

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
BOXING

While humans have used their hands to engage in combat since the dawn of man, boxing originated in ancient Greece as an Olympic event. It is one of the most popular, controversial, and misunderstood sports in the world. For its advocates, it is a heroic expression of unfettered individualism. For its critics, it is a depraved and ruthless physical and commercial exploitation of mostly poor young men. This *Companion* offers engaging and informative chapters about the social impact and historical importance of the sport of boxing. It includes a comprehensive chronology of the sport, listing all the important events and personalities. Chapters examine topics such as women in boxing, boxing and the rise of television, boxing in Africa, boxing and literature, and boxing and Hollywood films. A unique book for scholars and fans alike, this *Companion* explores the sport from its inception in ancient Greece to the death of its most celebrated figure, Muhammad Ali.

**Gerald Early** is Professor of English and African American Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. He has written about boxing since the early 1980s. His book, *The Culture of Bruising*, won the 1994 National Book Critics Circle Award for criticism. He also edited *The Muhammad Ali Reader* and *Body Language: Writers on Sports*. His essays have appeared several times in the Best American Essays series.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-05801-9 — The Cambridge Companion to Boxing  
Edited by Gerald Early  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
BOXING

EDITED BY  
GERALD EARLY  
*Washington University, St. Louis*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-05801-9 — The Cambridge Companion to Boxing  
Edited by Gerald Early  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107058019](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107058019)

DOI: 10.1017/9781107415355

© Cambridge University Press 2019

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2019

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd, Padstow Cornwall

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Early, Gerald Lyn, editor.

Title: The Cambridge companion to boxing / edited by Gerald Early,  
University of Washington, St Louis.

Other titles: Companion to boxing

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, N.Y.:

Cambridge University Press, 2018. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018039104 | ISBN 9781107058019 (Hardback) |

ISBN 9781107631205 (Paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Boxing – History. | Boxers (Sports) – History.

Classification: LCC GV1121.C34 2018 | DDC 796.83–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018039104>

ISBN 978-1-107-05801-9 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-63120-5 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

## CONTENTS

	<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	page ix
	<i>Chronology</i>	xiii
	Introduction: The Last Sport Standing GERALD EARLY	I
I	Boxing in the Ancient World BYRON J. NAKAMURA	22
2	The Bare-Knuckle Era ELLIOTT J. GORN	34
3	Jem Mace and the Making of Modern Boxing ADAM CHILL	52
4	Race and Boxing in the Nineteenth Century LOUIS MOORE	59
5	Joe Gans and His Contemporaries COLLEEN AYCOCK	69
6	Harry Greb, Gene Tunney, Jack Dempsey, and the Roaring Twenties CARLO ROTELLA	79
7	Prime (and Crime) Time: Boxing in the 1950s TROY RONDINONE	90
8	The Africans: Boxing and Africa ADEYINKA MAKINDE	99

## CONTENTS

9	A Century of Fighting Latinos: From the Margins to the Mainstream	118
	BENITA HEISKANEN	
10	Women's Boxing: Bout Time	137
	CATHY VAN INGEN	
11	Jews in Twentieth-Century Boxing	150
	STEVEN A. RIESS	
12	A Surprising Dearth of Top English-Born Jewish Fighters in the Bare-Knuckle Era	164
	TONY GEE	
13	Joe Louis: "You Should Have Seen Him Then"	173
	RANDY ROBERTS	
14	Sugar Ray Robinson's Furious Beauty	185
	WIL HAYGOOD	
15	Echoes from the Jungle: Muhammad Ali in the Early 1970s	194
	LEWIS A. ERENBERG	
16	The Unusable Champions: Sonny Liston (1962–1964) and Larry Holmes (1978–1985)	207
	MICHAEL EZRA	
17	Emile Griffith: An Underrated Champion	213
	MARK SCOTT	
18	Pierce Egan, Boxing, and British Nationalism	218
	ADAM CHILL	
19	Jose Torres: The Boxer as Writer	223
	ADEYINKA MAKINDE	
20	"Well, What Was it Really Like?" George Plimpton, Norman Mailer, and the Heavyweights	236
	KASIA BODDY	
21	Jack London and the Great White Hopes of Boxing Literature	246
	SCOTT D. EMMERT	

## CONTENTS

22	Body and Soul of the Screen Boxer LEGER GRINDON	258
23	Black Slaver: Jack Johnson and the Mann Act REBECCA WANZO	273
24	Yesternow: Jack Johnson, Documentary Film, and the Politics of Jazz BENJAMIN CAWTHRA	279
25	Opera in the Ring ROSALIND EARLY	289
26	The Voice of Boxing: A Brief History of American Broadcasting Ringside COLLEEN AYCOCK	296
27	Ralph Wiley's Surprising <i>Serenity</i> SHELLEY FISHER FISHKIN	307
28	Muhammad Ali: King of the Inauthentic GERALD EARLY	313
	<i>Index</i>	333

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-05801-9 — The Cambridge Companion to Boxing  
Edited by Gerald Early  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---



## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

COLLEEN AYCOCK, PhD, lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She is the co-editor for the International Boxing Research Organization and member of the New Mexico Boxing Hall of Fame. She has authored and co-edited five books on boxing and numerous articles in sports magazines and journals.

KASIA BODDY is Reader in American Literature at the University of Cambridge. Her books include *Boxing: A Cultural History* (2008), *The American Short Story Since 1950* (2010), *The New Penguin Book of American Short Stories* (2011), and *Geranium* (2013).

BENJAMIN CAWTHRA is Professor of History and Associate Director of the Center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. He is the author of *Blue Notes in Black and White: Photography and Jazz* (2011).

ADAM CHILL is Associate Professor of European and World History and Global Studies at Castleton University in Vermont. He is the author of *Bare-Knuckle Britons and Fighting Irish: Boxing, Race, Religion and Nationality in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (2017).

