

*Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line.* Theresa Runstedtler. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012. ISBN: 9780520280113

In the early 1900s, Jack Johnson emerged as a figure of resistance. On July 4, 1910, Johnson, a black boxer born to former slaves in Galveston, Texas, defeated white America's "great white hope," James Jeffries, in a match that could hardly be called close. For many African Americans, Johnson offered a public image of black strength, both in his victories in the boxing ring and in the defiant way he challenged traditional notions of black respectability, surrounding himself with white women and reveling in his own dandyism. Over the last half-century, historians have examined Johnson's battles in the United States and the reactions he faced, discussing the role Johnson's victories played in challenging Jim Crow and American notions of white superiority. Theresa Runstedtler, though, in *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner* breaks new ground in the scholarly discussion on Johnson's life, turning away from how he was treated domestically to examine his impact on a global scale.

Runstedtler argues that during the prime of his career, Johnson was the "most famous black man on the planet" (1). The "domestication of Johnson's legacy," she argues, "points to the limitations of our own understandings of persistent racial inequality in this supposedly postcolonial, postracial era" (5). Using a rich collection of media sources, Runstedtler traces Johnson's own foreign travels as well as the spread of his legacy through early twentieth-century commodity culture to draw connections between American reactions to Johnson and how he was received internationally.

Runstedtler structures her book by following Johnson chronologically and connecting his travels to larger global historical trends at the time. Before beginning Johnson's global journey, Runstedtler places his cosmopolitanism in context, introducing the reader to the black Australian

fighter Peter Jackson, who preceded Johnson in traveling the globe. Runstedtler uses Jackson's travels to track the development of black pugilists who were "trapped" in a "web of minstrel imagery," but who "also proved indispensable to the development of a cosmopolitan black counterculture," and thus created a path for Johnson to follow (26). Johnson's rise though correlated with the growth of African Americans as the "stand-ins for an imagined community of nonwhite peoples across the globe," demonstrating why Runstedtler's work in unpacking Johnson's treatment abroad is so important to understanding global notions of race at the start of the twentieth century (27).

After examining Jackson, Runstedtler's first chapter follows Jack Johnson to Australia, specifically focusing on two controversies – his relationship with a white Australian woman and his defeat of heavyweight champion, Tommy Burns. Examining reactions by both the British and the Australian press, she demonstrates how fears over white degeneration and crises in white manhood reverberated across what Runstedtler terms the white, "Anglo-Saxon" world (45). Runstedtler lifts this term from her newspaper sources and wields it to emphasize the connections she sees between Australian, British, and American racial attitudes. The second chapter follows movements by these same Anglo-Saxon governments to ban the moving picture of Johnson's defeat of Jeffries. It is in this chapter that Runstedtler most heavily depicts the global impact of Johnson, as she examines how Johnson's victory over Burns, and his success in general, caused anticolonial celebrations in places as far away and as varied as India, Fiji, and South Africa. Because of the significance these anticolonial reactions have in outlining Johnson's impact on notions of empire, these reactions are worth investigating further.

Runstedtler then shifts back to Europe, depicting nuanced, complicated treatments of African Americans and other people of color in nations claiming to be less racist than the United

States. Johnson's match with Billy Wells in London, for example, revealed another global call for a great white hope. Runstedtler explains this call by examining the spread of American views of race through mass media, as well as through an influx of black labor to Europe, which she argues threatened white manhood.

Her fourth chapter examines Johnson's quest to find refuge abroad after he was unfairly convicted in 1913 under the Mann Act for white slave trafficking. In this chapter – as well as in her fifth chapter which complicates Johnson's treatment in Paris – Runstedtler makes some of her most important claims. Although black "sojourners" like Johnson found refuge and success in Paris and elsewhere in Europe as entertainers and fighters, their celebrity only aided in exoticizing and commodifying them. Runstedtler does important and convincing work in using French and African American newspapers, as well as Johnson's own autobiography, to show that although many African Americans saw Paris as a safe haven - an example of global racial tolerance - the French still used Johnson and other black entertainers to depict the elevated superiority of white men. Runstedtler explains that while the French were receptive toward black boxing (and black soldiers) in an age where other European nations were rejecting them, part of this reception arose due to fears by many physical culturists that "France was, in effect, a dying nation, not only unable to protect its citizens at home but also incapable of bearing its share of the white man's burden abroad" (171). Runstedtler's examination of the French media using American racial attitudes to sell tickets and the French response to their own white hope Georges Carpentier greatly complicates the tolerance and colorblindness many in France have been trying to convey since Johnson's time down until the present.

