To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Daniel Bennett Coy entitled "Imagining Dissent: Muhammad Ali, Daily Newspapers, and the State, 1966-1971." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

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Imagining Dissent: Muhammad Ali, Daily Newspapers, and the State, 1966-1971

A Thesis

Presented for a

Master of Arts

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Daniel Bennett Coy

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Abstract

"The Paranoid Style in American Politics" is an accurate way to describe what happens here. In 1966 heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali was reclassified as fully eligible for military service; it became apparent that he would be drafted to serve in Vietnam. Ali—contesting the government's right to control his body—claimed his own right to self-determination. But this question of the government's right over the individual became far more complicated when daily newspapers turned this conflict into an "event."

These newspapers imposed rigid and simplified categories on a situation that was not easily classifiable. Muhammad Ali's response was to identify the "gaps" within this categorization by alternating between his various public images—including those that newspapers tried to impose upon him. To discredit the simplistic view of the newspapers Ali invoked complexity and contradiction.

By the time that the case reached the Supreme Court in 1971, Muhammad Ali had made perfectly clear through his own actions—coupled with the actions of his opponents—that he had not been given a fair hearing. The Supreme Court ruled that he should never have been drafted in the first place, essentially saying—in stark contrast to the characterizations of the newspaper dailies, federal employees, and agents of various state and local government—that the entire process was, in fact, a "non-event."

Table of Contents

Introduction — "Boss Trouble"..... 1

Chapter One — "In Footsteps of the Pharaohs": Muhammad Ali, Newspapers, and Communicating "Danger," 1966-1967..... 18

Chapter Two — "How Can You Call It Freedom?": Muhammad Ali, Revolution, and the State, 1967-1971..……..... 61

Bibliography..... 104

Vita…….. 108

Introduction: "Boss Trouble"

In an interview for Thomas Hauser's biography of Muhammad Ali, published in 1991, Alex Haley reminisced about the contribution that the boxer had made to the world. Haley suggested that for someone born after the 1960s, "someone for whom Ali is history," the best way to understand the man was to "not read books so much, but go to a library where you'll have access to daily papers and read about this man, every single day for years. That might give you some understanding of who Muhammad Ali was and what he meant to his people." This thesis attempts to fulfill Haley's suggestion for a five year period of Muhammad Ali's life. The following chapters begin in February 1966—when Ali learned that the government intended to draft him for military service in Vietnam—and end in August 1971, when the United States Supreme Court declared that Ali did not have to answer that call. The result of this study, however, uncovers far more than Ali's significance to the black community.[1]

The majority of the proceeding investigation stems from four newspapers: The New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, the Louisville Courier-Journal, and the Atlanta Constitution. These papers were chosen for several reasons: the geographic area where they were printed, socio-political bias, and their relevance to certain events in the five year span. The New York Times employed two writers who regularly covered Ali, Robert Lipsyte and Arthur Daley, and their opposing perspectives illustrate the wider ideological divide about the champ. Daley, an older, more conservative sportswriter, was

[1] Thomas Hauser, Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 509

highly critical of Ali, while Lipsyte, younger and at times clearly enamored with the boxer, supported Ali. The editors at the Chicago Tribune, following Ali's reclassification comments, waged an aggressive print campaign to attack the boxer and to ensure that he would not fight in Chicago. The Courier-Journal was chosen because it was the newspaper of Ali's hometown in Kentucky, and Courier-Journal writers often interviewed the boxer's parents—Cassius and Odessa Clay, who still lived in Louisville—for comments about their son. The Atlanta Constitution was chosen because Ali's first fight after his imposed exile occurred in that Georgia city, and the Atlanta Constitution provides a stark contrast to many of the editorial habits of the three papers mentioned above. Finally, The Times of London was used to highlight differences between domestic and international coverage of the events. Magazines tended to provide more rounded coverage of Muhammad Ali than did the daily newspapers mentioned above. Articles and interviews in The Nation, Playboy magazine, Esquire, and Ebony serve to buttress the primary sources. Film's of Ali's fights, as well as recorded interviews and promotional materials, also provide insight into the champ's personality and physicality.

The Supreme Court decision in 1971 supplies crucial details of the legal actions against Ali, and expands on the newspaper coverage of the events. Much of what was revealed about the case in the Supreme Court's decision was unknown to reporters at the time, and necessarily calls one to question the accuracy of news coverage of the case. Reporters did not know all the facts of the case, their conclusions were not fully informed, and editors and reporters injected their own biases into the articles in an attempt to impart cause, consequence, and meaning. Although it is beyond the scope of

this paper to suggest the consequences of the editor's actions on public opinion at large—which would, in effect, mirror the impulses that spurred editors to assign meaning in the first place—this investigation does attempt to suggest "what happened?" and "why?"

Chapter One begins with the statements made by Ali about his reclassification, and then provides background information about the boxer to place the reaction of the print media—and especially the Chicago Tribune—into context. The Tribune, which, aside from its' own reports, carried stories from Reuters, United Press International, and the Associated Press, offers a window to the stronger anti-Ali reaction; some papers were more moderate, but few were more critical of Ali than the Tribune. Throughout the Tribune's coverage of Ali, and apparent in the paper's reaction to Ali's reclassification comments, the boxer emerges as representative of more than a verbally defiant mindset or mood--Muhammad Ali becomes politically, economically, morally, and physically "dangerous."

Ali as "dangerous," however, did not fit neatly into the commoditized trope of the 1960s black dissident nor the violent militant. Although the Tribune, like most daily newspapers, incorporated creatively inflammatory language about the Nation of Islam, especially regarding Elijah Muhammad's racial ideology and principles of self-defense, the newspaper suggested that Ali's stance was not an adult position, instead labeling the boxer as a "spoiled, whining crybaby." This contradiction is problematic: How can a "spoiled crybaby" boxer be dangerous? The Tribune suggested that Ali was dangerous if his "mood" was influential. But "mood" and "influence" are highly abstract, subjective, and difficult concepts that require, at the very least, long term studies of "effect". The Chicago Tribune—subject to time constraints, deadlines, and public interest in Ali—

replaced what was chronologically impossible with instantly gratifying good copy: speculation. The editorial staff of the Chicago Tribune predicted an alternate future; their articles, peppered with words like "should" "could" and "would," reported on potential events yet to occur.

In their efforts at divination, the editors at the Tribune ignored another glaring contradiction. The reemergence of Mafia involvement in heavyweight boxing—in the form of Ernie Terrell—coincided with Ali's reclassification statements. Terrell's manager Bernie Glickman, an associate of La Cosa Nostra crime syndicate members, had been "marked for death" by Mafia assassins, and Terrell himself had been threatened, albeit secondhand. Terrell's associations are explored to demonstrate a more concrete concept of danger—death threats, grand larceny, fraud, criminal conspiracies—and his Mafia involvement forces the question: between Muhammad Ali and Ernie Terrell, who was more dangerous?

But Ali was not merely labeled "dangerous," he actively engaged in the construction of his own public persona, and following the failure of his Chicago fight, Ali answered his opponents with a different mediated image of himself. Internationally, Ali presented himself as gracious, humble, and kind, and no less willing to defend himself against news reporters. Where before Ali had publicly claimed that he was alone—"the onliest heavyweight champ"—he now connected himself to his racial and spiritual contemporaries internationally. Ali's ability to connect to his international supporters was significantly enhanced by developments in telecommunications, as satellites carried his fights around the globe. International viewers saw a man who could not be beaten in the ring, and they read his criticisms of news reporters and politicians—translated into

scores of languages—in international newspapers. By 1967 Ali, bolstered by his international fans, was holding his own—if not winning—the battle against his critics in the print media. His fight against Ernie Terrell, his second to last fight of the 1960s, and a fight that shocked sportswriters and fans alike, was proof of Ali's unrivaled physical power. The fight was also evidence of Ali's ability to win not only public support (for the fight was a brutal one) but self-determination and a form of individuality. In his fight against Terrell, Ali shrugged off the media's commoditized version of dissent that had been assigned to him and instead exhibited a personalized defiance, an anger and cruelty that was directed as much toward the print media as it was toward Ernie Terrell's broken face.

Until the summer of 1967 Ali had not broken any major law, but once he refused to step forward those positioned against him used the event to act. If Ali was winning the "image" contest internationally, his opponents used the "non-step" to strip Ali of his ability to reinforce that image. Through two separate acts, Ali could neither box nor travel abroad. Effectively denied the ability to promote himself, Ali focused on legal appeals and odd jobs, and his "image" shifted. Chapter Two, which begins with Ali's refusal to be inducted into the United States Army, turns to the events between 1967-1971.

Ali's new "image"—refined through his tours of the college lecture circuit—emerged as a mixture of Nation of Islam doctrine and Ali's own vernacular style, humor, and braggadocio. But as dissent within the United States grew more violent, the Nation of Islam's concept of self-defense stood in stark contrast to the programs of black militants and political revolutionaries. The more belligerent statements of the Nation of

Islam were essentially a defense mechanism against entrenched white power, a statement of power by the powerless, and Elijah Muhammad recognized this. Elijah Muhammad, a separatist, did not encourage followers to engage in direct armed conflict with the power of the state. Instead, Nation of Islam doctrine asserted that Allah would deliver retribution for white crimes against African Americans. If Muhammad Ali's socio-political "image"—created by both the champ and the popular press—was sympathetic to black revolution, his religious beliefs—influenced extensively by Elijah Muhammad--considered such violence unnecessary. In essence Ali's social message, although radical, appeared moderate compared to the calls to action of the Revolutionary Action Movement or the Black Panther Party.

Ali also stood apart from the larger ant-war movement. He did not engage in acts of civil disobedience, as did other religious dissenters like Philip and Daniel Berrigan—Catholic priests who actively tried to destroy induction records at draft offices. Nor did he flee the country or hide from authorities, as did Daniel Berrigan; Ali remained visible, and he often reminded reporters that he was willing to go to prison for his beliefs. Furthermore, Muhammad Ali did not participate in mass demonstrations of protest against the war, and thus escaped the wrath of the coercive powers of the state, whose powers were on full display in the summer of 1968 in Chicago. Again, compared to more active opponents of the Vietnam War and the military draft, Ali appeared relatively moderate.[2]

[2]Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States (New York: Harpers Collins Publishing, 1999), 488-9, 601-2

The divergence between these various "images", however, suggests that the actions of the state, and state appointees, against Ali were more concerned with one "image." Fears of an impending armed revolution in the United States spurred government officials to react decisively, evident in the espionage conducted domestically by the CIA and Army Intelligence, as well as in the violent 1968 Democratic National Convention and the reactivation of the 1902 New York Criminal Anarchy Law. Ali's "image" as one of many leaders of this projected revolution led to his persecution. This is not to minimize the violent potential of the various dissident groups, many of whom were considerably well armed and organized; instead it serves to show that Ali did not fit neatly into the "armed revolutionary" category. In other words, one of Ali's "images" was martyred on the altar of an imagined atavistic social order, while another "image" resonated in an area adjacent to, but disconnected from, armed black militancy and street level protest.

Ali himself stood parallax to all groups involved—the state and black militants, the mass media and Ali's international supporters, war hawks and the anti-war movement within the military itself—and if he was persecuted for one "image" he was exonerated by the Supreme Court for another. Over three years after Ali refused to step forward, his message showed no discernible active effect—it was utopian, but African Americans did not join the Nation of Islam in great numbers nor did they resist the draft based on religious principles. His message and his individual physical power were not enough to combat, on any form of mass material scale, the forces of the state or the opinions of the print media. But his "image," which existed in millions of hearts and minds internationally, that "haunted the dreams of administrators everywhere," this image of a

dancing, bragging heavyweight boxer who "whupped all the bums"—including those in the print media and government—was undeniably powerful on the astral plane of representation, perceived consequence, and projected meaning.

In this astral plane Ali was projected globally. Through news and television coverage his "image" existed in millions of places simultaneously and symbolized a host of issues. His message, once refined, was static, but his "image" was constantly built upon and manipulated by all involved—including Ali—to incorporate all causes and consequences. It was this highly contentious property that various and unconnected individuals sought to control. Judge Joe Ingraham, who denied Ali the ability to travel abroad, and Edwin Dooley, who stripped Ali of his boxing title and revoked his license to fight, attempted to halt Ali's ability to contribute to his international "image"; they instead contributed to the "myth" of Ali's persecution and eventual triumph. After Muhammad Ali regained the heavyweight championship title in 1974, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley awarded Ali the "Key to the City of Chicago," President Gerald Ford welcomed Ali to the White House, and D.C. Comics published a special issue of Superman where Ali fought the Man of Steel and won.[3]

"When Ali came back from exile," Jim Brown told Thomas Hauser, "he became the darling of America, which was good for America because it brought black and white together. But the Ali that America ended up loving was not the Ali that I loved most . . . In a way he became part of the establishment . . . [But] Ali, before he came back, was a true warrior. He was above sports, he was part of history. The man used his athletic

[3] David Remnick King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero (New York: Random House, 1998)

ability to project himself right up there with world leaders. Ali was involved in the Vietnam War. Ali was involved in the struggle for racial equality. To do what he did, to achieve the pinnacle of his profession, to fight for freedom for black people, to perform while being ostracized and still be a champion; Jackie Robinson died from that, and Ali was able to prevail."[4]

Few individuals of the second half of the twentieth century have been written about as much as Muhammad Ali. Aside from hundreds of promotional writings aimed mostly at children or die hard fans, there have been countless magazine articles and biographies that focus, more often than not, on Ali's boxing career. Few of these have any merit aside from entertainment, and some contain questionable facts or comments (postcards of Ali's face are still sold in Louisville that read "The Greatest: Cassius Clay," although the photograph is obviously of the boxer after his return to the ring). A growing catalog of academic literature covering Ali is beginning to emerge, however, and although these too contain discrepancies, they provide a background to the primary research conducted in this essay.

What's My Name: Black Vernacular Intellectuals places Ali's anti-war and black power comments into the category of the vernacular intellectual. Grant Fareed argues that Ali was a verbally self-defined individual who activated traditions in the African-American discourse–poetry and self promotion, as well as Ali's grammatical style and his criticism of the white power structure—and Fareed contends that this "vernacularity" is what made Ali accessible to the international audience. Ali emerged as a global figure at

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[4]Thomas Hauser, Muhammad Ali, 201

a crucial stage in the postcolonial experience, and his self-defined role as critic of white Western colonial practices—whether in Africa, Asia, or in the American ghettos—garnered as much domestic opposition as it did international enthusiasm. Fareed—a professor of literature—deconstructs the discourse of Ali and that of his "colonialist" opposition, and reconstructs the process of self-definition that Ali undertook. His essay covers a broader period of Ali's life, and Fareed explores Ali's departure from the oppositional vernacular, his endorsement for Ronald Reagan in the 1980 Presidential election is one example, in an effort to "demystify" the champ. Cataloging contradictions and inconsistencies about Ali, however, fails to provide a "more human" Ali, and Fareed shows an obvious bias for the boxer.[5]

Fareed's conclusions are sound, and although they are fascinating they provide an incomplete picture. The work fails to incorporate the opposition's role in the creation of Ali's image; this robs Ali's detractors of the ability to similarly self-define and they become simply "racist" reporters or seemingly mindless automatons of the state. Fareed also fails to explain that while postcolonial African and Asian nations were emerging from foreign occupation, the United States, despite possible "colonial" imperatives in Vietnam, was attempting to present itself as an altruistic defender of "democracy". Ali's vernacular intellectualism was able to reach so many internationally because the boxer was able to use a tool of U.S. cultural diplomacy—mass communication of popular culture through satellites—to promote his postcolonial discourse.[6]

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[5]Grant Fareed "Muhammad Ali: Third World Contender" What's My Name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

[6]Ibid.