GERALD EARLY is the Merle Kling Professor of Modern Letters in the Departments of English and African and African American Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. He also serves as the executive editor of the *Common Reader*, the online interdisciplinary journal of Washington University. He is the editor of the *Muhammad Ali Reader*.

ROSALIND EARLY is the associate editor of periodicals at Washington University and freelance writer in St. Louis. Her work has appeared in *American Theater* magazine, *Humanities*, the magazine for the national endowment for the humanities, as well as *St. Louis Magazine*.

SCOTT D. EMMERT is Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh. With Steven Trout he is the co-editor of *World War I in American Fiction: An*

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

*Anthology of Short Stories* (2014), and with Michael Cocchiarale he co-edited *Critical Insights: American Short Story* (2015), *Critical Insights: American Sports Fiction* (2013), and *Upon Further Review: Sports in American Literature* (2004). He is the author of *Loaded Fictions: Social Critique in the Twentieth-Century Western* (1996) and of articles on Midwestern literature and American literary naturalism.

LEWIS A. EREBERG is Professor of History Emeritus at Loyola University, Chicago. An authority on the Second World War and American culture, he has been on NPR, the Milt Rosenberg Show, and the Studs Terkel program and has been interviewed for articles in *The New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Nation*. He is the author of *The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis vs. Schmeling* (2005, paperback 2007) and *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (1981, paperback 1984). He is also the author of the forthcoming *The Rumble in the Jungle: Muhammad Ali and George Foreman in Africa*.

MICHAEL EZRA is Professor of American Multicultural Studies at Sonoma State University. He is the author of the book *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon* and the editor of the *Journal of Civil and Human Rights*. His book *The Bittersweet Science: Fifteen Writers in the Gym, in the Corner, and at Ringside*, co-edited with Carlo Rotella, was published in 2017.

SHELLEY FISHER FISHKIN is the Joseph S. Atha Professor in the Humanities, Professor of English, and Director of American Studies at Stanford. She is the author, editor, or co-editor of over forty books, and has published over 100 articles, essays, and reviews, many of which have focused on issues of race and racism in America, and on recovering previously silenced voices from the past. Her award-winning books include *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices* (1993), *Feminist Engagements: Forays into American Literature and Culture* (2009), and *Writing America: Literary Landmarks from Walden Pond to Wounded Knee* (2015). Her research on race and American literature has been featured twice on the front page of the *New York Times*.

TONY GEE is a former kickboxer, and a Xen-Do black belt, and is now considered one of the leading authorities on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bare-knuckle fighting. He is a contributor on the subject to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and author of the acclaimed publication on the London Prize Ring, *Up to Scratch: Bareknuckle Fighting and Heroes of the Prize-ring* (1998). He has recently been inducted into the Bare Knuckle Boxing Hall of Fame for his work as a historian.

ELLIOTT J. GORN is Joseph Gagliano Professor of History at Loyola University Chicago. He is the author of several books, including *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*; *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America*;

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

*Dillinger's Wild Ride, the year that Made America's Public Enemy Number One*; and co-author with Warren Goldstein of *A Brief History of American Sports*. His most recent book is about the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, *Let the People See: The Story of Emmett Till* (2018).

LEGER GRINDON is the Walter Cerf Professor of Film and Media Culture at Middlebury College in Vermont. He is the author of *Knockout: Boxing and the Boxer in American Cinema*; *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, Histories, Controversies*, and *Shadows on the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film*. He is currently writing a book on contemporary documentary film.

WIL HAYGOOD, author of *Sweet Thunder: The Life and Times of Sugar Ray Robinson* (2009), has written eight nonfiction books. His latest is *Tigerland: 1968–1969: A City Divided, a Nation Torn Apart, and a Magical Season of Healing*. A Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, Haygood serves as Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at Miami University, in Ohio.

BENITA HEISKANEN is Director of the John Morton Center for North American Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. She is the author of *The Urban Geography of Boxing: Race, Class, and Gender in the Ring* (2012, paperback 2014). She has published a number of book chapters and journal articles on sport in English, including the *European Journal of American Studies*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Diálogos Latinoamericanos*, *Auto/Biography*, and *Journal of Sport History*, as well as two edited volumes in Finnish.

ADEYINKA MAKINDE is a Visiting Lecturer in Law at the University of Westminster in the United Kingdom. He is the author of two books on pugilists, *Dick Tiger: The Life and Times of a Boxing Immortal* and *Jersey Boy: The Life and Mob Slaying of Frankie DePaula*.

LOUIS MOORE is Associate Professor of History at Grand Valley State University.

BYRON J. NAKAMURA is Associate Professor of History at Southern Connecticut State University.

STEVEN A. RIESS is a Bernard Brommel Research Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago.

RANDY ROBERTS, one of the leading sports scholars in the United States, is Distinguished Professor of History at Purdue University. He is the author of several biographies of professional boxers, including *Jack Dempsey: The Manassa Mauler* (1979), *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (1983), *Joe Louis: Hard Times Man* (2010). His latest book, with co-author Johnny Smith, is *Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship Between Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X* (2016).

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

TROY RONDINONE is Professor of History at Southern Connecticut State University. He additionally serves on the Executive Board of the Greater New Haven Labor History Association. Troy received his PhD in history at UCLA, and his areas of scholarly interest include working-class history, economic history, and radical studies. He has published articles in *American Quarterly*, *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, *Connecticut History*, and *Labor Studies* as well as writing two books, *The Great Industrial War: Framing Class Conflict in the Media, 1865–1950* (2010) and *Friday Night Fighter: Gaspar “Indio” Ortega and the Golden Age of Television Boxing* (2013). He is also the recipient of the Norton Nezvinsky Trustees Research Award for 2010. He is currently working on an analysis of working-class language with Graham Cassano of Oakland University.

