnson's celebrity that created a vibrant written record of white attempts at control. While it is certain that other black men had sexual and romantic relationships with white women, the scandalous and clandestine nature of such unions as well as the relative obscurity of the individuals involved left little, if any, historical record of how these situations functioned within and navigated white society. The legal and media discussion of Johnson's relationships were undoubtedly heightened in emotion due to his celebrity and his blatant disregard of social norms. The violent

reality of the situation is that while white society endlessly discussed and condemned Johnson's relationships with no real physical action taken against his person, a lesser-known—and perhaps less physically imposing—black man in a similar situation would have likely met an excruciatingly brutal end with little public conversation concerning anything but his death. As a result, the Johnson Affair, although concerning an unusual black man, provided a space to reveal white society's methods of rhetorical control to a greater extent than was usually present.

The Purity of White Womanhood, mental pressures and threats of consequences, and physical violence were the primary methods used to dissuade white women and black men from intimate relationships. This control structured race, gender, and sex roles in the early twentieth century in a variety of ways—influencing not only how these groups interacted with each other, but also with the white patriarchy. The loss of a good reputation, depression, anxiety, suicide, race suicide, and lynching were all real consequences that could dramatically affect—if not effectively ruin—the lives of these individuals. For some, this white social control was enough to dissuade them from such a relationship; others, like Jack Johnson, Belle Schreiber, Etta Duryea, and Lucille Cameron, attempted to navigate interracial affection in a white patriarchal society that was hostile to their very existence. Etta Duryea's suicide was perhaps the most tangible example of how these methods of white social control could damage the people involved. *The Chicago Examiner* commented on the tragedy and the implication her death held for the success of such interracial relationships: “The big, strapping colored prize fighter, sobbing his heart out over the former Long Island belle. It was a picture terrible in its

significance. The woman of one world, the man of another, who had tried to make their worlds one—and had failed.”<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> *The Chicago Examiner*, September 12, 1912.

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