Redemption Song connects Ali to the developing radicalism of the late 1960s, especially the turn to black militancy in Northern cities. Marqusse argues that black power was a vindication of Nation of Islam doctrine, which had previously been viewed with skepticism in most areas of the black community. If the turn to black power seemed to stem from the Nation, the growing opposition to the war in Vietnam seemed to justify Ali's reluctance to fight. Marqusse—an American expatriate writing in England—rejects the assumption that Ali represents a symbol of American exceptionalism and places the boxer into an international context of revolution and opposition. As a result of Ali's connection to the international community, Marqusse argues, the boxer stood ahead of the American socio-political curve; Ali was ahead of his time. As a pioneer of 1960s American oppositional politics, Ali was reviled until public opinion caught up to him.[7]

Marqusse, like Fareed, seeks to "demystify" Ali—both cite the 1996 Olympic Games as primary causes for this—but despite presenting the contradictions of the fighter in later life, Marqusse's book venerates Ali. His scope extends into Ali's later years, and Marqusse focuses more on Ali's support networks, from contemporaries in the Civil Rights movement to liberal white journalists like Howard Cosell and George Plimpton, than he does on Ali's opponents. The lack of footnotes in both Fareed and Marqusse—and some inconsistencies and surprising factual embellishments[8]—leads both books to

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[7]Mike Marqusse Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties (London: Verso Press, 1999)

[8] Fareed claims that in the fifteenth round of the Ali/Terrell fight Ernie Terrell meekly answered Ali's question of "what's my name?" with :"Muhammad Ali," a surrender that appears in no other account of the fight. Another example of inconsistent coverage concerns Ali's famous line, "I ain't got no personal quarrel with them Vietcongs," sometimes recorded as "I got no quarrel . . . " or "I got no fight . . . "

fall short of historical research. Like Ali's detractors (and supporters) in the newspapers, the lack of citation (which accompanies constant variations in descriptions of events) hinders the ability to reconstruct the facts of the case, thereby calling the opinions derived into question.[9]

Thomas Hauser's authorized oral biography Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times provides first person interviews with those involved and affected by the boxer. The book is well researched and documented and provides many "takes" on Ali, most of them positive. With little exception the book focuses on Ali's life, and the only discussions of process or impact come from individual interviewee opinion. John Cottrell's Muhammad Ali, Who Once Was Cassius Clay, written before Ali was exonerated by the Supreme Court, also focuses on Ali's life and does not attempt to place Ali into larger contexts. Ali's autobiography The Greatest, written in the mid-1970s, is a fascinating account, but contains the boxer's penchant for self promotion and exaggeration that limits its' use as a primary historical text. In Ghosts of Manila, former Sports Illustrated reporter Mark Kram recounts the three Ali/ Frazier fights. The book is very unfavorable to Ali and claims that Joe Frazier was the true hero of the three fights. Ali, to Kram, was a spoiled charlatan. Nick Tosches's The Devil and Sonny Liston also portrays Ali in a negative light. Tosches claims that Liston, not Ali, was the 60s political figure, and he characterizes Ali as a flaky, immature, self-promoter.[10]

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[9]Ibid.

[10]Thomas Hauser, Muhammad Ali; John Cottrell, Muhammad Ali, Who Once Was Cassius Clay (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967); David Remnick King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero (New York: Random House, 1998); Muhammad Ali/ Walter Dean Myers, The Greatest (New York: Scholastic Press, 2001); Mark Kram, Ghosts of Manila: the Fateful Blood Feud Between

Frederic Jaher's "White America Views Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and Muhammad Ali" in Sport In America argues that American public opinion shifted to Ali's point of view about the Vietnam War and the draft in light of the prospect of continued racial hostility and the "legitimacy of nonconformist athletes." Jaher claims that Ali was ahead of his time, but he also argues that the rebellions of the 1960s and seventies ended in an "uneasy truce" with the establishment—there was no resolution to the issues—and that the consensus about Ali illustrates this. (Jaher's article was published in 1985) The article is well-researched and documented, but Jaher also makes a questionable claim—that an attempted assassination of Ali occurred before his return to the ring. This claim is mentioned in no other source, primary or secondary, and Jaher provides no details about the attempt. [11]

This thesis also draws on secondary sources that do not mention Ali, but are nonetheless relevant in terms of methodology. In "House Negro versus Field Negro: The Inscribed Image of Race in Television News Representations of African-American Identity," contained in Say IT Loud: African-American Audiences, Media, and Identity, Jennifer F. Wood provides a sociological study of media coverage of blacks. Wood argues that the television news media presents African American actors in the opposing categories of "Uncle Tom or Nat Turner". Wood cites the retirement of Edward R.

Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2001); Nick Tosches, The Devil and Sonny Liston (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 2000)

[11]Frederic Cople Jaher, "White America Views Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and Muhammad Ali" Sport In America: New Historical Perspectives Donald Spivey, ed (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985)

Murrow—who provided "excellent" coverage of blacks—as the beginning of this bias in television news coverage, a bias that Wood argues continues to this day.[12]

In Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Society, Noam Chomsky details the state's role in setting the terms of media debate. The role of media, Chomsky argues, is to mobilize the elites in a community. These elites, in concert with the media and the state, set the terms for "thinkable thought." Chomsky uses the war in Vietnam as an example: the terms of debate about the war itself (defined by these three parties) precluded any debate about "American aggression" because the agents of thought ensured that such a category did not exist within the media debate. The United States was "protecting" or "defending" democracy, and "defensive" positions cannot be "aggressive." Those who strayed from the "allowed" debate were placed within pre-determined categories of dissent; the critics of the war were either Communist sympathizers, "Hanoi partisans," or else were hiding a "secret agenda" that predisposed them to anti-Americanism. In regards to internal dissent, Chomsky continues, the state maintained a defensive posture in the debate—the state defends freedom while silencing dissent while promoting democracy.[13]

Ali's relationship with the press fell into this process. Ali condemned the War, not through in-depth analysis of foreign policy but because of white colonial imperatives that connected the Vietcong with African Americans. To Ali, the same impulse that led

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[12]Jennifer F. Wood "House Negro Vs. Field Negro: The Inscribed Issue of Race in Television News Representations of African-American Identity" Say It Loud: African-American Audiences, Media, and Identity Robin R. Means Coleman, ed (New York: Routledge, 2002)

[13]Noam Chomsky, Necessary Illusions: Though Control in Democratic Societies (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 49

to the deployment of troops to Southeast Asia led to the existence of a black Diaspora in the United States. Critics in the media tried to fit Ali into one or more of the categories of dissent ("Nat Turner" with a "secret agenda," etc.) but the fit was not a comfortable one. In studying Ali from 1967 to 1971 we can see the difficult nature of this process, its' imperfections, and we can see how the emergence of global communications systems complicated state attempts at identification and individual attempts at dissent.

Schiller's "Transformation of News in the U.S. Information Market" in Communicating Politics and Page's Who Deliberates? Focus on corporate involvement in news coverage. Schiller provides a sociological and anthropological study of the commercialization and automization of news—beginning with the wire services of the 1950s—that split news between elite channels like the New York Times and more popular outlets like local dailies and television coverage. To Schiller, elite news provides "responsible" information while the popular news tends to focus on the "exciting" worlds of crime and scandal and "enjoyable" content such as sports or personal interest stories. Popular news, to Schiller, is answering the demands of advertisers to appeal to the broadest demographics. [14]

Page, in Who Deliberates?, contends that the size of the public, combined with the complexities of political policymaking, hinders any sort of mass public deliberation—a national "town meeting"—and instead gives rise to the "professional communicator." These "professional communicators" are not chosen democratically, although ratings

[14]Dan Schiller, "Transformations of News in the US information market" Communicating Politics: Mass Communications and the Political Process Peter Golding et al, ed (New York: Leicester University Press, 1986); Benjamin I. Page, Who Deliberates? Mass Media in Modern Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

reports may give the illusion of a democratic process, but are instead selected by private, profit seeking corporations. Page echoes Chomsky's claim that political content is meant to target "opinion leaders" of a community who then disseminate information to "ordinary citizens." Page questions whether corporate-controlled media and their "professional communicators" can stifle or skew democratic participation or mislead the public, and he investigates the effects of the corporate two-party political system in limiting coverage of diverse opinion. In the case of Muhammad Ali, the majority of "professional communicators" mobilized in opposition to the boxer, as did the two-party political system of the country. However, Page's book does not focus on the 1960s, when a fracturing of the popular political debate gave the appearance of distinct and disconnected interests at work in Ali's treatment. The mass media, despite evidence of corporate control, is not monolithic, and far more than profits drives the construction, creation, and dissemination of news content.[15]

In addition to the works noted above, Leinwoll's From Spark to Satellite, Mattelart's Networking the World, and Oslin's Story of Telecommunications provided a history of the global communication technology that allowed Ali to connect to his international base. In the mid 1960s these satellites were new and contentious technology, and Ali's case is but one instance of the competition for control of international communication. Michael Lieb's Children of Ezekiel connects modern sightings of U.F.O.'s to Ezekiel's vision of God's chariot, and traces Ezekiel's prophecy to the Nation of Islam's "mother ship" and Biblical images of a race-based technological

[15]Benjamin Page, Who Deliberates? 8-11

Armageddon. Representing Sport and Sport, Culture, and Media delineate the possibilities and consequences of representation and attribution in the highly controlled environment of professional sports; they also examine corporate interest in making sport accessible to a worldwide audience, and the dangers associated with the ideological manipulation of physical image. Todd Gitlin's The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage provided context for U.S. social and cultural developments, and George Moss's Vietnam: An American Ordeal supplied secondary information on the Vietnam War. [16]

[16]Stanley Leinwold, From Spark to Satellite: A History of Radio Communication (New York: Schribner and Sons, 1979); Armand Mattelart, Networking the World, 1749-2000 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); George P. Oslin, The Story of Telecommunications (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992); Michael Lieb, Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, U.F.O.'s, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Rod Brookes, Representing Sport (London: Oxford University Press, 2002); David Rowe, Sport, Media, Culture: The Unruly Trinity (London: Open University Press, 1999); Todd Gitlin, The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987) George Donaldson Moss, Vietnam: An American Ordeal (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994)

Chapter One: "'In Footsteps of the Pharaohs': Muhammad Ali, Newspapers, and Communicating "Danger," 1966-1967"

On Valentine's Day 1968 Murray Schumach of the New York Times reported that Madison Square Garden would be demolished to make way for a new Garden across the street. The Garden stood on 8th avenue, the old site of Barnum's Circus, which opened in 1874. The first boxing matches were held at the Garden in 1877 and, because prizefighting was illegal at the time, they were promoted as "scientific sparring exhibitions between professors." That building was demolished in 1890 and replaced with an ornate structure replete with cupolas and Moorish archways and topped with a nude statue of Diana the Huntress designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Boxing remained illegal, and the second Garden—under the management of the Vanderbilt family—hosted horse and dog shows, bicycle races, ballets, and performances by the glitterati of the day, most notably Sarah Bernhardt. The second Garden struggled financially, however, until boxing became legal in 1920.[17]

The last event at the second Garden was a boxing match, held on 5 May 1925. Announcer Joe Humphreys, after quieting the crowd, read a poem through the public address system. "Farewell to thee, O Temple of Fistiana," he intoned, as taps played in the background. The structure was demolished shortly thereafter to make way for the third Garden, overseen by Tex Richard, the "first notable boxing promoter to dominate the Garden." This Garden, wrote Schumach, had been a "sports palace, political

[17] New York Times 14 February 1968 Murray Schumach "Next and Last Attraction at Madison Square Garden: The Wrecking Ball." P 32

battleground, town hall of the nation, magnet for circuses and fund drives, temple for evangelists, forum for crusaders, [and] a stage for many of the greatest performing artists." Politicians attempting to capitalize on captive sports crowds were often booed off the stage, and Elizabeth Taylor threw an infamous Hollywood Party there that resulted in thousands of dollars of damage to the building.[18]

In 1949 "millionaire sportsman" James D. Norris bought a boxing interest at the Garden, and controlled all championship fights in the arena until he was charged by the state with Mafia collusion for "monopolizing championship titles." Many of the greatest gambling scandals in sports were played out under the roof of the third Garden, wrote Schumach, especially those involving boxers and basketball players. Harry Markson, the boxing director for the Garden in 1968—and himself under investigation for Mafia ties—commented that the growing worldwide coverage of boxing events had changed the dynamic of the business of prizefighting. Increased television coverage of fights had put smaller boxing venues out of business, he said, as fans preferred to "[get] a closer look at the fights through television." As an even larger and more technologically advanced arena was being constructed--designed to accommodate the growing popularity and subsequent demand for coverage of boxing--across the street from the arena, the third Garden's last event was the Westminster Dog Show, followed by the wrecking ball.[19]

The story above provides insight into the major themes of this chapter. The sport of boxing, evident from the earliest matches at the Garden to the 1968 investigations into

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

Mafia collusion with promoters, had always existed on the fringes of legality. A steady stream of criminal hustlers and professional gamblers, no doubt attracted to the enormous sums of money that the controlled violence of the sport generated, remained on-hand to influence fighters and referees, or to protect investments and ensure payoffs. The sport was dangerous—physically and legally—and always had been. But when the heavyweight champion of the world, Muhammad Ali, fought his last fight of the 1960s in Madison Square Garden against Zora Folley in 1967, the boxing world was, in a highly abstract way, subject to a new form of danger. If the Garden, as Murray Schumach wrote, was an arena for sports, a political stage and national town hall, a site of circuses, evangelical missions, and a destination for performing artists, twenty-five year old Muhammad Ali embodied all of these divergent strands in a single six-foot four frame. Ali was a sports hero, a political figure, an evangelist, and an unmatched physical artist who presided over a veritable socio-political circus that he himself inaugurated.

