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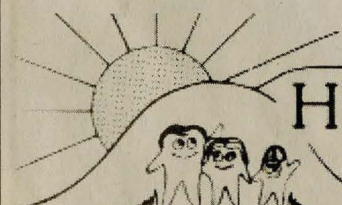
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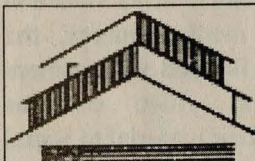
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Poetic Justice: A Bi-racial Man Pardoning A Black Man For Dating White Women

By TaRessa Stovall

Special to the NNPA from thedefendersonline.com

Like an embattled boxer returning to the ring, the question of whether the nation's first Black biracial president will pardon the first Black heavyweight champion for the crime of interracial dating is back for another round.

Media outlets from ABC News to ESPN to the Taiwan News are speculating about the continuing quest of two Republican boxing enthusiasts—New York Rep. Peter King and Arizona Sen. John McCain—and their supporters to reintroduce a congressional resolution urging a pardon for Jack Johnson, who held the heavyweight champion title from 1908 to 1915.

Jack and Lucille Johnson

The resolution was first introduced in April, 2009. Two months later, after gaining Senate approval, the Congress sent the President a formal request to pardon a man who is a powerful and still-controversial symbol of the clash of racial, sexual, athletic and political dynamics that permeate America as deeply today as they did in Johnson's heyday.

Three years after beating a White boxer in the "Fight of the Century," on July 4, 1910, Johnson was convicted under the Mann Act, which made it illegal to transport women across state lines for "immoral" purposes, but was often used to punish interracial couples.

As Lee A. Daniels wrote for TheDefendersOnline "once Jack Johnson won the heavyweight title, he was persecuted by no less than the Justice Department for his "unforgivable" relationships with white women

until he was falsely charged and convicted of luring white women into prostitution, and stripped of his title." Johnson left the country for several years, returning seven years after the conviction to serve a year and a day in the federal penitentiary at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

While the Republican senators have recently taken up the cause, some of Johnson's descendants have sought the presidential pardon for more than a decade. It has been written that the 2005 Ken Burns documentary, "Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson," is credited with bringing Johnson's tale—and this cause—to public attention.

President Bush twice refused to act on similar Congressional resolutions.

"It's an injustice that shouldn't fall through the cracks, and it looks like that's exactly what happened here," Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., told ESPN.Go.Com.

Rangel said he plans to discuss the pardon with William Daley, Obama's chief of staff, and Attorney General Eric Holder.

Opinions are peppering the blogosphere. "The pardon seems safe and innocuous enough, at least on the surface," writes Earl Ofari Hutchinson on TheGrio.com

"But there's my mystery as to why Obama remains cautious about Johnson. It's an old racial wrong that was marred with controversy. And, that's always fraught with risk for a president that has had to walk a fine line on racial matters in the White House."

Tim Dahlberg of The Associated Press opined that,

"President Barack Obama had the perfect chance to give Johnson a posthumous pardon last July 4, 100 years to the date after his win over Jim Jeffries ... [the president] could take care of it all with a stroke of his pen ... Why Obama didn't act last year is unclear, particularly since there seems to be little political risk associated with a posthumous pardon. Johnson was a victim of his times, and clearing his name in the history books isn't a notion that is terribly controversial. It's nearly 100 years late. And it can't come soon enough."

Joe Markman wrote in the Los Angeles Times during the 2009 pardoning round that, "The president has largely sought to avoid directly addressing racial issues. And critics add that posthumous pardons—used only twice in presidential history—consume precious time and resources from the president and Justice Department that could instead be focused on wading through thousands of clemency requests for people still living."

What all this macho speculation seems to miss is the poetic justice of a man with a Black father and White mother—whose union would have been illegal in some of these United States not so long before his birth—being pressured to "forgive" a high-profile Black athlete for liking White women.

Nor has anyone mentioned the irony of one uppity Black man being lobbied to grant a pardon to another uppity Black man, one whose achievement was as historic and significant as Obama's own, and who was just as impervious to criticism and other people's rules as the man who currently rules the land.

They miss the most crucial point: the truly urgent matters facing Black Americans right now—from escalating poverty and joblessness to the cradle-to-prison pipeline, to continuing inequities in everything from education to health care to you-name-it. Are those lobbying for Johnson's pardon thinking that it would have the symbolic weight of somehow lessening these injustices or the endless string of suffering they cause?

Are they seeing it as a form of psychological reparations? I believe most of us would much rather have the president focused on these urgent, tangible matters affecting millions of lives and devastating not just Black communities, but our entire nation.

Have they considered that pardoning Jack Johnson for interracial relationships is validating the notion that such unions are inherently so problematic that they require a presidential policy to undo? Are they expressing remorse and shame for the Mann Act?

Is there a single interracial couple in America—or the world today—who feels invested in the passage of this policy by a man who could have been Jack Johnson's son?

Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that the two senators pressuring and criticizing President Obama on this matter have yet to forgive him for having been elected and therefore facing this dilemma in the first place. Their move to force his hand is no less racist than the Mann Act itself.