Runstedtler closes her book by examining the reception of black boxers as American influence expanded in the "borderlands" and "colonial spaces on the fringes of the United States"

(198). Tracing Johnson's journeys through Cuba and Mexico, Runstedtler demonstrates how the global color line allowed black Americans to both face resistance and find support among the citizens of the United States' southern neighbors. In her final chapter, Runstedtler shows how Johnson's reception globally impacted the rise of the Senegalese boxer, Battling Siki, in the late 1910s and early 1920s. His rise depicted a black colonial challenger to white imperialism - a rise, she argues convincingly, Johnson's legacy helped pave.

Runstedtler's work enters discussions across a broad range of historical fields. This book should be of great importance to sports historians because it provides a powerful example of how examining sport allows historians to explore foreign relations and social mobility and protest. Some of Runstedtler's best work is in tracing the spread of American ideas and attitudes toward race transnationally. Boxing, thus, serves as just one example of the rise of globalization at the start of the twentieth century. Her use of sources –newspapers from the United States, England, France, Mexico, Cuba, South Africa, Australia, India, and South America - is ambitious and allows her to capture a wide variety of perspectives. She heavily examines, for example, African American newspapers in the United States, like *The Defender* and the *New York Age* to show how black Americans understood themselves internationally. Her ideas enhance our view of imperialism and whiteness during Johnson's age and many of her arguments depict how the rise of this global black cosmopolitan culture had impacts on foreign affairs and issues of empire.

Still, the real importance of Runstedtler's work is in her uncovering of global structures of racism. In her preface, Runstedtler examines how nations today still view issues of race as a national problem, failing to see some of the more global connections. She emphasizes the danger of many nations in the Global North choosing to “waste energy ‘sparring’ over which nation is doing the best job of ‘managing’ its racial tensions,” rather than acknowledging the global

origins and consequences of this racism (xxii). Her examination of French attitudes during Johnson's era is particularly important in understanding this – Runstedtler demonstrates how the French were insistent on proving their tolerance, but how even when they avoided more direct forms of racism, the structures they used to support black entertainers like Johnson were inherently racist. Runstedtler could have been more explicit in exploring how Americans reacted to these attacks on their tolerance by the French and how this might have affected relationships between France and the United States during World War I. Runstedtler examines foreign relations in other chapters and discusses the role of black soldiers in the French army during World War I, and so addressing how, or if, varied treatments of Johnson and efforts by the French to promote their own tolerance influenced relations between the French and the Americans could enhance her argument about Johnson's global impact. Even without this exploration though, Runstedtler's work is still more than successful at showing complicated, international attitudes of race by investigating reactions to and treatments of Jack Johnson.

Although this book was published in 2013, and therefore before the increased media attention to racism both domestically and abroad that has come with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and increased social media awareness of structures of inequality like mass incarceration, this only makes Runstedtler's work more important today. Although she focuses on the life of a boxer, Runstedtler's book is exceptionally important in the way it traces the development of global American racism. In a current environment where Americans are being forced to grapple more directly with increased visibility of structural inequalities and racism, Runstedtler's book demonstrates why this is not simply an American problem. Her book provides proof that there is no benefit gained by nations arguing they are less racist than others, because as Runstedtler demonstrates, this racism exists without any regard for national borders.

As a result, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner* is particularly topical and relevant today, making it worth reading for almost any scholar.

Michael Kadow is a Ph.D. student in the Department of History at the University of Minnesota.