Muhammad Ali also stood as a central figure in raising awareness of boxing: his physicality, mixed with his socio-political beliefs, generated international interest in the sport, and necessitated the construction of a new, technologically advanced Garden that catered to television coverage rather than to live audiences. When Muhammad Ali boxed the world watched, but witnesses saw far more than displays of physical dexterity. Viewers observed a conflict of contested social, religious, and cultural imagery carried through the ether; when Muhammad Ali won a fight—and in the 1960s he always won—the victory was not the champ's alone but signaled a triumph for his socio-political discourse, for his image and representation, and a defeat for those forces opposed to his

individual self-definition. Muhammad Ali was not dangerous in the way that criminals or gangsters were dangerous, Muhammad Ali was dangerous for what he represented.

This chapter explores the manipulation of those representations in the communications media. When Muhammad Ali learned that he was eligible for induction into the Armed Forces, his response was based on—and connected him to—his various public images. Muhammad Ali's reclassification remarks sparked a contest over these public images between the boxer and his opponents in the print media. Ali's opposition attempted to define the boxer based on select statements and associations, but by highlighting only certain areas of Ali's situation they left considerable gaps in coverage. Ali—recognizing the gaps—responded by fluidly transitioning between his several different public images. His ability to "dance" between these various personas, and his highly physical performances (both inside and outside of the ring) exposed contradictions in print accounts, allowing Ali to counter the negative abstractions assigned to him.

Beginning with an examination of these personas, this chapter explores how Ali consolidated these various images into a new one, an image that stood in opposition to the war in Vietnam. Ali was not solely responsible for the construction of his image, however, and this thesis shows how the print media contributed to this process by selectively incorporating certain characteristics of these personas. The result was a battle for definition—illustrated in the Chicago Tribune's campaign to ban an Ali fight—that culminated in an exchange between Muhammad Ali and the Illinois State Athletic Commission in 1966.

The Chicago Tribune's image of Ali was created by incorporating select features of Ali's various images, but in this process the paper ignored other important

characteristics. Notably absent in the Tribune's coverage is the continued involvement of Mafia figures in boxing—personified by Ali's opponent Ernie Terrell—a situation that would have damaged the newspaper's claims that Ali was dangerous. Through the manipulation of circumstance, the Tribune won the initial image war against Muhammad Ali, who was not controlled by criminal elements, by claiming that Ali was more of a threat to order than was Ernie Terrell or La Cosa Nostra crime syndicate. After losing this battle, however, Ali activated other avenues of support to combat his opponents in the domestic press.

Following the failure of the Chicago fight, Muhammad Ali focused on generating international support. He countered the influence of the domestic press by harnessing the power of an emerging technology—international satellite communications—and essentially broadcast his image over the heads of the United States media outlets. Ali was able, through his incredible athletic ability, his position as an African American celebrity, his critiques of the quasi-imperialist policies of the United States both domestically and internationally, and his conversion to Islam, to appeal to millions around the globe. In sum, Ali was holding his own against a host of opponents (in the ring and the media). This chapter concludes with the realization that Ali, however unpopular domestically, was essentially unstoppable—unbeatable in the ring and, despite an early loss to the Chicago Tribune, able to rally international support in the face of his critics. This chapter begins with the events of a day in mid-February 1966.

On February 17, 1966, the heavyweight boxing champion of the world--Muhammad Ali--was sitting in front of his rented concrete bungalow in Miami, where he

was training for a bout with Ernie Terrell. On weekday afternoons after training, Ali would sit in his lawn chair and play with the children that came to visit him everyday after school. This was a striking and recurrent image, that of a massive and violent man displaying a gentle delicacy with the children that he towered above. He would ask the young boys and girls about their studies, sing songs for them, and often Ali would hold foot races for the children, rewarding the victors with dollar bills and high praise. It was in this setting, surrounded by children, that Ali learned that the selective service board in Louisville, Kentucky had reclassified him 1-A—meaning fully eligible for military service—from an earlier evaluation of 1-Y.[20]

Ali's classification of 1-Y had resulted from his failure of three pre-induction mental aptitude tests in 1964. The score of 1-Y sparked speculation in the press that Ali (Cassius Clay at the time) had been deliberately dishonest with the board and had intentionally failed the tests. In a 1964 Playboy interview with Alex Haley, Ali responded to those claims with a guarded humility by saying, "The truth don't hurt nobody. The fact is I never was too bright in school. I just barely graduated . . . [with] a D-minus average. I ain't ashamed of it, though. I mean, how much do school principals make in a month?" He continued, "when I looked at a lot of the questions [on the test] . . . I didn't even know how to start after finding the answers. So I didn't pass. It was the Army's decision that they didn't want me . . . I don't want to say no whole lot about it." When

[20]New York Times 18 February 1966 Robert Lipsyte "Fighter Charges Board With Bias" p 37

Haley asked Ali if he found the poor scores embarrassing, Ali replied: "I have said I am the greatest. Ain't nobody ever heard me say I was the smartest."[21]

As reporters started to call and television news vans pulled up to Ali's bungalow to get comments about the champ's reclassification, Ali's words were far less self-deprecating. "Why me? Why me?" he said. "I don't understand why they're picking on me." The Chicago Tribune quoted Ali as saying: "If they'd just let me fight, I could pay for two modern airplanes in two fights, or I could pay the salaries of 100,000 men. I'm fighting for the government everyday . . . [in] a game nine out of ten soldiers wouldn't want to take part in. It's too dangerous." Between comments, New York Times reporter Robert Lipsyte wrote, Ali would ask a sixth grade girl about her studies or sing a verse form Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind." Ali then echoed his 1964 sentiment claiming that the label of less than average intelligence had been imposed upon him. "For two years the Army told everybody I was a nut, and I was ashamed. And now they decide I'm a wise man without testing me to see if I am wiser or worser than before." He then connected himself to his contemporaries in the sports world, albeit in an oppositional manner. "I can't understand why, out of all the baseball players, all of the football players, all of the basketball players they seek out me, the onliest heavyweight champion in the world."[22]

Lipsyte, who was with Ali during these interviews, reported that Ali was "panic-stricken" at the thought of the Army. Several of his friends in the Nation of Islam,

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[21] Playboy 10-64 Alex Haley "Cassius Clay"

[22] Chicago Tribune 18 February 1966 "Clay Is Ruled 1-A; Says He'll Appeal" p 1; 19 February 1966 (AP) "Millions of Muslims Are Watching, Cassius Claims" S1; 21 February 1966 "Clay Sees Self As Boon to US in Civilian Dress" p1; New York Times 18 February 1966 Lipsyte "Fighter Charges" p37

Lipsyte continued, had told Ali horror stories of the violently segregated Army. As the calls for comments continued, Ali focused on his own economic success. Why pay him eighty dollars a day, he asked, "when the government is in trouble financially? I think it costs 12 million dollars a day to stay in Vietnam, and I buy a lot of bullets, at least three jet bombers a year, and pay the salary of 50,000 fighting men with the money they take from me after my fights," he told Lipsyte. "President Johnson is a wise man," the Chicago Tribune printed "and maybe he'll call some people up and change this . . . I'm just saying maybe."[23]

Ali also responded to the reclassification in terms of his religion, Islam. He reminded reporters that Muslims around the world were watching him, and "maybe they'll be angry about this." It was not until the next day, however, that Ali responded with his signature quote. "I am a member of the Muslims and we don't go to wars unless they are declared by Allah himself," he began. "All I know is that [the Viet Cong] are considered as Asiatic black people and I don't have no fight with black people." Ali, encapsulating his powerful socio-religious perspective, then declared "I don't have no personal quarrel with those Viet Congs." Although these comments sparked a firestorm of criticism within the print media, Ali had already been held in contempt by sectors of the public and print media for his association with the Nation of Islam, a radical socio-political religion led by Elijah Muhammad.[24]

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[23] Thomas Hauser Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times, p 144; New York Times 18 February 1966 Lipsyte "Fighter Charges" p 37; Chicago Tribune 19 February 1966 (AP) "Clay: 'How Can They Draft Me?'" S1

[24] Chicago Tribune 19 February 1966 (AP) "Millions of Muslims Are Watching" S1; 20 February 1966 "Radzienda Favors Fight; Stars Feel Draft Pinch" S1

The first sign of Ali's involvement in the controversial nation arose immediately after his heavyweight championship victory against Sonny Liston. He announced to reporters that he had changed his name to Cassius X—later changed to the Muslim name Muhammad Ali--in order to free himself from the "slave name" of Cassius Clay. Newspapers in the United States and the United Kingdom, however, refused to accept Ali's new name and, thus, his new image. His hometown newspaper, the Louisville Courier-Journal, covered the actions of "Cassius Clay" from 1965-1967 with no mention of Muhammad Ali. The Chicago Tribune also continued to use the name Clay, as did the Atlanta Constitution, which in one article changed Stokely Carmichael's words from Ali to Clay. The magazine The Nation preferred the name Clay as well, and seldom mentioned Muhammad Ali.[25]

The Times of London and the New York Times also refused to use the name Ali. The British newspaper used the name Cassius, with few exceptions, until 1970 when his case was before the Supreme Court. And the New York Times, carrying the story of Ali's first reactions to his reclassification, called him Clay with no mention of Muhammad Ali until the ninth paragraph of the body. But the print media was not monolithic in it's denial of Ali's right to self-definition. The articles of reporter Robert Lipsyte, who fought his editors to use the name Muhammad Ali, used the name Cassius Clay exclusively. Lipsyte avoided the awkward "Cassius Clay AKA Muhammad Ali" used by many reporters and instead filed his articles using the name Ali. When editors changed every mention of Ali back to Clay, the articles were left devoid of any reference

[25]Hauser, 102; Passim, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Atlanta Constitution, Louisville Courier Journal, Times of London

to Ali. But Lipsyte was in the minority. His fellow sportswriter Arthur Daley refused to use the name Ali at all. After Floyd Patterson wrote a Sports Illustrated article that was sympathetic to the champ, Ali complained that Patterson had insisted on calling him Clay. "Don't worry Cassius old boy," responded Daley in his sports column "he's not the only one."[26]

If Ali's name change caused a stir, the reasons for the change—his conversion to the Muslim religion and his involvement with the Nation of Islam--were unacceptable to many writers, who presented their own image of the organization. The Courier-Journal labeled the Nation of Islam a "Negro-supremacist sect" that criticized Martin Luther King, Jr. as representing "the white man's black man." To the Chicago Tribune, the Nation was a "Negro Supremacy cult" comprised of "phony Muslims" whose violent behavior was a threat to public safety. The New York Times also incorporated the words "cult" and "sect" into their descriptions of the organization, and described followers as "a band of thugs" that had "rejected the mainstream of American life." The trial of those accused of assassinating former Nation of Islam member Malcolm X provides a telling example of both the print media's coverage of the Nation of Islam and the public's response to Muhammad Ali's association with the organization.[27]

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[26]Passim, Ibid; New York Times 4 August 1966 Arthur Daley "Sports of the Times: Listening to Cassius" p 53

[27]Chicago Tribune 25 February 1966 "He's All Yours Louisville"; "Let Clay Go To Vietnam—Legislator" p. 1; Courier Journal 27 February 1966 Paul Sisco (UPI) "MLK Rapped; Muslim Chief Backs Clay's Draft Stand"; New York Times 24 February 1966 (UPI) "Clay Not Expected to Attend Black Muslim Convention" p 44; 26 February 1966 Lipsyte "Sports of the Times: Instant Bile" p 42

Malcolm X was murdered at the Audubon ballroom in Harlem shortly after 3:30 PM on 21 February 1965. Malcolm had split with Nation of Islam but remained a dedicated Muslim, and following his death many speculated that he had been killed for denouncing Elijah Muhammad as a racist and a philanderer. Many Associated Press and UPI wire reports described the assassination as a gunfight between violent gangsters, and these stereotypes were perpetuated in the ensuing weeks. Malcolm's supporters promised violent reprisals, and a fire in Ali's apartment on 23 February 1965 sparked fears that he would be assassinated in retaliation. Three men accused of killing Malcolm, Talmadge Hayer, Norman 3X Butler, and Thomas 15X Johnson, were arrested and put on trial in New York.[28]

On 5 March 1966, in the last days of the trial, Muhammad Ali's name was raised by the prosecution in connection with the Nation, and specifically with defendant Norman 3X Butler, whom the prosecutor asked if he had worked as Ali's bodyguard. Butler's attorney, William Chance, demanded the judge declare a mistrial because of "the light in which Clay had been cast." Charles Beavers, attorney for another defendant, agreed that the prosecution had attempted to prejudice the jury by bringing up Ali's name, and similarly called for a mistrial. The judge refused, and on 11 March 1966 all three defendants were found guilty. A month later they were sentenced to life in prison.[29]

A month before the three men were found guilty, Muhammad Ali appeared in court to plead guilty to a charge of "disorderly conduct" resulting from a traffic stop in

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[28] Atlanta Constitution 24 February 1965 "2 Mosques Burn"

[29] New York Times 5 March 1966 "Testimony Ended in Malcolm X Case" p 10; 8 March 1966 Thomas Buckley "Defense Sums Up in Malcolm Case" p 24; Times (London) 12 March 1966; 16 April 1966

December 1965. Ali had been a passenger in a car that was stopped for improper registration tags. When the officer approached the car, the Chicago Tribune reported, Ali stepped out of the car and, after a verbal exchange with the officer, had dared the policeman to hit him. The officer arrested Ali, and in February 1966 he pled guilty to the charge and paid a 50-dollar fine. This incident was Ali's sole brush with the law before 1966--hardly enough to justify the negative reaction sparked by the prosecution's mention of his name—when Ali appeared in court over a personal matter.[30]

Ali's name appeared in court proceedings between February and April 1966, as a result of his divorce from Sonji Roy, and reporters used the divorce proceedings to depict Ali as an irresponsible religious zealot who rejected the authority of law. The two had been married in 1964, and less than two months before his Army reclassification they had divorced. In February 1966, Sonji's lawyer declared that he would take Ali's new red Cadillac convertible and his $8,000 wardrobe as partial payment for $22,500 that Ali owed to pay Sonji's attorney fees. In April, Sonji appeared in court to report that Ali had not paid the $1,250 a month in alimony in the months since their divorce. Ali did not appear in court and was held in contempt by the presiding judge, who threatened to send the champ to jail if he did not pay. By July 1966 a judge demanded that Ali purchase a $50,000 alimony bond and again threatened to send him to jail if he refused to pay, once again holding him in contempt for failure to appear. Ali's personal lawyer, Edward Jacko, told the judge that he would not have the money until his next fight.[31]

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[30] Chicago Tribune 21 February 1966 "Reveal Clay Paid $50 Fine in Traffic Case" p 2

[31] Hauser, Muhammad Ali, 116; New York Times 2 April 1966 (AP) "Clay Facing Jail Over Alimony Payments" p 34; Times (London) 29 July 1966 "Cassius Clay Faces Gaol Sentence" p 10 col. B

On 27 March 1966 the Louisville Courier-Journal ran a story that suggested that Ali had been reclassified 1-A as a direct result of his divorce from Sonji. The paper reported that had Ali not been divorced he would not have been eligible for the draft at the time he was reclassified. His 1-A status came "almost immediately" after the divorce. Ali remarked that his divorce from Sonji resulted from her refusal to follow Muslim customs, especially regarding restrictions on female dress. If the Courier Journal's speculation about the divorce causing his reclassification was correct, then Ali's claims in the New York Times that the government was "picking on him" for his affiliation with the Nation of Islam was not far from the mark, albeit ignoring his own action of divorcing Sonji for her failure to meet Nation of Islam requirements.[32]

Whatever the cause of the draft boards actions, Ali's response to reporters in February 1966 caused bitter reactions—not the least in Chicago, where Ali was set to meet Ernie Terrell in a match on March 29. Winnifred Phillips, chief selective service clerk of Jefferson County, (where Louisville is located) Kentucky assured reporters that Ali would not be called until the April draft, which would not interfere with the Terrell fight. The New York State Athletic Commission had refused to grant a license to the fight prior to the champ's reclassification comments, but once Ali quotes appeared in newspapers nationwide, the Chicago Tribune initiated a campaign to drive the fight out of Chicago. This was an image war.[33]

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[32]Courier Journal 27 March 1966 Larry Boeck "Divorce Gives Chuvalo Chance"; New York Times 18 February 1966 Lipsyte "Fighter Charges"

[33]Courier Journal (?)