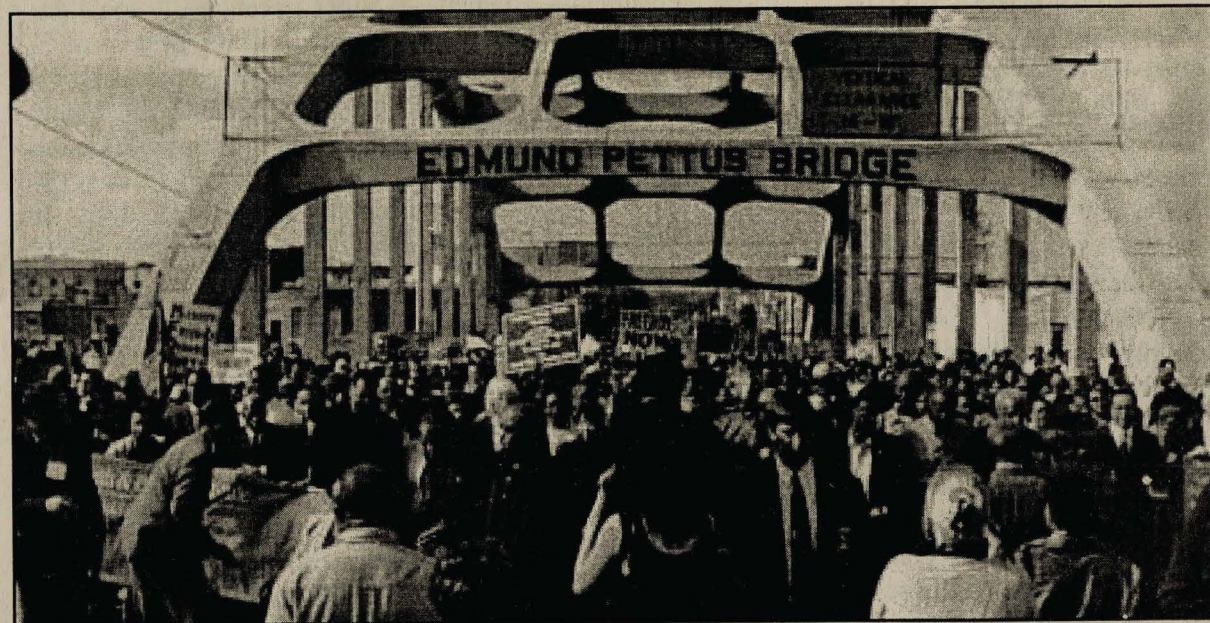
TaRessa Stovall is Managing Editor of TheDefendersOnline.

'Bloody Sunday' Commemoration Tour This Weekend

ATLANTA (TriceEdneyWire.com) — The Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Women's Organizational Movement for Equality Now (W.O.M.E.N.), Inc. will take busloads of people on a two-day tour through the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement this weekend, March 5-6.

The event commemorates 'Bloody Sunday', the day that civil rights marchers were brutally attacked by state and local police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in route from Selma to Montgomery. The more than 600 marchers were beaten with billy clubs and assaulted with tear gas.

Started in 1987, the annual Evelyn Gibson Lowery Civil Rights Heritage Tour visits several historic sites and meets with people instrumental in the Movement. Students, seniors, elected officials, dignitaries, and celebrities have joined the tour over the years.



This year, founder and chair of SCLC/W.O.M.E.N., Evelyn Gibson Lowery, will honor the family of slain activist Jimmie Lee Jackson, whose murderer - an Alabama State Trooper - plead guilty to the 1965 crime in 2010 and was sentenced to six months in jail.

The tribute will be held directly in front of the monument

that SCLC/W.O.M.E.N erected in Jackson's memory at the historic Zion Methodist Church, once a meeting place for civil rights workers.

The tour bus departs from the organization's headquarters on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta and traces the paths of history by visiting historical sites in Birmingham, Marion, Selma, Whitehall, Montgomery, and Tuskegee, Alabama. In addition to meeting people who made history participating in the movement and reliving events that forced dramatic change in America, the group will visit monuments constructed in memory of civil rights warriors Viola Liuzzo, Rev. Hosea Williams, Earl T. Shinhoster, Coretta Scott King, Rev. James Orange, Rev. James Reeb, Albert Turner, Sr., Rosa Parks, and the

Freedom Wall. Tour participants will also March across the Edmund Pettus Bridge reenacting the "Bloody Sunday" march.

On March 7, 1965, 600 peaceful protestors started a 50-mile march from Selma to Montgomery in response to Jimmy Lee Jackson's murder and to protest for voter's rights. As they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the marchers were violently attacked by State Troopers with nightsticks and tear gas. The violent incident - known as "Bloody Sunday" - was broadcast on live television and caused outrage around the country. Two days later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led a second march that was turned back by State Troopers. After a federal judicial review, over 25,000 people were allowed to march escorted by the National Guard. Soon afterward, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 forcing states to end discriminatory voting practices.

For more information call SCLC/Women's Organizational Movement for Equality Now at (404) 584-0303 or email sclcwomeninc@aol.com.

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