CARLO ROTELLA is Professor of American Studies, Journalism, and English at Boston College and a regular contributor to the *New York Times Magazine*. His books include *Cut Time: An Education at the Fights*, *Good With Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt*, *Playing in Time: Essays, Profiles, and Other True Stories*, and, with co-editor Michael Ezra, *The Bittersweet Science: Fifteen Writers in the Gym, in the Corner, and at Ringside*.

MARK SCOTT is a writer and former Golden Glove boxer who lives in Austin, Texas. He has written four books with Colleen Aycock: *Joe Gans: A Biography of the First African American World Boxing Champion* (2008), *The First Black Boxing Champions: Essays on Fighters of the 1800s to the 1920s* (2011), *Tex Rickard: Boxing’s Greatest Promoter* (2012), and *Boxing Short Stories* (2014).

CATHY VAN INGEN is an Associate Professor at Brock University (Department of Kinesiology). Dr. van Ingen’s research is on the cultural study of sport, focusing on issues of inequality, violence, and social change. She is the founder of Shape Your Life, a free, non-contact boxing program for female identified survivors of violence in Toronto, Canada.

REBECCA WANZO is Associate Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Washington University in St. Louis.

## CHRONOLOGY

### The Ancient World

- 2400 BC Earliest depictions of boxing in Ancient Mesopotamia.
- 1500 BC Boxing Boys Fresco on the island of Thera.
- 1350 BC Boxing emerges in Egypt.
- 776 BC First Olympic Games are held.
- 700 BC Homer's account of boxing in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Virgil's boxing match between Dares and Entellus in the *Aeneid* is similar to boxing matches found in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.  
(circa)
- 688 BC Pygmachia, ancient Greek boxing, is added to the Olympic Games. This combat sport is fought with leather wrappings around the hands, knuckles, and wrist. As the sport developed, more sharp-edged gloves were used that could lacerate the skin. Fighters fought to the finish, until one was unable or unwilling to continue. Blows were only permitted with the fists. Kicks were not allowed nor were blows to the genitals. Fights were refereed and confined to a space called the skamma. There were no rounds, no time limit, or rest periods.
- 648 BC Pankration, a no-holds barred, unrestrained combat sport that combines boxing and wrestling is introduced at the Olympics. Despite its violence or perhaps because of it, it maintains its popularity for centuries, well into the days of the Roman Empire. The sport was meant to resemble the combat of war and was so brutal that some contestants were actually killed during the contest. Biting and gouging were not permitted but nearly everything else was, including breaking fingers and choking.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 5th century BC Diagoras of Rhodes and his family dominate Pan Hellenic boxing.
- 480 BC Theagenes of Thasos wins his first of multiple Olympic titles. A novel about the great athlete called *The Olympian: A Tale of Ancient Hellas* by E. S. Kraay is published in 2008.
- 2nd century AD Melankomas of Caria retires undefeated. He is known to us from the 28th and 29th Discourses of Dio Chrysostom. It is not entirely clear whether Melankomas was a real person or a fictive creation.
- 393 AD Christian emperor Theodosius I abolishes boxing, indeed the Olympics as well, in the Roman Empire due to excessive brutality. Pugilatus, as it was called in Rome, usually employed gloves with embedded sharpened metal studs, reminiscent of the gloves used in Pan Hellenic boxing but even more deadly.

## The Modern World

- 1681 First known reported bare-knuckle boxing match. The combatants were an unnamed butcher and the Duke of Albemarle's footman.
- 1719 James Figg becomes first British heavyweight champion and opens his Amphitheatre. This date is much in dispute in both regards. At least one scholar explains that there is no contemporary evidence that Figg's Amphitheatre existed this early. Figg was known predominantly as England's premiere swordsman and his actual fistic participation was minor. Figg is regarded today as England's first pugilistic champion but the date here is considered by some scholars to be arbitrary.
- 1725 First known international pugilistic contest. This was between John Whitacre, English, and the Venetian Gondolier, Italian.
- 1740 Jack Broughton beats George Taylor and becomes champion.
- 1743 Jack Broughton's Rules are published and become the governing rules of the sport and will remain so until the London Prize Ring Rules replace them nearly a century later. Broughton's Rules required that fighters must come to a "scratch" mark in the center of the area that has been marked off for the bout and each man must be "set," that is, in a fighting position, before

#### CHRONOLOGY

fighting can commence or resume. A fight was over when one of the combatants could not make it back to the scratch mark within the time allotted after a knockdown. The Rules outlawed blows below the waist and limited who could enter the ring and when. A fighter was considered down if he fell to his knees. An umpire was established to settle disputes about knockdowns, fouls, and the like. The Rules greatly reduced the chaos that surrounded bouts in the early days of prizefighting. But the Rules were designed largely to provide clarification for betting rather than to safeguard boxers. Betting was the major impetus for boxing. Also, opening of Broughton's Amphitheatre, the first establishment dedicated to pugilism. James Figg's Amphitheatre, although showcasing the first regular pugilistic contests, nevertheless concentrated on "trials of skill" involving weapons, rather than "trials of manhood" involving fists. (Contrary to popular belief, weapons and fists were not used in the same contest.) Broughton's Amphitheatre did, on occasions, include other entertainments but boxing predominated.