On 19 February—one day after the story broke—the Tribune printed an unsigned editorial asserting that the paper had been correct in previously asking that the city of Chicago be spared "the spectacle of a would be draft dodger defending his title" against another fighter who was ineligible for duty. Ernie Terrell, who stood at six-feet six-inches, was too tall to be drafted, but remarked in all seriousness that "no matter how much money you make, when you're called you have to go. This is the way it should be." The editorial further claimed that "sucker spectators" and Chicagoans in general were "unwittingly encouraging [Ali] by their interest in a fight whose profits" would fund the Nation of Islam. The editorial concluded that Ali should be fighting in Viet Nam, not Illinois.[34]

The editorial ran the same day that Ali suggested that "millions of Muslims" were watching the events unfold. A Tribune reporter interviewed Joe Triner, the head of the Illinois State Athletic Commission, who disagreed with Ali's comments but replied that the outburst was no reason to cancel the fight because "Lots of people have bought tickets in hopes of seeing him get his block knocked off." The next day the Illinois chapter of the American Legion complained to Governor Kerner and two state legislators protested the licensing of the fight. Democratic State Senator Thomas McGloon suggested that the athletic commission call "this Muhammad—whatever his name is" and clarify his statements about the Army, and then examine its' decision to allow the fight. State Representative Lawrence Pussteri, a Republican, demanded that the commission

[34]Chicago Tribune 19 February 1966 "The Reluctant Hero"; New York Times 22 February 1966 (UPI) "Terrell Scolds His Rival" p 17

cancel the fight immediately. Governor Kerner responded that he left the decision to the commission.[35]

The Tribune carried two stories on February 20 that exposed their intentions. One reporter, under the auspices of a factual report, speculated that the Louisville draft board could still act in time to cancel the fight. Selective service, the reporter noted, would have to act quickly, but it could happen. The reporter seemed to believe that such an outcome was desirable. Members of the athletic commission remained reluctant, when asked by the Tribune, to cancel the fight. Commission member Lou Radzienda called Ali a "mouthy kid," but affirmed Ali's "right to his own opinion and . . . freedom of expression." "His statements have nothing to do with boxing," continued Radzienda, who remarked that several politicians and bankers opposed the war but still received the community's business. Apparently unsatisfied, a reporter for the Tribune called Joe Robichaux, another commission member. Robichaux had not read Ali's comments and he snapped at the Tribune reporter "It is the duty of the commission to make decisions without coercion from anybody!"[36]

The campaign continued. On 21 February the Chicago Tribune carried nine stories about Ali, the athletic commission, and the fight. A Tribune reporter, dispatched to a nearby Army hospital, interviewed wounded GIs recently returned from Vietnam about Ali's statements. Few felt sympathy for the boxer. The paper unearthed details of Ali's December 1965 arrest and printed the story. A reporter interviewed Ali's ex-wife

[35]Chicago Tribune 19 February 1966 "Millions of Muslims Are Watching"; "No Cause to Call Off Bout, Triner Asserts" p 1; Ibid, 20 February 1966 "Crime Prober Demands State Bar Clay Fight" p 1

[36]Chicago Tribune 20 February 1966 "Draft Can K.O. Clay Fight—If It Hurries" p 2; "Radzienda Favors Fight" S1

Sonji about her feelings—"He should fight," she said—and carried the story separately, while a banner headline on the sports page announced: "Clay and Muslim Pals Figure to Strike It Rich Here" with the subhead "Estimate Their Take At Over a Million." In the text of another article, the writer reported that the Nation of Islam believed the white man to be "the devil himself," and that Ali and his brother had both joined the "hate group." The article also remarked that Ali idolized Elijah Muhammad, who spent time in federal prison during "World War I on charges of being a draft dodger."[37]

The Tribune applied pressure in other areas as well. A reporter attended the inaugural day of the Inland Daily Press Association meeting, where over twenty publishers, editors, and other executives of Illinois newspapers commented on Ali's remarks. The Chicago Tribune claimed that all interviewees believed that "the image of Chicago, the state, the nation, and the boxing profession will be irreparably damaged if the fight is permitted to take place." Robert Sward, business manager of the Moline Dispatch, commented that "I would not miss Clay from the sports scene at all . . . because of his unusual attitudes and habits." This article illustrates the enemies that Muhammad Ali faced in the domestic press—of the twenty owners of media outlets in the state of Illinois not one supported Ali's right to dissent, and all believed that Ali's image abstractly (and "irreparably") damaged all that it touched. [38]

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[37]Chicago Tribune 21 February 1966 "2 Legislators Rip Clay Bout License"; "Champs Plaint Irks GIs Back From Vietnam"; "War Hero Choate Says He'd Back Boxing Ban"; "VFW Urges Kerner to Block Clay Fight"; "Reveals Clay Paid $50"; "News Chiefs Rap Kerner, Boxing Board"; "Clay Sees Self as Boon to US in Civilian Dress"; "Clay and Muslim Pals Figure to Strike It Rich Here"; "Clay-Terrell Bout Sent Packing by NY"; "Clay Alone in His Corner"

[38]Ibid "News Chiefs Rap Kerner"

The Tribune also suggested that those supportive of Ali had ulterior motives, some of them self-serving but others possibly criminal. One story speculated that the Illinois Athlete Commission was reticent about canceling the fight because it needed money. Of the $50,733.70 that the commission spent in 1965, the majority went to salaries. But the commission only received $28,012 in event receipts that same year, reported the Tribune, causing a financial crisis. The paper printed the salaries of all commission members—two of whom returned the money because of the commission's financial straits—and then attempted to implicate the board members in questionable situations. One member, the Tribune reported, had previously worked as a hostess at a restaurant that arsonists burned, and the head of the commission Joe Triner had apparently contradicted a decision he made in 1938 when he banned a Joe Louis bout because of a pre-fight controversy.[39]

On 22 February, despite growing pressure from the Tribune and State politicians, Joe Triner announced that the athletic commission would meet with Ali. According to Triner, who had spoken to Ali on the telephone, the champ apologized to "the commission, the governor, the fight promoters, and the public." In his first comments since the initial reaction to reclassification, Ali appeared contrite. Triner told the Tribune that Ali "said that he was sorry for having his big mouth make those statements" and would prove to the commission that he did not mean them. The Tribune also reported that Ali was en route to Chicago to speak at the annual Nation of Islam convention, where the boxer had apparently taken Malcolm X's position as second in power only to

[39]Ibid "The Commission is Reluctant"

Elijah Muhammad. Two "Letters to the Editor" asking for the commission to bar the fight also appeared, as did an account of Governor Kerner's orders to the board to reconsider allowing the bout.[40]

Two editorials about Ali ran in the Tribune on 23 February 1966, the first disingenuous, the second, sadistic. The first editorial praised Chicago mayor Richard Daley for his "good judgment" in opposing the fight. "It is not in the interests of the people of Chicago or Illinois to glorify men of the caliber of Terrell or Clay or to invite the enormous danger of disorder which the fight will entail." Despite assurances from the police department that they could control the "Black Muslims," the Tribune reminded readers that "violence could spread like a prairie fire." If this editorial suggested that Ali was a truly dangerous individual that could physically injure the city of Chicago, the second editorial characterized Ali as a spoiled, cowardly egomaniac. [41]

The second editorial, penned by David Condon and addressed to "Mr. Greatest," made light of the dangers Ali would face in the Army. The article sarcastically claimed that, although generals and colonels may not meet Ali's personal qualifications for friends, he would first encounter the drill instructor, who will deny that Ali is "the greatest" at all. The article's author delighted in the thought of Ali peeling potatoes, mopping floors, and being mocked and ostracized by his fellow soldiers. The editorial also suggested—with an attempt at humor--that Ali could be killed during live ammunition training, but should not worry, as the second-lieutenant would notify his next

[40]Ibid 22 February 1966 "State Reconsidering Clay Fight" p 1; "Letters to Editor"

[41]Ibid 23 February 1966 "Mayor Daley's Good Advice"

of kin. If Ali survived, Condon concluded, he would feel patriotic every time he sees the Stars and Stripes. "It'll get even a big knothead like you."[42]

On 25 February Ali arrived at the Chicago airport from Miami. As he stepped off the plane, reporters noticed that his mouth was taped shut. After saying that he and promoter Ben Bentley had thought of the tape together, he refused to answer any of the journalists' questions and instead climbed into a car driven by his manager Herbert Muhammad. Ali controlled his own image through silence; in response the Tribune listed, in numerical order, "the statements most inflammatory" made by Ali after he learned of his reclassification. Ignoring its own actions of the past week, the paper reported that Governor Kerner "brought about today's showdown." The paper then suggested that the Governor stop the fight using a provision in the Illinois State athletic code barring contestants guilty of "ungentlemanly conduct." Another unsigned editorial appeared that denounced Ali as a "crybaby" and, before the meeting even commenced, predicted that the fight would be canceled. "Why not take the fight back to Louisville?" the editorialist asked, where the 11 millionaires of Ali's managerial group first "foisted Clay onto the public" [.][43]

Muhammad Ali's meeting with the Illinois State Athletic Commission was the climax of this fight for self-definition. With every reference to Cassius Clay, Ali interrupted with "Muhammad Ali, if you please sir." Ali, wearing a signature bow-tie, expressed regret that he had threatened the investments of promoters, angered veterans,

[42]Ibid David Condon "In the Wake of the News: Mr. Greatest"

[43]Ibid, 25 February 1966 "Clay Arrives for 'Apology' Hearing" p 1; "He's All Yours, Louisville"

and embarrassed the commission. When chairman Joe Triner "led with his chin" by asking: "Then you're not apologizing for the unpatriotic statements you made?" Ali abandoned his prepared statements and replied, "I'm apologizing for making them to sportswriters and newspapers." Amid the nine television cameras set up to record the exchange, Ali's attorney attempted to intercede, but Ali brushed him off and, recognizing the limited authority of the Commission, said "I'm not here to make a showdown plea or apologize the way the press said I would . . . if I've got any apologizing to do, I'll do it to government officials . . . [but] I don't have to apologize. I'm not in court." Commissioner Robichaux interjected with a central question of image, asking Ali if he was behaving like the "people's champion." Ali yelled "Yes I am!" A shouting match ensued, in the midst of which Commissioner Radzienda called a recess.[44]

Less than an hour after the recess, the Illinois Attorney General declared the match illegal because of a legal technicality. But a letter to the editor published the day after the commission meeting suggests that the fervor with which the Tribune attacked the fight also angered the paper's readership. Bowman Kreer pleaded with the paper, "don't write about him . . . [don't] take his picture. Don't even criticize him. Just completely ignore him." Kreer, who called the champ "Cassius Aly or Muhammad Clay or whatever his name is," denounced his Viet Nam comments. In an attempt to counter the Tribune's claim that as news, Ali must be covered Kreer wrote "I say he's legitimate news on the one or two nights a year that he defends his title. It would be better for the country, especially its youngsters, if none of the things Clay says or stands for ever were

[44]Courier Journal 26 February 1966 (UPI) "Law Staggers Clay Fight, But It's Still On For Now" p 1; Chicago Tribune 26 February 1966 Condon "In the Wake of the News"

printed." Kreer, a Tribune reader concerned with the over-saturation of Ali in the newspaper, essentially asked editors to stop Ali from promoting his own image. [45]

Was Ali really dangerous? The reasons that the New York State Athletic Commission refused to license the Ali/ Terrell bout make the zeal of the Chicago Tribune and the actions of the Illinois Attorney General against Muhammad Ali appear completely misguided. New York refused the fight not because of the statements of Ali, but because of the associations of Ernie Terrell. Terrell, aside from boxing professionally, played guitar in a rhythm and blues band called "The Heavyweights." The booking agent for the band, Bernie Glickman, also managed Terrell's boxing career, albeit unofficially. The New York Athletic Commission required Terrell to swear in an affidavit that he had broken all ties with Glickman, but, according to the Commission, the same day that Terrell swore the affidavit he boarded an airplane for Chicago accompanied by Glickman.[46]

Estes Kefauver's Senate Subcommittee that investigated boxing had found that Bernie Glickman was an associate of Frankie Carbo, who was once considered the "underworld czar of boxing." In 1966 Carbo, nicknamed "Mr. Gray," was serving a prison sentence for "extortion and conspiracy," but the mention of his name in association with Glickman and Terrell—coupled with the relationship between Carbo and

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[45]Chicago Tribune 26 February 1966 "Attorney General Clark Rules Bout is Illegal in State" p 1; "Letter to Editor"

[46]New York Times 7 June 1966 Robert Lipyte "Terrell Goes From Ropes to Strings"; Chicago Tribune 21 February 1966 "Clay-Terrell Bout Sent Packing By NY"

the management of Madison Square Garden--was enough for the New York Athletic Commission to deny Terrell a license for the Ali bout. Shortly after the failure to secure the New York venue, Glickman claimed that Felix (Milwaukee Phil) Alderisio, a known Mafia enforcer, attacked him in his suburban Schiller Park home. Alderisio choked Glickman and threatened to kill both he and Terrell if the two did not stay apart. Glickman, "reported to have been marked for death by underworld assassins," claimed that the attack was retribution for ruining the New York fight.[47]