- 1777 Former American slave Bill Richmond goes to England where he achieves considerable fame as a boxer, the first black man to do so. He was defeated by Tom Cribb in 1805 and seconded Tom Molineaux, when the latter fought Cribb for the title.
- 1787–1795 This is the era of Daniel Mendoza, the first prominent Jewish boxer, the most scientific and intelligent fighter of his time, and the 16th champion of England. The latter point is disputed by at least one scholar who can find no evidence in contemporary sources that Mendoza was ever referred to as champion. He himself claims to be champion. He is, nonetheless, one of the dominant fighters of this period and the most famous Jewish fighter of the time.
- 1788–1790 During these years Daniel Mendoza fights Richard Humphries three times, winning the last two. These fights reflect a high point of interest in boxing. There is simply unprecedented interest in these fights with extensive newspaper coverage of the combatants. At this point, it might be said that bare-knuckle fighting has "arrived" as a truly popular sport. Indeed, for their last fight, in a barn at Doncaster in Yorkshire, Mendoza erects a gate and, for the first time in boxing history, spectators have to pay an admission.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1810 Tom Cribb beats Tom Molineaux in thirty-nine rounds. Molineaux, a former American slave, followed Richmond to England and practiced the profession of boxing, which he had learned on plantations in the United States. The fight with Cribb is the first international and interracial bout for the championship. Richmond serves as Molineaux's second. Molineaux actually knocks out Cribb but through seeming chicanery in Cribb's corner and the complicity of the partisan crowd is unable to claim victory. Cribb recovers his senses and defeats a badly fatigued Molineaux. The fight generated massive interest at the time. There is a debate among scholars about whether Molineaux was "robbed." What happened to Molineaux in this fight was not at all unusual for a prizefight at this time, which were typically quite rowdy affairs.
- 1811 Tom Cribb beats Tom Molineaux in rematch in eleven rounds. Molineaux, under-trained, dissipated from rowdy living, and somewhat demoralized by the results of the first fight, is much easier for Cribb to defeat this time.
- 1812 Journalist Pierce Egan's first edition of *Boxiana or Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism* is published and becomes the first prominent and well-regarded history of the sport.
- 1822 William Hazlitt's famed essay, "The Fight," is published, describing the journey to and from the December 1821 fight between Bill Neate and Tom Hickman as well as the fight itself. As boxing is illegal in England at the time, followers of the sport often have to go on pilgrimages to get to fights. Locations are frequently changed at the last minute if it is learned that the constables know about the fight. The essay is considered one of the finest pieces of first-person sports reportage and certainly the best description of the atmosphere surrounding a bare-knuckle fight. Norman Mailer uses the essay as a model for his 1975 book, also entitled *The Fight*, about the 1974 championship fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman that took place in Zaire.
- 1838 The London Prize Ring Rules are established, commonly called the "New Rules" in contemporary sources. They are revised in 1843, 1853, and 1864. The LPRR outlaw biting, butting, gouging, holding and hitting, scratching, hitting an opponent when he is down, and kicking. The LPRR requires the ring to



CHRONOLOGY

be 24 ft. square and with designated corners for each fighter. The LPRR reiterate the Broughton Rules that each fighter must come up to scratch for each round. A round ends when a man is knocked down. Fighters have thirty seconds to come to scratch and resume the fight. Although very different from modern boxing, under LPRR bare-knuckle boxing comes to resemble somewhat what boxing is like today. The new rules have made the sport a little less gruesome and brutal to watch than under the Broughton Rules. Fights are still to the finish, with one man quitting or so badly beaten as to be unable to continue. The LPRR are designed to safeguard fighters a bit. Nonetheless, bare-knuckle boxing remains a rough, tough, vicious, unseemly sport.

- 1858 John Morrissey defeats John C. Heenan to win the American heavyweight championship. Morrissey later served two terms in the US Congress.
- 1860 The first “world” heavyweight championship fight takes place in Farnborough, England, between John C. Heenan (United States) and Tom Sayers (England). After two hours of hard scrapping, the two fighters abandon the ring when spectators begin to scramble to escape the police who never officially stop the fight. The referee declares the fight a draw. Among the spectators are Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, and Lord Palmerston.
- 1861 Britain passes an anti-prizefight law that, among other things, makes it illegal to transport anyone to a prizefight. The sport diminishes in popularity in Britain.
- 1867 The Marquess of Queensberry Rules are published and will replace the London Prize Ring Rules. At first these rules apply only to amateur boxers but gradually catch with professional fighters as well. Boxers are required to wear gloves which protect the hands and enable the combatants to throw more blows. Wrestling, with the exception of clinches, has been eliminated. Rounds are now timed at three minutes. Fighters are given a one-minute rest between rounds. Fights are fought for a set number of rounds and if the bout ends with both fighters still standing, designated judges using a point system will designate who, in their judgment, won the fight on the basis of which fighter won the most rounds.

## CHRONOLOGY

Although bare-knuckle boxing will continue for several years, these rules are the launch of modern boxing. By the end of the nineteenth century, bare-knuckle fighting has been virtually eliminated from the sport.