In March 1966 Robert Lipsyte wrote a speculative column in the New York Times suggesting that members of La Cosa Nostra crime syndicate could feel threatened by the formation of Main Bout, Inc., Ali's new promotional company. Formed in January 1966, Main Bout, Inc. was an interracial management group whose members included Ali's manager—and son of Elijah Muhammad—Herbert Muhammad, and the Cleveland Browns' Jim Brown, among others. As the Courier Journal reported, while the "glory is the champ's, the power belongs to the man or corporation who controls the promotional rights to championship matches," as they decide everything, from where the fight is shown and by whom to which vendors sell food at the bout itself. Eighty percent of the revenue from the Ali/Terrell bout, which was set to broadcast in 300 cities in the United States and Canada, would go to Ali and Main Bout, Inc, with the remaining twenty percent being split between Terrell and the venue's promoters.[48]

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[47] New York Times 29 January 1966 Robert Lipsyte "Commission Denies License to Terrell, Balking Title Fight at the Garden"; 30 January 1966 Robert Lipsyte "Boxing's Bogeyman Back"; 30 May 1966 (choked); Chicago Tribune 21 February 1966 "Clay-Terrell Bout Sent Packing"

[48] New York Times 28 March 1966 Lipsyte "Showdown in Boxing" p 45

Because Main Bout, Inc. had no Mafia ties, Lipsyte continued, then many of the closed circuit operators, exhibitors, and other business associates that dealt with previous heavyweight bouts could lose out on the profits of the fight. When New York backed out on the fight, Chicago—"another city with a flourishing underworld"—licensed the fight. Lipsyte reported that during the Tribune's campaign against Ali, a rumor circulated through the city that if Terrell could last 15 rounds, he could win the championship by decision, even if he had not actually won the fight. Lipsyte argued that official fears of violent disturbances after the fight supported this line of reasoning, especially if an unfair anti-Ali decision caused a riot. But Chicago, too, passed on the fight.[49]

Throughout late February and early March, dozens of cities proposed holding the fight, only to rescind their offers once politicians denounced Ali's "unpatriotic statements." As the fight moved from city to city, over 100 of the 280 closed circuit theaters broke their contracts and refused to carry the bout. Jim Brown held a high-profile meeting with New York Representative Adam Clayton Powell and claimed that because Main Bout, Inc. was in control of the closed circuit coverage, efforts had been made to "get rid of them." Brown believed that these efforts were an attempt to stop a black business from reaping most of the profits. Powell promised to investigate.[50]

When the city of Toronto agreed to host the fight, Ernie Terrell pulled out, ostensibly because he disagreed with the contract. But Lipsyte suggested that Terrell withdrew because, with the fight out of the country, his Mafia contacts could no longer

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[49]Ibid

[50]Courier Journal 10 March 1966 (AP) "Terrell Blasts Contract, Says He's Pulling Out" S1; 11March 1966 (AP/UPI) "Terrell Dropped as Clay's Foe, But Fight 'On'" S1

control the outcome of the fight and would not make any money. Instead, he could wait until Ali was forced into the Army or sent to prison, at which point Terrell would more easily become the heavyweight boxing champion. George Chuvalo was named Terrell's replacement, but the fight seemed doomed to financial failure. Closed circuit theaters canceled the fight in part due to pressure from politicians, the print media, and veteran's groups that disagreed with Ali, but there is a possibility that La Cosa Nostra played a role in ruining the fight as well.[51]

Although Mafia figures often used violence and intimidation as a means to reach desired goals, they, at times, also showed remarkable insight and creativity in using less overt forms of pressure. Not unlike Muhammad Ali and the Chicago Tribune, Mafia members also instigated image wars. A telling example of this occurred in Secaucus, New Jersey, where a group of Cosa Nostra members had applied for a license to open a racetrack. The Municipal Government refused to license these men because of their underworld connections, but allowed another individual to obtain a license if a city referendum proved that locals supported the track. In an attempt to defeat the vote, the men who had been denied a license hired dozens of young black and Puerto Rican men to distribute pamphlets for the racetrack.[52]

The pamphlets, which were delivered door to door in the white suburbs, claimed that the racetrack was "pro-integration and pro-brotherhood." The pamphleteers, reported the New York Times, rang doorbells and "aggressively sought accommodation"

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[51] New York Times 28 March 1966 Lipsyte "Showdown in Boxing" p 45; Courier Journal 12 March 1966 "Clay, Chuvalo Sign For Bout"

[52] New York Times 17 September 1968 Ronald Sullivan "Crime Expert Tells New Jersey Hearing How Mafia Sabotaged the Referendum on Secaucus Track" p 30

in the homes of white New Jersey-ites. "They were actually out to wreak vengeance," commented a New York detective who confirmed that on the Saturday before the vote eleven African American and Puerto Rican men were arrested for disorderly conduct. The referendum, which carried the county and was heavily favored to win, was soundly defeated in Secaucus and thus failed. The Mafia members had presented an aggressive and negative image of integration, and the "white backlash" that the Cosa Nostra members sought worked perfectly.[53]

Although scant evidence exists to prove that the Mafia exerted similar pressure to damage the Ali/Chuvalo fight, there is little doubt that the crime syndicate remained a strong force in boxing. In May 1966 authorities located Bernie Glickman in St. Louis, where he was hiding from assassins, and returned him to Chicago with two FBI agents. Glickman agreed to testify, and among those subpoenaed for the investigation were Harry Markson and Teddy Brenner, who both worked as boxing officials at Madison Square Garden. The investigation—which began as a result of Glickman's claims—continued throughout the 1970s, and uncovered Mafia involvement in boxing that reached as high as Carlo Gambino, leader of the most powerful of the five families that constituted La Cosa Nostra.[54]

Ernie Terrell was not alone in his association with Mafia figures. Frank DePaula, a popular lightweight contender was arrested with his manager—a known associate of the New York underworld--for stealing $80,000 dollars from a New Jersey pier.

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[53]Ibid

[54]New York Times 30 May 1966 "Key Boxing"; (here and there) Boxing Investigations; Courier Journal 27 March 1966 "Grand Jurors to Probe Terrell 'Death Threats'"

Heavyweight contender Jerry Quarry, later an opponent of Ali, worked with trainer Teddy Bentham, who himself had trained a fighter named Tony Pellone. Tommy Eboli, a childhood friend of Bentham's, managed Pellone. In the mid 1950s, after Pellone was defeated in a match, Tommy Eboli jumped into the ring and punched referee Ray Miller in the mouth. In 1966, after the death of Vito Genovese, Eboli was expected to control La Cosa Nostra. "I don't like to talk much about Tommy," Bentham said in an interview, "because I might meet those guys on the street sometime." In 1969 Eboli's associate James Napoli (Jimmy Nap), a professional gambler with connections to Teddy Brenner of Madison Square Garden, was indicted by a federal boxing inquiry for fixing fights. In 1972, while walking on a Brooklyn sidewalk, Tommy Eboli was shot five times in the face by a Cosa Nostra assassin and killed.[55]

So, considering La Cosa Nostra's involvement with Terrell, a question arises: who was more dangerous to boxing, Muhammad Ali or Ernie Terrell? During the investigations into Glickman's claims, a prosecutor commented to the New York Times that news coverage and media speculation had damaged the government's inquiry into Mafia control of boxing. As the investigation progressed, prosecutors echoed this statement. New York District Attorney Alfred Scotti refused to discuss any details of the

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[55]New York Times 29 May 1969 Morris Kaplan "Benevenuti and Tiger Testify"; 16 March 1969 Dave Anderson "Trainer Uses 'Kid Gloves' on His Quarry" pS4; 17 July 1972 Eric Pace "A Key Gang Figure Slain in Brooklyn; Eboli is Felled By 5 Bullets in 15th Mafia Style Killing in 13 Months" p 20; "Eboli Showed a Fiery Temper, But He Had No Feuds or Fear"; 17 December 1969 Richard Severo "Boxer is Indicted With 2 Gamblers" p 1

case with the media, and the head of New York State's Boxing Commission, Edwin Dooley, also refused to comment about details of the case.[56]

But officials seldom protested media coverage of Muhammad Ali, and in the days following Ali's reclassification statements it was Ali—not Terrell—who was considered more dangerous to the public. Charles Siragusa, the executive director for the Illinois Criminal Investigation commission appeared to sum up the feelings of the Tribune when he stated that, although New York had refused the fight because of Terrell's ties to Glickman, what really disgusted him was Ali's "whining appeal to avoid military service." Surely a fixed championship fight, promoted by racketeers and professional gamblers and supported by Mafia enforcers, would do far more to discredit the city of Chicago and the sport of boxing in general than would the presence of Muhammad Ali, who belonged to a religious minority and was managed by a company whose board was made up of a black majority. But the Chicago Tribune's image of Ali would have been contradicted by such disclosures. [57]

The preceding paragraphs illuminate two important points. The first point is that the Chicago Tribune's campaign to drive the Muhammad Ali/Ernie Terrell bout out of Chicago was more than misdirected, it was unfair. Although the campaign illustrates the esteem in which Ali and the Nation of Islam were held in the newspaper's mind, it also shows a willful distortion of fact and circumstance. The newspaper attacked Ali incessantly for days, until pressure from the paper and the state government cancelled the

[56]Ibid 2 April 1966 "News Media"

[57]Chicago Tribune 23 February 1966 "Siragusa Raps Clay On Draft"

fight. In the entire week of coverage, Ernie Terrell's ties with Glickman were mentioned exactly once, and even in that story important details—especially concerning death threats and the possibility of a fixed fight—were noticeably absent.

Aside from investigating Mafia ties in boxing as a comparative tool, the above paragraphs also serve to illustrate the variety of forces arrayed against Muhammad Ali. Ali's detractors—veteran's groups, politicians, and aggressive journalists (Lipsyte even speculates that the Louisville Sponsoring Group, which had managed Ali since his Olympic victory and who were being replaced by Herbert Muhammad and the nation, were attempting to discredit him)—were joined, unwittingly, by the likes of "Milwaukee Phil", "Mr. Gray", and Carlo Gambino. Ali's defeat of Sonny Liston in 1964 had essentially eliminated Mafia ties to the heavyweight crown. Liston was well known for his associations with the Cosa Nostra—had even acted as an enforcer and bodyguard for some members—and his loss to the then Cassius Clay left the associations between the Mafia and heavyweight boxing obsolete. The Mafia did not control Ali, who instead formed Main Bout, Inc. to generate revenue for the Nation of Islam as well as to aid the black community in general.[58]

"What did I do wrong?" Muhammad Ali asked a Courier Journal reporter. "What did I do to become the most despised athlete in history?" The heavyweight champion, in Toronto training for the bout against Terrell's replacement George Chuvalo, listed the reasons that he should be popular. "I live a good life, I don't run around with

[58]New York Times 30 January 1966 Lipsyte "Boxing Bogeyman"; Tosches Devil and Sonny Liston

women—and you just don't know how many there are hanging around a champion." As well as abstaining from drinking and smoking, Ali remarked that "I take care of my parents. They're good Christian and humble people . . . And I'm religious. I pray five times a day and go to worship three nights a week. But then I say I don't have any quarrel with the Viet Cong, and everybody gets on me . . . I didn't expect Southerners to like me. I'm a Negro that's got money. But what about the rest of them? What did I do except say what I thought? I thought any American was supposed to be able to do that."[59]

Ali was not referring only to the domestic press. Joe Louis criticized "Cassius Clay", as did Floyd Patterson, for his comments. Jackie Robinson, while offering support to Ali as an athlete, remarked that, on the subject of Vietnam, the boxer was "on his own." While some in his peer group enlisted for service—including Arthur Ashe, previously a member of ROTC—others, while not making overtly political statements, openly met with Ali. Jim Brown, Bill Russell, and (the then) Lou Alcindor all discussed the issue with Ali privately, and offered their "support in whatever he chose to do." The reaction in the broader African-American was similarly mixed. Young northerners tended to support Ali, while the older and more conservative middle-class, both North and South, did not. A New York Times reporter, in an attempt to gauge black public opinion, interviewed several middle-aged men in a Harlem barbershop. All of the men referred to Ali as "Cassius Clay," and, refraining from openly criticizing the boxer, suggested that he was being manipulated by the Nation of Islam. While moderates often disguised their dubious reactions to Ali's associations and statements by questioning his

[59]Courier Journal 17 March 1966 James S. Tunnell "Champ Wonders What Went Wrong" p 1

overall state of mind, conservatives railed against him. "I see no reason why the law shouldn't be broken in the cases of Cleveland Sellers, Stokely Carmichael, and Cassius Clay," began a letter written to the Atlanta Constitution, and attributed only to "A NEGRO VIETNAM DISABLED VETERAN" The author suggested that all three should be jailed immediately, and that Carmichael should be "beheaded."[60]

After scores of United States cities refused to hold the fight—prompting the champ at one point to forge a passport to the moon, the only place left to fight--Ali found himself in Canada, where he began a campaign to rally support and answer his critics. According to Al Sokol of the Toronto Telegram, Canada felt a "dubious reaction . . . to the war in Viet Nam," and both the press and the public warmly welcomed the controversial boxer. He joked about being "a champion against the world," but as the aftermath of the Chuvalo match would show, the comment was not entirely correct. In response to the prospective failure of the fight, especially in the closed circuit market, Ali replied with an image of principled defiance. "I know I'm losing a lot of money and I don't care because I'm proving a point." Most importantly, Ali endeared himself to the Canadians. "Clay has made a wonderful impression," Al Sokol stated, and Tom Geargevich, Toronto resident, added: "He's a wonderful young man . . . we are glad he is here."[61]

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[60]New York Times 20 February 1966 "Athletes Face Call in Draft Step-Up"; 30 April 1967 "The Draft: Cassius vs. Army"; Courier Journal 18 February 1966 Earl Ruby "Ruby's Report: Joe Louis was in Army 48 Hours after Enlisting"; Hauser, Muhammad Ali, 178; Atlanta Constitution 8 May 1967 Pulse of the Public "Forget Law?"