- 1873 Richard K. Fox launches *Police Gazette, the Leading, Illustrated Sporting Journal of America* in New York. Lurid and sometimes unreliable, the paper becomes the leading publication about boxing in the United States. It ceases publication in 1932.
- 1877 Jem Mace, boxing champion in England and the United States, goes to Australia and meets Larry Foley, the undisputed champion of Australia. Using Queensberry Rules, they usher in a golden age of boxing in Australia.
- 1877 John Knifton defeats Tom Tully for the championship of England in the first heavyweight championship fight under Marquess of Queensberry Rules
- 1880 Henry Downes Miles's *Pugilistica* is published, intended to succeed Egan's *Boxiana* as the definitive (and more accurate) history of boxing.
- 1880 Prizefighting is illegal in every state in the United States.
- 1882 George Bernard Shaw publishes a boxing novel, *Cashel Byron's Profession*.
- 1886 Peter Jackson, The Black Prince, émigré to Australia from the West Indies, defeats Tom Lees for the Australian heavyweight becoming the first black man to win the professional heavyweight of any country. He challenges American champion John L. Sullivan who draws the color line and refuses to fight him.
- 1889 John L. Sullivan beats Jake Kilrain in Mississippi and wins the American championship, becoming America's first celebrity boxer.
- 1889 Jem Smith draws with Frank Slavin in Belgium, the last Prize Ring championship fight in Europe.
- 1889 The manual *Boxing* is published by R. G. Allanson-Winn (Lord Headley). An Irish peer and accomplished amateur boxer, Headley famously converts to Islam in 1913.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1892 James J. Corbett knocks out John L. Sullivan to become the first heavyweight champion under Marquess of Queensberry Rules. The era of gloved boxing and timed rounds has begun. Distinct weight divisions have been firmly established now. George Dixon becomes the first African American to win a boxing title when he knocks out Jack Skelly to win the world featherweight title. Both fights were at the Carnival of Champions in New Orleans. In 1893, Richard K. Fox, owner of the *Police Gazette*, “officially” recognizes Dixon as the featherweight champion.
- 1894 Thomas Edison films the first boxing match, a staged match for film between heavyweight champion James J. Corbett and Peter Courtney in Orange, New Jersey.
- 1896 The Horton Act legalizes professional boxing in New York state from 1896 to 1900 when it expires. It would not be until 1920 that boxing would again be legal in the state of New York.
- 1897 Nellie Verrill Mighels Davis becomes the first woman reporter to cover a prizefight when she reports the Bob Fitzsimmons–Jim Corbett heavyweight championship fight for the Nevada Appeal. The fight ends with Fitzsimmons knocking out Corbett with his famous “solar plexus” punch. Fitzsimmons will win titles as a middleweight, light heavyweight, and heavyweight, becoming the first fighter to do so.
- 1897 The state of Nevada legalizes boxing and becomes an important site for championship matches.
- 1899 Peter Felix, émigré to Australia from St. Croix, defeats Bill Doherty to become the second black man to win the Australian heavyweight title.
- 1901 Joe Walcott of Barbados becomes the first black man to win the welterweight title by knocking out Jim “Rube” Fern in Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada.
- 1902 Joe Gans, considered one of the greatest fighters of all time, becomes the first African American to win the lightweight title, knocking out Frank Erne.
- 1904 Men’s boxing is introduced in the Olympics Games held in St. Louis.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1905 Jack London publishes *The Game*, a boxing novel. London will publish several other boxing stories over the course of his career.
- 1906 Jack Johnson defeats Sam Langford, the Boston Tarbaby, one of the great black fighters of his age, who manages to give Johnson a competitive battle despite the fact Johnson outweighed him by nearly 30 pounds and was six inches taller. Unlike the other black fighters of this era whom Johnson would fight several times, he would never fight Langford again. Seventy-six of Langford's fights were against black opponents as black fighters often were forced to fight one another because of Jim Crow.
- 1906 Joe Gans wins a 42-round lightweight title defense against Oscar "Battling" Nelson at Goldfield, Nevada. It was the most talked-about and publicized non-heavyweight title fight of the era. For instance, reporters read by bullhorn the round-by-round Gans-Nelson fight results from Western Union Telegraph transmissions at their various newspaper headquarters. Famed promoter Tex Rickard promoted the fight.
- 1907 Andrew Jephtha of Cape Town, South Africa, becomes the first black fighter to hold a British title (unofficially) when he wins the British welterweight championship.
- 1908 Jack Johnson defeats Tommy Burns in Sydney, Australia to become the first African American heavyweight boxing champion. The cry goes up from writer Jack London for a "Great White Hope" to defeat Johnson and return the title to the white race. Battling Nelson defeats Joe Gans to win the lightweight title. In a return match a few months later, Nelson retains the title and defeats Gans a second time.
- 1910 On July 4, "Great White Hope" and former champion Jim Jeffries returns to the ring to face champion Jack Johnson in what is billed at the time as "the Fight of Century," the most publicized sporting event in American history to that point. Johnson easily wins the match, the result causing racial violence throughout the United States. Tex Rickard, the promoter, vowed not to promote another interracial heavyweight championship fight again. The federal government interdicts the film of the fight under the Interstate Commerce Clause in the interest of public safety.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1910 Former lightweight champion Joe Gans dies in Baltimore from complications from tuberculosis.
- 1911 National Sporting Club imposes a “color bar” in British boxing after Home Secretary Winston Churchill bows to pressure to declare as illegal and ban a fight between heavy-weight champion Jack Johnson and “Bombardier” Billy Wells scheduled for October.
- 1912 Jerry Jerome becomes the first Aboriginal to win an Australian boxing title, defeating Ted Whiting to win the Australian middleweight title.
- 1912 In Australia, Sam Langford defeats Sam McVey, a noted black American fighter of the period, to win the Australian heavy-weight championship. McVey and Langford would fight six bouts against each other while both were in Australia.
- 1913 Jack Johnson is convicted in federal court of violation of the Mann Act and is sentenced to a year and a day in prison. He flees the country rather than serve the sentence.
- 1915 Jess Willard knocks out Jack Johnson in Havana, Cuba, ending the controversial reign of the first black heavyweight champion. Johnson claims that he threw the fight in order to have the Justice Department drop his conviction for violation of the Mann (or White Slavery) Act so that he could return to the United States. He left the United States in 1913, immediately after his conviction of transporting a woman across state lines for immoral purposes.
- 1917 Benny Leonard, “The Ghetto Wizard,” considered by many boxing authorities to be the greatest of all Jewish boxers, wins the lightweight title by defeating Freddie Welsh. He holds the title until his retirement in 1925.
- 1920 Jack Johnson returns to the United States to serve his one-year prison sentence at Leavenworth federal prison.
- 1920 Walker Law legalizes professional boxing in the state of New York and forms the basis for legalization in other states.
- 1921 Jack Dempsey defeats Georges Carpentier in the first live radio broadcast of a championship boxing match.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1922 Tex Rickard is jailed and charged with statutory rape of a 15-year old girl. The charges stem from his relationship with the 15-year old and two other girls, 11 and 12. He is acquitted by an all-male jury despite the fact that the prosecution had a strong case. Rickard's attorney successfully attacks the reputation of the girl in question after he is unable to shake her testimony under cross-examination. Despite the acquittal, Rickard's reputation is stained.
- 1922 Battling Siki becomes the first African to win a world championship when he defeats the popular French fighter Georges Carpentier to win the light heavyweight title.
- 1922 Nat Fleischer, former sports editor at the *New York Telegram*, launches *The Ring* magazine, the Bible of Boxing, which becomes the most famous boxing publication in the United States.
- 1923 Shelby, Montana holds a heavyweight championship match between champion Jack Dempsey and challenger Tom Gibbon. The town's desire for the match is the result of an oil boom which convinced the town's leaders that a boxing match would make the town famous and increase tourism. The tourism never materializes; the fight draws a disappointing attendance and the promoter, Tex Rickard, and Dempsey's manager, Jack "Doc" Kearns fleece the town for everything they can in the demands they make for the fight to be held there. Dempsey wins the lackluster fight and Kearns absconds with the gate receipts as Dempsey's share of the fight. The match actually bankrupts the town's four banks that backed the fight and is one of the most disastrous boxing ventures in the history of the sport.
- 1923 Luis Firpo, an Argentine nicknamed the Wild Bull of the Pampas, becomes the first Latin American fighter to contend for the heavyweight title when he loses to Jack Dempsey in September at the Polo Grounds in New York. It is considered to be one of the most exciting title fights ever with Firpo being knocked down seven times in the first round. But in the same round, Firpo manages to trap Dempsey against the ropes and knock the champion clean out of the ring. Dempsey, who lands on the typewriters of the reporters at ringside, manages, with some support from the reporters, to get back in the ring before being counted out. (A fighter is given twenty seconds to get back in the ring if knocked out of it, rather than the ten

## CHRONOLOGY

- seconds to get up if knocked down inside the ring.) Dempsey then knocks out Firpo in the second round. The moment of Firpo knocking Dempsey out of the ring was captured by Ashcan painter George Bellows in 1924 in one of the most famous pieces of art dealing with boxing or indeed any sport.
- 1925 Promoter Tex Rickard builds the third iteration of Madison Square Garden between 49th and 50th Streets on Eighth Avenue which becomes the most famous site in the world for professional boxing. It would be replaced by a new Garden built above the Pennsylvania Station by Irving Mitchell Felt in 1968.
- 1926 Tiger Flowers becomes the first African American middleweight champion, defeating Harry Greb.
- 1926 Black British middleweight Len Johnson goes to Australia as he is unable to fight for the title in England because of his color. He has some success outclassing several Aussie fighters including welterweight and middleweight champion Harry Collins. When his career ends, Johnson becomes a lorry and bus driver and an active member of the Communist Party.
- 1927 The first Jack Dempsey–Gene Tunney fight in 1926 ends with Tunney defeating Dempsey in ten rounds, thoroughly outboxing the hard-charging champion. The controversial rematch one year later features “the long count.” Dempsey once again is being outclassed by Tunney’s stylish boxing but knocks Tunney down in the seventh round. Instead of immediately going to a neutral corner as the rules stipulate, Dempsey hovers over Tunney for several seconds. The referee actually has to push Dempsey to a neutral corner. It is only when Dempsey is finally pushed away that the referee actually starts the count over Tunney who rises at nine, although he has been down on the canvas for at least fourteen seconds. By then, Tunney has regained his senses, continues to outbox Dempsey, indeed, knocking Dempsey down in the eighth round. Dempsey loses the rematch as well. Both Dempsey–Tunney fights are among the biggest sports events of the 1920s with multi-million dollar gates, with a glamorous audience of the rich, the beautiful, the celebrity, and smart set crowds. Boxing, especially big-time matches, is attracting these sorts of people during this era all over the Western world, in Europe and the

## CHRONOLOGY

- United States. Tunney is the first true intellectual-gentleman type, modeled after George Bernard Shaw's Cashel Byron, to become heavyweight champion. Tunney in fact is friends with Shaw and lectured on Shakespeare at Trinity College, Dublin. He marries a wealthy socialite. One of his sons, John V. Tunney, becomes a US senator in the early 1970s.
- 1927 *The Atlantic Monthly* publishes Ernest Hemingway's "Fifty Grand," a story about a fixed fight that does not go as planned. It becomes one of the most famous and well-regarded pieces of boxing fiction in American literary history.
- 1931 Mahonri Young casts a bronze statue of Joe Gans from a wax cast that was used in a Paul Muni movie called *Seven Faces*. Gans's wax statue in the movie, one among seven of famous men in different fields, represented sport. The other six wax statues were destroyed but Young's bronze casting of Gans wound up in Madison Square Garden sometime during the 1930s. Surprisingly, no one at Madison Square Garden had any idea that it was a bronze of Joe Gans.
- 1933 Middleweights Archie Sexton and Lauri Raiteri fight the first televised boxing match – an exhibition aired by the BBC.
- 1933 Adolph Hitler listens to radio transmission of the Max Baer v. Max Schmeling heavyweight fight. Baer wins the fight.
- 1934 Heavyweight boxer Max Baer stars in *The Prizefighter and the Lady* opposite leading actress Myrna Loy. He wins the heavyweight title in May 1934, knocking out Primo Carnera in the eleventh round. Gillette sponsors the Baer–Carnera match and it is broadcast internationally in three languages. Don Dunphy begins his sports broadcasting career announcing the fight.
- 1937 Joe Louis knocks out Jim Braddock to become the second African American to win the heavyweight title. Louis owes much to his promoter Mike Jacobs, the most powerful man in boxing during the Depression, for being able to get an opportunity to fight for the title at a time when much of the boxing establishment was reluctant to have a black heavyweight champion or even entertain the thought of one.
- 1937 Clifford Odets's *Golden Boy* opens on Broadway and runs for 250 performances. The film version with William Holden and