[61]Cottrell, Muhammad Ali, Who Once was Cassius Clay , 254-55; Courier Journal 25 March 1966 Boeck "Clay Says He's "Champ Against the World'" B6

On 28 March 1966, two days before the fight, Ali, who had been shadow boxing before a crowd of hundreds of fans, leaned on the top rope and shouted: "All you sports writers—c'mon into the ring. I got a surprise for you." Larry Boeck, writing for the Louisville Courier-Journal, reported that in the suddenly silent gymnasium not a sports writer moved. "C'mon now . . . I give you all interviews all the time." The request was again met with silent stillness. "You don't come in no ring and I don't give you no more interviews." The threat compelled the self-conscious journalists to climb into the boxing ring. "This is where I've always wanted to get you guys—in the ring with me."[62]

One onlooker suggested that Ali start throwing punches, but he refused. Ali then asked how many reporters were from the United States, but before they could reply the champ began counting them off. "Ladies and gentleman, these are the men who run me out of the United States." He then turned to the crowd of hundreds who were watching him train. "But wherever I go, that's where the title goes. So you tell 'em who's the champion of the world?" The crowd roared back "You are!" "Who's the champ of Canada?" "You are!" they screamed. "Who's the champ of Trinidad?" he asked, before answering his own question with "I am!"[63]

The fight turned out to be far more of a contest than experts expected. This resulted, to a great extent, from Chuvalo's toughness. Chuvalo had never been knocked down in a fight, much less knocked out, and one observer noted that if all fights went 100 rounds Chuvalo would be the heavyweight champion. The 13,000 spectators at Maple

[62]Ibid 28 March 1966 Boeck "Clay, Back In Form, 'Takes On' Writers"

[63]Ibid

Leaf Gardens witnessed "more action and punishment than any other crowd at a Clay fight." At one point Ali, holding Chuvalo's head, allowed the challenger to rabbit punch his lower side. "Harder! Harder!" Ali yelled, stirring up the crowd. Despite a tough fight, Chuvalo lost in a fifteen round decision and Ali remained the champion of heavyweight boxing.[64]

But Ali had enjoyed a victory before he ever set foot inside the ring—he had wooed an international constituency. The story above illustrates Ali's response to the press; he negated the power of media outlets opposed to him by demonstrating his international popularity. Ali recognized that the media's image of him had contributed to the failure of securing a U.S. venue for the fight, but he countered the actions of domestic opponents by traveling abroad and generating international support. In this capacity, Ali benefited from the rise of global communications technology. Ali's popularity abroad had grown steadily since his conversion to Islam and his world tour following his victory over Sonny Liston, but in the years since that tour technological advances had made possible the live broadcast of events across the globe. If Ali refined his image for international consumption, that image was projected internationally. Ali's actions in Canada, however, were only the beginning.

The day after his loss to Ali, George Chuvalo, along with his wife and a cousin, were sitting outside of their hotel in Toronto when they saw an object in the sky. Lynne Chuvalo told a reporter that the object was "unlike any commercial aircraft I've ever seen." The object, glowing white, red, green, and blue, was witnessed by hundreds of

[64]Ibid 30 March 1966 "Clay Bombards Chuvalo for 15 Round Decision"; "Champ Says Foe Allowed to Hit Low"; Skill, Brains, and Guts

other Canadians as well. The day before the fight, scores of people across the United States and Canada reported seeing unidentified flying objects. Ali himself spoke of spaceships three days before the fight. The "mothership," as Ali called it, was one-half a mile long and one-half a mile wide, and could be seen on clear nights. According to Nation of Islam doctrine, the ship was piloted by Allah himself, who would land the craft and rescue all Muslims when the Earth was destroyed in the wars of Armageddon. More U.F.O.'s were sighted in 1966 than in any other year that such sightings were recorded. The phenomenon was so widespread internationally that Soviet scientists proposed an international investigation, and many reporters joked about a "flying saucer gap."[65]

Objects were orbiting the heavens. In 1939 Wernher von Braun, a German scientist, inspired by the technological advances made by Robert H. Goddard, developed the first guidance controlled vertical rocket that, on its' test run, reached an altitude of over seven miles. Slightly modified versions of this rocket—known as V2s—were fired on London during World War II. Following the war, British science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke proposed that, using the rocket technology to break the bonds of gravity, satellites could be installed in space that would vastly improve communications. Clarke suggested that signals could be beamed from Earth to the satellites, which could then transmit them back to other points on the planet. In 1957 the Soviet Union launched the first satellite, a 194 pound yellow ball called Sputnik, or "fellow traveler." American

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[65]New York Times 1 April 1966 (UPI) "Chuvalo Spies Object Flying Over Toronto" p 39; 12 November 1967 "Soviet Study of U.F.O.'s is Reported Under Way"; 10 December 1967 "A Soviet Astronomer Suggests World Study of Flying Saucers"; 15 December 1967 "Sightings of U.F.O.'s Near Peak in 1966"; Courier Journal 29 March 1966 (UPI) "New U.F.O.s Are Reported in 3 States"; Ibid 25 March 1966 Boeck "Champ Against the World"

newspapers carried banner headlines that claimed "America Beaten" and "Pearl Harbor in Space." Two years later Muhammad Ali won his first championship fight--a gold medal at the 1960 Rome Olympics.[66]

On 10 July 1962 AT&T launched Telstar I, the first satellite to send television signals across the Atlantic Ocean. The launch, a cultural event, was immortalized in a song by the Tornadoes. Suspicious of private control of telecommunications, and prescient in his skepticism that private ownership of satellites could lead to conflicts of interest between business and government, President John F. Kennedy refused to take part in the launch or in the inaugural telecasts of the Telstar. Kennedy believed that the federal government should have oversight over international communications, and in 1963 COMSAT was created to regulate transmissions between the United States and foreign governments. One year later Muhammad Ali defeated Sonny Liston to capture the heavyweight boxing crown.[67]

Muhammad Ali's success continued to parallel triumphs in communication technology. The first commercial international communications satellite, and the first step towards an international satellite system, was named Early Bird, later changed to Intelsat 1. Early Bird connected the United States and Europe, and was launched in June 1965. That same year Muhammad Ali defeated Sonny Liston in a rematch to secure his position as heavyweight champion. Intelsat 2, also known as Lani, or Heavenly, Bird, connected the U.S. and Hawaii in November 1966, but when it failed to reach its exact

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[66]Oslin, Story of Telecom, 387-394; Leinwoll, From Spark to Satellite, 202-4; Mattelart, Networking the World, 52-7; Remnick, King of the World, 254-8; Hauser, Muhammad Ali, 26-9; 160

[67]Ibid.

orbit, a second Lani Bird was launched to connect the U.S. with Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia. Muhammad Ali's fight against Ernie Terrell for the WBA championship belt occurred three months later. These were soon supplemented by other satellites, and by 1968 communication satellites connected the entire world.[68]

Muhammad Ali's international popularity was inextricable from the technological advances that facilitated global viewership. In London awaiting his August 1966 bout against Brian London, Ali told a reporter that because of him eight countries—the holy city of Mecca, Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Algeria, and Sudan--would see a boxing match for the first time. He continued that over 600 million people would watch him, from "old ladies to itty-bitty children. I'll reach into every culture, every nation, every religion." His 1967 bout against Ernie Terrell was listed for both the Early Bird and the Lani Bird satellites, and was broadcast simultaneously through Europe and Asia—a first in the history of communications. Reporters from the British Broadcasting Company and Spanish networks, as well as the Nippon Television Network in Japan provided audio commentary at ringside. The fight was broadcast to Australia, Curacao, Ghana, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Kenya, Kuwait, Liberia, Malaysia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria, the Philippines, Rhodesia, Singapore, Surinam, Uganda, Venezuela, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Argentina, and Puerto Rico, and was free on home television screens internationally. The United States and Canada received closed circuit coverage handled by Main Bout, Inc.[69]

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[68]Ibid

[69]New York Times 26 January 1967 "Clay Fight Listed For 2 Satellites" p 57; 4 August 1966 Arthur Daley "Sports of the Times: Listening to Cassius" p 53

But international interest in his boxing matches, and the subsequent demand for coverage, was inextricable from his personal appeal and, to a great extent, his image as a principled dissenter. After news spread that Ali had been reclassified, he received letters of support from fans in Algeria, Indonesia, and dozens of other countries. Ali had wooed the Canadians, and during the buildup to the Chuvalo fight a corps of international journalists interviewed the champ. A Dutch reporter had remarked "Americans are envious because [Ali] speaks the truth," and when Ali had asked two Turkish reporters if he was known in their country, they replied, "You are beloved. On the streets of Istanbul children wear pictures of you on their shirts and cry 'I am the greatest!'" An English expatriate in Egypt had declared that Ali was the reincarnation of Ramses II, "an old show off, but [with] a certain amount of charm." Following his victory over Chuvalo in Toronto, Ali signed to fight Henry Cooper, the British contender, in London.[70]

The result, as one reporter remarked, was "the public relations coup of the year." In a press conference at the airport in London immediately after his arrival, Ali praised his opponent, who was clearly outmatched, and began the campaign to win over the English. British boxing had been something of a joke for the past 68 years, Robert Lipsyte reminded readers, and that simple act of respect toward the British contender "capture[d] the island without a blow." He also wooed the international press by telling Swedish reporters of his love for Stockholm, suggested to German reporters that German contender Karl Mildenberger would be a tough opponent, and then shouted "Do they still

[70]Courier Journal 18 February 1966 "Clay Reclassified 1-A, He Asks 'Why Me?'"; 29 March 1966 "Clay Busy Greeting Friends on Eve of Bout"; New York Times 6 March 1966 Hedrick Smith "Following In Footsteps of the Pharaohs" p xx49

know me in Ghana?" Invitations from Africa, Asia, and the Indian subcontinent arrived daily, and Ali spoke of "truly exercising the world championship," by traveling from "country to country so everyone can have a shot."[71]

He praised the American public, saying that the majority supported his decision, and "It's just some politicians and boxing commissioners who make certain moves." But, when asked about the United States press, Ali responded "The American press keeps me in shape. The world wants to know, how can this man continue against the propaganda machines of the most powerfullest Government in the world; how can this man continue when even governments fall under the press?" Lipsyte reported that blacks and Muslims in London considered Ali as one who "speaks for us," and women had praised his courage in standing up for his principles in the face of such strong opposition. "As never before," the reporter continued, "Ali feels like an international figure." His devotion to Allah connected him to the "vast Muslim brotherhood," and his skin color made him a symbol of "the black emergence."[72]

The fight was bloody but relatively uneventful. Cooper was unusually prone to cuts, and started bleeding from the face early in the fight. Ali seemed unwilling to seriously injure the British challenger, especially as his face grew bloodier and bloodier. The fight, transmitted to the United States through the Early Bird satellite, was available free on home television, to be followed by the Preakness Stakes. Ali won easily, and in the post-fight wrap up declared that "Islam gave me strength to defeat Cooper." If Ali

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[71]New York Times 15 May 1966 Lipsyte "Clay's Fight With 'Our 'Enery' Small Talk of Town in London" p S1; 18 May 1966 Lipsyte "They're Slowly Going Wild About Ali" p 82; 20 May 1966 Lipsyte "Clay Thanks Britain and Praises U.S." p 54

[72]Ibid 18 May 1966 Lipsyte "They're Slowly Going Wild"; 20 May 1966 Lipsyte "Clay Thanks Britain"

had experienced a warm reception in London 1966, mobbed by fans wherever he went and treated with respect by the British press, it was but a hint at what was to follow.[73]

After the Cooper fight, Ali flew to Cairo, where he was greeted at the airport by a crowd of five-hundred students chanting his name. He told the students that "Right now my main concern is to go back to the States and try to beat the draft," but, as a United States citizen, he intended to "respect the laws of my country." Later in the day, Ali met President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who presented him with an ancient book of chantings from the Koran. In the United Arab Emirates, the High Council for Islamic Affairs hailed Ali as "A Moslem hero." And the older brother of King Faisal gave Ali a ring that had been in the family for generations. Even his detractor Arthur Daley was forced to admit that Ali was the most popular champ ever.[74]

By January 1967, with his draft call imminent, Muhammad Ali was in Houston where he was scheduled to fight none other than Ernie Terrell. The fight took on an ominous tone when, during a pre-fight publicity meeting with reporters, Terrell offhandedly called Ali "Clay." The champ responded, "Why do you call me Clay? You know my right name is Muhammad Ali." Terrell, believing that Ali was trying to psyche him out, did not respond. "It takes an Uncle Tom Negro to keep calling me by my slave name . . . You acting like another Uncle Tom Floyd Patterson, and I'm going to give you a good punishment, too. I'm going to make you an example to the world." Patterson had

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[73]Skill, Brains, and Guts; New York Times 25 May 1966 (Reuters) "Clay Visits Rival En Route to Cairo" p 78

[74]New York Times 26 May 1966 Hendrick Smith "Clay Tells Cairo He Hopes To Beat Draft" p 61; 29 May 1966 (Reuters) "Clay, Hero to Moslems, Tells Cairo He'll Return" p S3; 4 August 1966 Arthur Daley "Sports of the Times: Listening to Cassius" p 53

attacked Ali for his affiliation with the Nation of Islam, and in Alex Haley's 1964 interview with the then Cassius X, Ali had said that if he were to fight Patterson, it would "be the first time I ever trained in myself to develop a brutal killer instinct." Ali had indeed met Patterson in a bout a year later, and made good on his promise to embarrass the aging heavyweight. But at the weigh-in in Houston, Ali smacked Terrell, before saying "I'll ask you right after I whip you . . . if you don't make it easy on yourself, you're gonna be in boss trouble."[75]

The resulting fight was brutal. In the second round Ali broke Terrell's cheekbone, and a muscle in Terrell's left eye hooked on the shattered bone, causing the fighter to see double. By the fourth round, Terrell was incapacitated with his left eye completely closed and by the seventh round blood poured from a cut above his right eye. In the eighth round, Ali began screaming "What's my name? What's my name?" accentuating each question with a punch to the broken cheek. By the ninth round, with Terrell huddled in a defensive posture, Ali smiled at the crowd and boasted "You can't hit me. But I can hit you." Most sportswriters agreed that Ali had deliberately avoided knocking Terrell out in an effort to prolong the humiliation. Ali easily won the 15-round decision. "I'm like an astronaut," Ali told reporters after the fight. "In a world of my own." As Ali boasted to reporters that he had embarrassed the "dog", Terrell underwent surgery to repair his left eye.[76]

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[75]Ibid 29 December 1966 Lipsyte "Muhammad Ali Slaps at Terrell after Name Calling Exchange at Garden" p 38; Playboy Alex Haley 10-64

[76]New York Times 7 February 1967 Arthur Daley "Clay Keeps Promise" p 46; 8 February 1967 Daley "Sports of the Times: At Bottom of the Barrel" p 23

The Muhammad Ali/ Ernie Terrell fight was, in many respects, the climax of events that had occurred since Ali's reclassification--if not since his conversion to Islam. If Terrell was indeed the "great white hope" of many Americans--the symbol of an accommodationist African American who could reclaim the championship from the hands of Ali and the "Black Muslims"--he was also quite possibly, as the New York State Athletic Commission believed, the last hope of the criminal underworld to reclaim control of the heavyweight crown, a control that La Cosa Nostra lost when Ali defeated Sonny Liston in 1964 and 1965. Terrell had held the World Boxing Association's heavyweight title going into the fight, and although that title was seldom recognized or respected, Ali had unified the heavyweight belts and driven La Cosa Nostra from the realm of boxing.