## CHRONOLOGY

- Barbara Stanwyck and directed by Rouben Mamoulian was released in 1939.
- 1938 Joe Louis knocks out German fighter Max Schmeling to retain the heavyweight title in one of the most publicized fights of the century: the American versus the Nazi. Louis had previously lost to Schmeling by knockout in 1936 and the German fighter was confident of winning the rematch. Louis's victory makes him a genuine hero in the eyes of many white Americans. He has long been the toast of black America.
- 1938 Nat Fleischer's *Black Dynamite: The Story of the Negro in the Prize Ring from 1782 to 1938*, five-volume series is the first comprehensive history of African Americans and boxing.
- 1938 Henry Armstrong wins both the welterweight and lightweight championships, adding them to the featherweight crown he already possesses, to become the only fighter in boxing history to hold three titles simultaneously. Armstrong is considered by most boxing experts to be one of the greatest fighters of the twentieth century.
- 1938 Joe Louis portrays a boxer and the romantic lead in the all-black cast film *Spirit of Youth*.
- 1939 Lou Nova defeats Max Baer in the first major televised boxing match in the United States.
- 1939 Henry Armstrong stars in the all-black cast film, *Keep Punching*, portraying an aspiring boxer.
- 1942 Joe Louis gives a speech at a military charity event, saying "We're going to do our part ... and we'll win because we're on God's side." The words became a patriotic slogan for the Second World War and were used on a poster featuring Louis charging with a bayonet. Actually, Louis mangles his speech as he was supposed to say, "God's on our side." What he wound up saying was actually better. The promotion of Louis as an image during the war was meant to encourage patriotism especially among African Americans whose loyalty became an issue in the early days of America's entry into the war. Many blacks remembered their horrendous military experience during the First World War and were conscious that the nation was fighting a war for democracy against a

## CHRONOLOGY

- nation, Germany, which looked upon the United States as a model racist society.
- 1944 While at Camp Siebert in Gadsden, Alabama, Sugar Ray Robinson jumps a racist white military policeman to prevent Joe Louis from hitting him when the MP pokes Louis with his billy club and tells him to move to the black waiting area to wait for the segregated camp bus. Other MPs arrive and recognize Louis so no harm comes to either Louis or Robinson, and no charges are filed. But Louis and Robinson are asked to drive around the camp in an open jeep to show black soldiers that they have not been harmed as rumors have spread and there is fear that there may be reprisals because of the incident.
- 1944 Gillette sponsors boxing at Madison Square Garden, telecasting *Friday Night Fight* between Willie Pep and Chalky Wright.
- 1946 Heavyweight champion Joe Louis returns to action after more than three years away for military service, defeating Billy Conn in the first televised heavyweight boxing match, shown on NBC.
- 1946 *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports* runs on NBC's New York City station WNBT intermittently beginning in 1943 and is picked up by the NBC television network three years later. It becomes one of the most famous, well-remembered of the many boxing programs on television during the 1950s, when boxing is the most televised sport of the era.
- 1946 Sugar Ray Robinson wins the welterweight title.
- 1947 John Garfield plays a boxer very loosely based on the career of the great Jewish fighter Barney Ross (who won titles in the lightweight, junior lightweight, and welterweight divisions) in *Body and Soul*, which also features African American character actor Canada Lee. Nominated for several Academy Awards, it is considered by many critics to be the best boxing film ever made.
- 1947 Sugar Ray Robinson knocks out Jimmy Doyle in a welterweight title fight that results in Doyle's death as the 22-year-old never regains consciousness. It is the first time that a fighter dies in a world title fight.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1947 British Boxing Board of Control abrogates the color bar in British boxing.
- 1947 Budd Schulberg's boxing novel, *The Harder They Fall*, loosely based on the career of Primo Carnera, is published. Carnera, who held the heavyweight championship from 1933 to 1934, is accused of being controlled by gangsters and unknowingly participating in fixed fights. His size is his calling card and he is considered the biggest heavyweight in history. Actually, at 6 feet 6 inches he is an inch shorter than Jess Willard who won the title from Jack Johnson in 1915 and lost it to Jack Dempsey in 1919. But Carnera weighs more than any other heavyweight champion until Russian Nikolai Valuev who weighs 328 pounds and who stands 7 feet tall wins the title in 2005. Schulberg's novel is made into a 1956 film starring Humphrey Bogart, his last film. Carnera unsuccessfully sues Columbia Pictures for invasion of privacy because of the film.
- 1948 The passage of the British Nationality Act of 1948 creates circumstances for a migration of African fighters from the British colonies. They would play a major role in keeping the game alive in the face of a boxing recession and the experience would enable the emergence of the likes of Roy Ankrah, Hogan "Kid" Bassey, and Dick Tiger.
- 1948 Marcel Cerdan, a Pied-Noir born in Algeria and reared in French Morocco, and one of the most successful boxers to learn his craft in Africa, defeats Tony Zale to become world middleweight champion. He becomes perhaps equally famous for having an affair with singer Edith Piaf in the last year of his life. He dies in a plane crash in 1949.
- 1949 Robert Ryan stars in Robert Wise's film noir boxing classic, *The Set-Up*, based on the 1928 long narrative poem by Joseph Moncure March of the same title. The poem is actually about a black fighter and the film would have had more dramatic power had the race of the protagonist not been changed. Nonetheless, the film is considered among the best film noirs ever made and certainly one of the best boxing noirs.
- 1949 Joe Louis, considered by many experts to be the greatest fighter of all time and almost unanimously considered the greatest fighter of his era, announces his retirement. It does

## CHRONOLOGY

not last long as Louis is forced back into the ring because of tax problems.

- 1949 James D. Norris and Arthur M. Wirtz form the International Boxing Club to promote boxing matches at Madison Square Garden, Yankee Stadium, Chicago Stadium, St. Nicholas Arena, and the Detroit Olympia. The IBC, backed by Murder Inc. gangsters Frankie Carbo and Blinky Palermo, develops a stranglehold on boxing for most of the 1950s, controlling nearly all championship fights of the period. They also fix fights while paying the fighters next to nothing. It is nearly impossible for a fighter to get a chance at a championship unless he plays ball with the IBC. Norris splits the corporation, setting up a new corporation in Chicago, with African American lawyer Truman Gibson taking over the New York share of the business. (In effect, Gibson, who is Joe Louis's lawyer, becomes the first significant black promoter in boxing.) This smokescreen does not fool anyone and the IBC is found to be a monopoly and in restraint of trade in federal court and forced to dissolve. In 1960, Gibson, Carbo, and Palermo are charged with extortion and conspiracy. Gibson is given five years' probation and a fine. Carbo and Palermo are sentenced to 25 years in prison.
- 1949 Jack Hassen, an Australian Aborigine, wins the Australian lightweight championship in a bout with Archie Kemp. But Kemp dies from injuries he sustains in the fight. Kemp's death so upsets Hassen that he loses all effectiveness as a fighter, being afraid to punch hard, and as a result loses most of his fights between 1949 and 1951, when he retires. He becomes politically active in retirement, for instance demonstrating in 1967 in support of Muhammad Ali's opposition to the draft.
- 1950 The British Empire Championships Committee is formed, later renamed "Commonwealth" instead of "Empire." Empire titles have previously been contested by whites from the British Isles and the old dominion nations such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa. Black African countries (still under colonial rule) could have a representing steward each. One of the first Nigerian fighters to migrate to England was Israel "Battling" Boyle who was instrumental in welcoming other Nigerian

## CHRONOLOGY

- fighters to Liverpool such as Hogan “Kid” Bassey and Dick Tiger. There are now fifty-four Commonwealth states.
- 1951 Joe Louis’s comeback is brutally ended when he is knocked out in the eighth round by rising heavyweight Rocky Marciano who was reluctant to fight his aging boyhood hero. Louis retired for good after this fight. Marciano would go on to defeat Jersey Joe Walcott and become champion.
- 1951 Sugar Ray Robinson defeats middleweight champion Jake LaMotta to win the title. He and LaMotta would fight six times altogether, going back to their first bout in 1943. Robinson would win five of them. Robinson would win and lose the middleweight title five times over his long career. He is commonly considered to be the greatest fighter pound-for-pound who ever fought. He was Muhammad Ali’s favorite fighter, icon, and hero. Ali patterned much of his own style after Robinson.
- 1952 Light-heavyweight Floyd Patterson wins the gold medal at the Helsinki Olympics. He will go on to become heavyweight champion in 1956 when he beats Archie Moore. He loses the title in 1959 to Sweden’s Ingemar Johansson. Patterson regains the title in 1960, knocking out Johansson. He knocks Johansson out again in a third match. Patterson loses the title for good when he is knocked out in one round by the indomitable ex-convict Sonny Liston in 1962. Patterson is knocked out again in one round in the rematch against Liston in 1963. He will go on to lose matches against champion Muhammad Ali, whom he at first detests for joining the Nation of Islam and changing his name, but later learns to respect and support in his stance against the draft.
- 1954 Elia Kazan’s *On the Waterfront* is released featuring Marlon Brando playing an ex-boxer working for his brother on a mob-controlled New York waterfront. The film wins eight Oscars including Best Picture but is not a movie about boxing.
- 1956 Another Robert Wise boxing film, but considerably more upbeat is *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, based on the autobiography of middleweight champion and street tough Rocky Graziano. James Dean was originally cast to play Graziano but was killed in an auto accident. Paul Newman

## CHRONOLOGY

replaced him. The film won Oscars for best cinematography and art direction. It is considered among the best boxing films ever made by Hollywood. The 1955 autobiography on which the film is based is far more harrowing and grittier than the movie and is among the best sports autobiographies ever written.

- 1956 New Yorker writer A. J. Liebling's *The Sweet Science*, a collection of his boxing essays, is published and gains the reputation as the best writing in English on the sport. *The Sweet Science* has become the classic text on boxing and probably the most famous of all American nonfiction works on the sport.
- 1957 Andre DeToth's *Monkey on My Back* is released. It is based on the career of Barney Ross, including his heroic service during the Second World War. Ross becomes a drug addict as a result of the injuries he sustains during the war. The film is, as are most films of this type, heavily fictionalized.
- 1957 Hogan "Kid" Bassey defeats Cherif Hamia to win the world featherweight title becoming the first Nigerian to win a world title.
- 1960 Senator Estes Kefauver conducts a Congressional investigation of boxing as part of an investigation into organized crime that was launched in 1950. Jake LaMotta, Sonny Liston, Frankie Carbo, and James D. Norris are among those who testify, with Norris admitting that organized crime was in control of the sport. The hearings end in 1964.
- 1960 Charlie Mohr, a middleweight at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, dies eight days after fighting in the NCAA boxing tournament, the result of a blow he took in the ring. Almost immediately the University of Wisconsin ends its collegiate boxing program. The NCAA soon follows suit by ending its national boxing tournament and, in effect, pulling the plug on collegiate boxing. The NCAA began sponsoring the championship tournament in 1932 and the tournament reached its peak in 1948 with fifty-five colleges participating. By 1960, the number dwindled to twenty, a sign that boxing is losing popularity in the United States.
- 1961 Jimmy Toppi Sr. opens the Blue Horizon in North Philadelphia which becomes, after Madison Square, the most famous boxing venue in the United States.