But the fight was also far more than an act that "cleaned up" boxing. It also exposed a glaring contradiction in the way that the fight was recorded by the print media. "One almost misses Frankie Carbo and his mobster ilk," wrote sportswriter Arthur Daley in response to Ali's annihilation of Ernie Terrell. Why? Because as a first in the history of communication, more people around the globe had witnessed the fight than any previous boxing match. Millions of viewers had seen Ali demand recognition from Terrell, and they had seen Ali brutalize the man for his refusal to comply. With the defeat of Terrell, Ali proved internationally that he was unmatched in the sport of boxing—unbeatable—and that his worldwide fame would only continue to grow. As a black man, and, perhaps more importantly to his worldwide audience, a Muslim, Ali was celebrated internationally at a crucial early stage of globalization. As the United States and the Soviet Union competed to win the support of African and Asian nations in the

Cold War, the first accessible (through television) international sports superstar was also a separatist who called for an independent black nation. Highly critical of United States foreign policy, Muhammad Ali toured the world, winning support from admirers worldwide, and antagonizing the domestic daily press.[77]

Muhammad Ali highlighted the contradictions of the American press before an international audience, the most glaring of which was the newspapers' refusal to use the name Muhammad Ali. In the mediated reality presented by the dailies, "Cassius Clay" was a bad guy, and dangerous; a spoiled, suggestible crybaby who turned his back on a country that provided him with everything. Ali rejected this reality. He responded to labels of "dangerous" by accentuating his own humble religiosity while repeatedly reminding reporters of his true name. He refused to concede to the categories of the Chicago Tribune and the Illinois State Athletic Commission on topics as abstract as "The People's Champ." His answer to the domestic press's subjective concepts of meaning and consequence was an unmatched physicality—the objective truth of contest in a highly controlled environment—and a string of undeniable victories. In Canada he countered the power of the United States press by drumming up international support.

Ali's own version of events echoed internationally, illustrated by the unprecedented amount of support from Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Canada. This support ensured that Ali's bouts would continue to enjoy international satellite coverage, which would, in turn, generate continued interest in Ali's legal situation. He could be "a Muslim hero" in Egypt, "the greatest" in Turkey, a voice of truth in Holland,

[77] Ibid.

a fine, respectable man in Canada and England, and, alternately an "unpatriotic crybaby" and a dangerous voice of dissent in the United States. But, as Chapter Two will show, agents of the state and members of the general public agreed with the mediated reality presented by the domestic press.

The character of "Cassius Clay", as depicted by American dailies, was guilty of draft evasion and cowardice, made clear by his initial statements about reclassification and buttressed by the claims of sports writers, newspaper editors, and political appointees. In this mediated reality, "Cassius Clay" could not be found innocent, could not even be defended, and (as far as the daily papers were concerned) the debate ended there. "Clay" had convicted himself from the very beginning, before he even formally refused induction. When "Cassius Clay" finally refused to take the symbolic step forward, agents of the government reacted to him as the newspapers had predicted they would (and should): with swift, silencing action.

But state authorities were not dealing with the "Cassius Clay" of the press. (Muhammad Ali was far more complex--more radical, conservative, and liberal--than editorialists suggested, as was clearly evident in the papers' own day-to-day coverage.) Nor were they facing a Civil Rights movement based on non-violence. During the next two years, frustrations over seemingly slow civil rights achievements gave rise to an increasingly aggressive—and armed—black militancy, concentrated in urban settings previously untouched by Civil Rights groups. Black militancy coincided with the domestic anti-war movement, arguably still in its' nascent stages in 1966, which grew exponentially in the ensuing years, garnering national attention for acts of civil disobedience and protest. Muhammad Ali was neither an armed black militant, nor was

he was member of an anti-war group--unless Catholics qualify as an anti-war group; members of the Nation of Islam fought in Vietnam—but both the domestic press and various state authorities treated him as such. These comparisons, while initially detrimental, eventually served to vindicate Ali. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Two: "'How Can You Call It Freedom?' Muhammad Ali, Revolution, and the State, 1967-1971"

On 28 April 1966 Muhammad Ali ate breakfast in the restaurant of the Hotel America in Houston. Staring out the window at the overcast morning, Ali said "Every time I fight it gets cold and rainy. Then dingy and cool, no sun in sight nowhere." At 8 A.M., Ali stepped out of a taxicab with his legal team—Hayden Covington, Quinnan Hodges, and Chauncey Eskridge, lawyer for Martin Luther King, Jr.—and quickly walked up the stairs outside of the United States Custom House on Jacinto Street. A group of black men on their way to work stood across the street and applauded Ali's courage, saying "he gets more publicity than [President] Johnson." Scores of television and newspaper reporters stood as Muhammad Ali disappeared inside of the imposing structure to fill out paperwork, give a blood test, and be apprised of the upcoming induction schedule." At lunch, Ali refused the ham sandwich that was provided to all recruits.[78]

Outside of the Custom House, television crews attempted to instigate a small demonstration. A group of white college students had driven from Oklahoma to show support for Ali and opposition to the war in Vietnam, and a half-dozen young black men wearing "Black Power buttons" appeared on the street as well. The television news

[78] New York Times 29 April 1967 Robert Lipsyte "Clay Refuses Army Oath; Stripped of Boxing Crown" p1; Courier Journal 29 April 1967 Ed Meagher "Clay Refuses Induction; To Lose Boxing Crown"; Chicago Tribune 29 April 1967 "Clay Dodges Draft; Stripped of Title"; "Boxing Bodies Go Into Fast Ali Shuffle"; Times of London 29 April 1967 "Cassius Clay Refuses to Take Oath"; Atlanta Constitution Will Grimsley "Clay Refuses to Be Inducted"

teams, through aggressive and "sometimes insulting" questions eventually led both groups to create signs. The white college students created signs that called for the end of the war and improved civil rights. The African American group, eventually growing to about two dozen, held signs that read "Burn Baby Burn" and "Nothing Kills A Nigger Like Too Much Love". The reporters convinced several of the black protestors to wrap bed sheets around their heads or bodies in imitation of west African garb, and most of the group, reported Robert Lipsyte, were young women on their lunch hour from nearby businesses.[79]

At 1:10 P.M. Lieutenant Colonel J. Edwin McKee appeared at an improvised press room in the Custom House and declared to reporters: "Mr. Muhammad Ali has just refused to be inducted." Ali was not arrested, McKee continued, but notice had been sent to the United States Attorney General. Then Ali appeared in the room, and before thirteen television cameras and scores of reporters, quietly handed out a printed statement. Ali refused to answer reporter's questions, but the statement thanked those who had helped him in his professional career, Elijah Muhammad, Muhammad Oweida, the Secretary General of the High Council for Islamic Affairs, and Floyd McKissick, the president of the Congress of Racial Equality. "It is in light of my consciousness as a Muslim minister and my own personal convictions that I take my stand in refusing the call to be inducted in the armed services," the statement began. "I strongly object to the fact that so many newspapers have given the American public and the world the

[79] Ibid

impression that I have only two alternatives in taking this stand: either I go to jail or I go to the army. There is another alternative and that alternative is justice."[80]

The account above illustrates several key themes for this chapter. The demonstration of support for Ali, although initially small and quiet, grew, with the involvement of the television news crews, into a symbol of black defiance against an oppressive state. This was not the initial goal of the protestors—although they played a role in creating signs and acquiescing to reporters' requests—but was assigned to them based on the imperatives of the news organizations present. The display was constructed to convey a message from white television producers to the viewing public at large—the event was created by the media with the cooperation of the individual actors involved. Ali's appearance at the improvised press room mirrored his actions at the Chicago airport where his mouth was taped shut. At a crucial and controversial moment Ali controlled his mediated image by remaining silent. This silence contrasts sharply with the violence—rhetorical and physical—of the Ernie Terrell fight in Houston, where another image of Ali was evident. Finally, by rejecting the binary opposites of "prison" or "Army" (through the identification of a third category, that of justice) Ali contributed to setting the terms of debate within the public consciousness.

Ali had highlighted a contradiction in the mediated reality presented by the press and confirmed by the state, and he exploited similar gaps to his own benefit. This chapter begins with the legal appeals that attempted to halt the induction process, appeals that centered on selecting between Ali's several public personas. This process was not

[80]Ibid

entirely controlled by Ali, however, as politicians and the general public contributed to Ali's image construction. While Ali refined one image on the college lecture circuit, officials in the government and print media presented another image, connecting the boxer to violent strands of dissent emerging within the United States. To his opponents, Ali personified the potential of a violent domestic revolution against the socio-political order, and officials met the threat posed by Ali as they did the dangers posed by suspected revolutionaries—with quick actions of questionable legality. As the possibility of revolution grew more immediate--spurred on by organizations like the Revolutionary Action Movement, groups within the white New Left, and institutions like the Chicago Police and National Guard—Ali presented an image of moderation Ali's return to the ring—and the magnanimous image that he presented in Atlanta—illustrates this shift.

If the threat that Ali posed to the social order seemed tempered, especially after the highly symbolic bout against Joe Frazier, the boxer remained a powerful figure of draft resistance and opposition to the war in Vietnam. While some individuals focused on specific images of Ali—that of black power ideologue or anti-war protestor—to justify denying Ali the ability to box or travel abroad, Ali and his legal team activated other images—religious dissenter or oppressed minority—to combat such attempts. If Ali was attacked for certain images, he was exonerated for others. Ali won this battle, in effect, because the United States Supreme Court rejected the opposition's image of the boxer and accepted Ali's own definition of himself.

Since the first news of draft eligibility, Ali's lawyers had attempted to stop the confrontation at Jacinto Street. Among Ali's first remarks on 18 February 1966 were

assurances that his reclassification would be appealed. The grounds for appeal were based on activating two of Ali's "images"—that of unruly and unintelligent reactionary or that of religious dissenter. Ali initially claimed conscientious objector status. Four days later, Ali's personal lawyer Edward Jacko told reporters that the appeal would be based on the previous induction tests claiming that Ali was "psychologically untrainable." These pending appeals delayed Ali's induction date, as an individual could not be drafted while courts considered appeals. On 18 March Ali appeared in Louisville, Kentucky to appeal his reclassification personally; he argued to the board that his religion forbade him from taking part in Vietnam. The board denied his request to change the status, but it did allow Ali to leave the country to fight George Chuvalo in Canada. [81]

After the Louisville draft board refused to reclassify him, Ali had few options. If on the second appeal the board unanimously voted that he should be drafted, Ali would have to submit to induction. Any disagreement between the board left Ali with another chance of appeal. After his victory against Chuvalo, Ali fought in London before embarking on a world tour. Although this tour allowed Ali to mobilize international support through his roles as athlete, political figure, and religious hero, it also delayed the draft board's ability to induct him. A registrant, Ali's lawyer Edward Jacko told a

[81] Courier Journal 19 February 1966 James S. Tunnell "Clay to Seek Draft Status as Objector" p1; 18 March 1966 James S. Tunnell "Draft Board ReAffirms Clay's 1-A Classification" p 1; 22 February 1966 "Clay Stirs Up Illinois Storm on Title Fight" p1; Chicago Tribune 22 February 1966 (Special) "Clay Group to Stay With Him for Now; Reveal Appeal Plan"; "Plea Will Be He's Psychologically Untrainable"

reporter, had a 60-day extension to appeal draft board action if the individual had been out of the country. Following the world tour, Ali returned to London in August to fight Brian London, again delaying his deadline for appeal. [82]

If Ali was fighting abroad as a result of political pressure at home and unmatched support internationally, he also fought abroad to allow his appeals to stall the induction process. Despite these attempts, the draft process continued and Ali's legal defense struggled. In response, lawyers activated another image—that of an oppressed minority involved in the larger Civil Rights struggle. On 17 March 1967 Ali's lawyers filed suit in Owensboro, Kentucky alleging that the Louisville draft board was "illegally constituted" of all whites, a situation that Hayden Covington claimed should void Ali's induction. When this suit failed, Covington appealed to the Sixth District Court in Cincinnati and also requested a restraining order to stop Ali's induction. The Justice Department wrote a letter to the presiding judge, reminding him that the Supreme Court had "uniformly held that Selective Service registrants may not challenge draft board action . . . except by submitting to induction and seeking relief by habeas corpus, or by refusing to submit and raising their contentions in defense to a criminal prosecution."[83]

In late March 1967 Ali swore an affidavit that his legal residence was Houston Texas. This act, called a "delaying tactic" by the director of the Louisville draft board, required that Ali's records be transferred to Texas, forcing the Houston draft Board to

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[82]Courier Journal 18 March 1966 Tunnell "Draft Board ReAffirms" p1

[83]New York Times 17 March 1967 Dave Anderson "Clay Prefers Jail To Army"; 25 March 1967 (AP) "US Acts to Block Clay's Draft Plea"

manage his induction. The Houston draft board had filled its induction order for April; Ali would not be drafted until at least June. A U.S. District Court in Louisville held a hearing investigating Ali's claims that the Kentucky draft board was "illegally constituted"; at the same time the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals was still considering his appeal. Both courts found against Ali, and on 24 April 1967 the United States Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal that the "induction order was unconstitutional." The day after the High court's refusal, Covington informed a Houston court that Ali would never submit to induction—a position that contradicted earlier claims that the boxer was considering joining the Army—and requested that the court stay his induction and hold a hearing to determine if Ali was a conscientious objector. Covington also called for Texas draft boards to immediately appoint African American members. All requests were denied.[84]

Ali's refusal to step forward—as his remarks following reclassification had a year and half earlier—generated strong criticism and political pressure. After Ali's comments in February 1966, the white American public seemed squarely against the boxer. Veterans groups passed resolutions denouncing the fighter, and letters to the editor of newspapers criticized the champ. In Ali's hometown of Louisville, Mrs. L. F. Lauer suggested to the Courier Journal that Ali be sent to Vietnam without a gun. Other writers claimed that Ali should be punished for highly abstract offenses. M. R. Constanzo argued that Ali's refusal to serve was a "sign of rot in our own United States." W. L.

[84]New York Times 28 March 1967 (UPI) "Clay's Induction Into Army Delayed By Transfer of His Records to Houston"; 25 March 1967 "Supreme Court Actions"; 26 April 1967 (AP) "Clay Asks Court to Stay Induction"

Collins, Sr. wrote that Ali had "talked his way out of the hearts of all Americans" and that "the yellow streak in his remarks should not be put on exhibition." And Charles Peace commented that "King Kong could play the role of man or champion better than he and do it with more grace . . . Does he really believe that he is beautiful? If so . . . we should feel pity." Other newspaper readers connected Muhammad Ali with the Civil Rights Movement. J. Earle Mason of Kentucky, while supporting the right of dissent, wrote that ". . . in other words, send Julian Bond back to the Georgia Legislature and send Cassius into the Army. He needs it." "Until recently," wrote Bill Hays, Jr. to the Courier Journal "Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cassius Clay helped to win their people rights . . . [but] it's hard to understand two men . . . who want help from the white race but do not want the black race to help the yellow race." [85]

Public response from veteran's groups and private citizens provoked politicians to action. Less than a week after Ali's February remarks, the Kentucky State Senate passed a resolution imploring Ali to "switch and fight." "The sudden aversion to fighting on the part of Cassius M. Clay brings discredit to all loyal Kentuckians," the resolution started before claiming that the memory of Cassius Clay, the abolitionist for whom Ali was named "is particularly slurred by his ignoble efforts to avoid being drafted." From this perspective, Ali had abstractly injured an entire state and had embarrassed a dead man whose name the champ had rejected two years earlier. After hearing of Ali's plan to buy

[85] Courier Journal Letters to the Editor 2 March 1966 "Critical of Cassius"; 4 March 1966 "Why Not Cassius?"; 11 March 1966 "Pity, Not Contempt, For Clay"; Courier Journal Letters to the Editor 6 March 1966 "The Right of Dissent"; 6 May 1967 "Dr King and Clay"

a farm in Tuskegee, the Alabama House of Representatives passed a resolution stating that "He will not be welcomed by the people of any race." Ali moved there anyway. Illinois State Legislators denounced Ali, and pressure from Governor Otto Kerner, coupled with the campaign of the Chicago Tribune, drove the Ali/Terrell fight out of the city. With the fight homeless, politicians across the United States used the situation to their advantage; cities offered to hold the fight, and politicians then promised to protect their citizens from such a display. [86]

After the California State Athletic Commission agreed to license Ali to fight, then-Governor Ronald Reagan said "That draft dodger will never fight in my state, period." Ali's hometown of Louisville offered the fight until Kentucky Governor Breathitt refused, and similar offers were made by cities in Maine, as well as Pittsburgh, Miami, Huron, South Dakota, Boston, Las Vegas, and Brownwood, Texas. When Manchester and Portsmouth in New Hampshire were named as possibilities, Governor John King told a reporter "never." The fight also struggled to find a venue in Canada, with Montreal, Verdun, Sorel, and Edmonton mentioned before Toronto accepted. Even after the Ali/ Chuvalo match was set in Toronto, politicians continued to oppose the fight. Closed circuit coverage of Ali/ Chuvalo was banned in Miami, Boston and San Antonio.[87]

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[86] Courier Journal 24 February 1966 "State Senate, Lawyer Fire On Clay; Maloney Wants $60,000 From Reds" p1; New York Times 3 May 1967 (UPI) "Action By Alabama House"

[87] Hauser 208; Courier Journal 1 March 1966 Larry Boeck "Convention Center is Probable Site for Clay-Terrell Heavyweight Clash"; 2 March 1966 Boeck "Clay Title Fight Remains Big ???"; 3 March 1966 Dave Kindred "Title Fight 'Thing' Going to Montreal—Well, Maybe"; 5 March 1966 Kindred "Guess What? That Fight is Still Moving Around"; 6 March 1966 Kindred "Still No Site for Clay-Terrell Fight"; New York Times 19 March 1966 "TV of Clay Fight Banned in 3 Cities" p 22

Politicians also pressured Athletic Commissions, who in turn pressured promoters and exhibitors. In Boston, boxing promoter Sam Silverman had rented the Boston Arena to show the Ali/ Chuvalo match. Edward Urbec, the head of the Massachusetts State Athletic Commission, asked that Silverman not show the fight, and Silverman agreed, apparently to avoid future conflict with the Commission. But Boston's Mayor made the announcement that the fight was banned, illustrating the collusion and political power that politicians had over athletic commissions and sports promoters. The actions of the commissions in refusing Muhammad Ali and Ernie Terrell hint at the political pressure levied against the state boards. Ali's anti-war remarks and Ernie Terrell's mafia ties were enough to chase the fight out of the country. But no laws had been broken, so politicians had no more recourse than to refuse to license the fight. [88]

In early June 1966, three months after the fight was cancelled, the governor of New York appointed Edwin Dooley, a former college football player, to the head of the New York State Athletic Commission. In an interview announcing the decision, Dooley spoke of international interest in boxing as a result of Muhammad Ali before accusing Ali of abstractly hurting an entire sport. He admitted that Ali was the "most seen fighter ever", but claimed that "It's a pity that Clay has loused up his image and the image of boxing. I once thought . . . he had that electric spark that might have turned him into a combination of Joe Louis, Jack Dempsey, Rocky Marciano, and Willie Mays. However, he's thrown it away." Obviously, Dooley was no fan of Ali. On 28 April 1967, a few hours after Ali had refused induction, and before Ali had even stepped into a courtroom

[88] New York Times 19 March 1966 "TV of Clay Fight Banned in 3 Cities"

to defend his actions, Edwin Dooley appeared before reporters to deliver a statement. "His refusal to enter the service is regarded by the commission to be detrimental to the best interests of boxing," Dooley began, before explaining that he had vacated Ali's heavyweight title. [89]

Not all of Ali's opponents focused on abstractions. In Louisville, moments after Dooley's announcement, the president of the World Boxing Association Bob Evans told a reporter that "I feel Ali has violated the laws of the United States regarding Selective Service. His action today leaves me no alternative." Bob Evans vacated Ali's title because of his "action" not because he somehow damaged the "interests of boxing." (That said, only a criminal prosecution could legally determine "law-breaking"; perhaps this is why Evans qualified his remark with "I feel . . . .") In response to the actions of Dooley and the WBA, the State Athletic commissions of Texas and California, as well as the Las Vegas City Commission, also vacated the title. These commissions effectively barred Ali from boxing in the United States. After hearing of the actions of the U.S. commissions, the British Boxing Board of Control and the European Boxing Union also stripped Ali of the title.[90]

On 20 June 1967 Muhammad Ali sat in a Houston courtroom, being tried by an all white jury for refusing induction. Ali paid little attention during the proceedings, instead chewing gum, drawing pictures, and waving to a little girl in the audience, until United States Attorney Mort Susman suggested that Ali's involvement with the Nation of

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[89]New York Times 2 June 1966 Arthur Daley "Sports of the Times: The New Broom" p 55; 29 April 1967 Thomas Rogers "New York Lifts Crown in Swift Move"

[90]Ibid 29 April 1967 Rogers "New York Lifts"

Islam had led to his refusal. "If I can say so, sir," Ali spoke up "my religion is not political in no way." Hayden Covington, Ali's attorney, also challenged the remark. When the jury returned with a guilty verdict, Ali requested that the judge pronounce the sentence immediately so that he would "be able to sleep." Susman indicated to the judge that the United States would not object to a lighter sentence, given that "the only record he has is a minor traffic offense." The judge refused, and sentenced Ali to the maximum: five years in prison and a $10,000 fine. Afterwards, Ali showed reporters the drawings that he had made during the hearing. One drawing portrayed an airplane "flying over a heavily wooded mountain range toward the rising sun."[91]

In August Ali appeared before a judge in Houston to seek permission to go to Japan for a fight against Oscar Bonavena in Tokyo. Joe Ingraham, the Federal District Court Judge, refused to let Ali fight abroad, and ordered the boxer to surrender his passport to the court. Unable to fight in the United States, and prevented from leaving the country, Ali had no recourse. The World Boxing Council and the Orient Boxing Council followed this decision by declaring their heavyweight titles vacant as well. Despite claims from the United Arab Republic and the World Muslim conference that Ali was still the heavyweight champion, Ali could not defend his title, nor could he travel abroad to mobilize international support. The actions of Edwin Dooley, a political

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[91]Ibid 21 June 1967 Martin Waldron "Clay Guilty in Draft Case; Gets Five Years in Prison"

appointee, his imitators, and Judge Joe Ingraham, a Federal judge, effectively silenced Muhammad Ali in the summer of 1967.[92]

The actions of Edwin Dooley and his imitators threw the boxing world into chaos. Dooley suggested that an elimination tournament be held to decide the next heavyweight champion. At the top of the list of contenders was a newly forgiven Ernie Terrell, followed by George Chuvalo, Floyd Patterson, and Karl Mildenberger, all of whom had been beaten by Ali. Rounding out the list were Jimmy Ellis—Ali's old sparring partner—and an unbeaten, but unproven, Joe Frazier. In an attempt to recapture international interest lost as a result of Ali's absence, fights were held in Europe as well as the United States. Main Bout, Inc. was dissolved and Herbert Muhammad and John Ali were dismissed. Robert Arum and Lester Malitz, two other members of Main Bout, continued to work with Jim Brown because, as they said, the fullback had "class." The announcement of the tournament, as well as the end of Main Bout, Inc., following only two days after Ali's refusal, appear to have been planned well in advance.[93]

Ali, unable to box, found himself in financial straits. He owed considerable alimony payments and lawyer fees to Sonji—who still used the surname Clay years after the divorce. In 1968 Ali went to jail for a traffic offense, and worked in the kitchen of the Dade County Jail. "They've got a million dollar champion tied up working for 40 cents a week." He, along with 50 other prisoners, was given the "customary Christmas amnesty." On 22 August 1970 Ali's second wife Belinda gave birth to twin girls. Added

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[92] New York Times 3 August 1967 (AP) "Clay Loses Request to Fight Outside U.S."; 29 April 1967 Rogers "New York Lifts"; 4 May 1967 "State Officials Assailed on Clay"; (Reuters) "Moslems Appeal"

[93] Courier Journal 30 April 1967 Robert Lipsyte "Clay is Gone . . . But is He Forgotten?"

to these personal debts, Ali's legal fees were growing as a result of his continued appeals. By 1971 lawyer Bob Arum estimated Ali's legal fees at $250,000. The actual figure was much higher, Arum said, but Hayden Covington had not been paid as much as he had billed, and the Legal Defense Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union had done a considerable amount of work for free.[94]

To earn money, Ali branched out. He took part in a "computerized championship bout" against Rocky Marciano. Marciano won in a thirteen round knockout, which the stateside audience enjoyed, but when European viewers objected the film was re-edited to show an Ali victory. Ali also sold the rights to his autobiography to Random House publishing, and worked with a documentary crew on the film Cassius Clay AKA Muhammad Ali, a retrospective of earlier fights. He also donated his time to select causes. In August 1967, shortly after being denied permission to travel abroad, Ali appeared as the Grand Marshall of a parade commemorating the second anniversary of the riots in Watts. Less than a week after the parade, however, Ali refused an invitation to speak at a meeting called by Martin Luther King, Jr. who was attempting to reconcile the various positions of black activists. The majority of Ali's public appearances—and his income--came from lecturing to college students at universities.[95]

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[94]New York Times 21 December 1968 (AP) "40 Cents a Week in Jail Makes Ali an Economist"; 23 August 1970 (UPI) "Silent Majority Grows by Two in Clay Family"S15; 28 June 1971 Robert Lipsyte "Judges Decision Today: 5-3-1, Favor Ali?" p41

[95]During the parade, H. Rap Brown tried to pull a station wagon into the procession behind Ali, but event organizers stopped Brown and asked him to leave. Brown drove away, followed by the three FBI agents "who are never far from him these days." Later in the day, Brown spoke to a small audience, where he said "People did not burn Watts down in order to have a parade today." After praising violence as an American virtue, Brown concluded, "The civil rights movement is dead and thank goodness." Hauser, 196-7; New

During these appearances, Ali refined his message and presented another image, placing himself within the struggle for African American power. Ali's own socio-political views differed significantly from Dr. King's. Ali supported the calls of Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad for a separate black state in North America. At one point Ali declared "I don't say 'We shall overcome' because I done overcame." In his prepared comments following his refusal to step forward, Ali declared that "We do not believe this nation should force us to take part in such wars, for we have nothing to gain from it unless America agrees to give us the necessary territory wherein we may have something to fight for." But Ali's views of separatism also spoke to present-day realities, a practical dissent. When a reporter asked Ali how a black separatist could sell his autobiography to a white publishing house, Ali responded that "You wouldn't want me to ride white elephants, either. So I would have to . . . take off these white-made shoes and ride on camels. We don't make nothing," Ali continued "we don't make toothpicks, we don't make zippers to zip our pants.[96]

Ali also presented himself as consistent and unbending in the face of fiscal oppression. "The power structure seems to want to starve me out," he told a campus crowd. "They want to stop me from working, not only in this country but out of it. You read about this in the dictatorship countries, where a man don't go along with this or that and he is completely not allowed to work or to earn a decent living." At another

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York Times 19 August 1967 Gene Roberts "Dr. King Stresses Pride in His Race"p12; 14 August 1967 Robert Windeler "Watts Fete Led By Cassius Clay"

[96]New York Times 28 April 1968 Robert Lipsyte "Sports of the Times: The Only Real Heavyweight Champion"; 17 March 1967 Dave Anderson "Clay Prefers Jail to Army"; New York Times 7 January 1970 Henry Raymont "In This Corner, Cassius Clay the Author"

university, Ali declared "I could make millions if I led my people the wrong way . . . So now I have to make a decision. Step into a billion dollars and denounce my people or step into poverty and teach them the truth. Damn the money. Damn the heavyweight championship. I will die before I sell out my people for the white man's money." When speaking of the future, however, Ali claimed to enjoy the support of Allah. "Look at that little robin pecking and eating. The Lord feeds the birds and the animals. Will the Lord . . . let a man who is doing His work go hungry?"[97]

At universities Ali dedicated the majority of his lectures to promoting the Nation of Islam and the Muslim faith. When speaking of his faith, Ali's comments were neither universally appealing nor carefully accommodating. He would explain that "dumb Negroes come out dumber Negroes" after worshipping in Christian churches, and that Jesus Christ was dead while Allah was a living God. When speaking to black audiences, Ali would explain the Nation of Islam position that whites were the product of the "big headed" mad scientist Yacub, and were in reality a race of devils doomed to destruction. Ali also spoke of white oppression against blacks in the form of diet. Whites, Ali contended, had convinced African Americans to eat pork—the inbred product of "cats, rats, and dogs." "The swine is the nastiest animal on earth," Ali told one crowd "a mouthful of maggots and pus." He also claimed that the sound of bacon sizzling in the pan was in fact the screams of thousands of bugs and worms that infected the muscles and tendons of those who ate pig.[98]

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[97]Hauser, Muhammad Ali, 186-8

[98]New York Times 6 February 1967 Robert Lipsyte "Muhammad Ali Shows Other Side"

Ali's religious views also informed his beliefs about gender, beliefs that contributed to a conservative image. In 1968 Ali spoke at a university in San Francisco. The smell of marijuana smoke wafted above the attentive crowd made up mostly of college students and others opposed to the war in Vietnam. The crowd laughed at Ali's jokes about the present heavyweight contenders, but the direction of Ali's speech changed quickly. After he apologized for offending the interracial couples in the crowd, Ali said that "mixed marriages should be prohibited." Boos began to echo through the auditorium and the crowd drifted away. Ali responded to the crowd by saying, "People just can't stand the truth. They want to hear about violence or integration, but they can't stand the truth that can save them." Ali's views on women's rights stemmed from a mixture of the Nation of Islam's highly conservative socio-cultural cosmology and sections of the Koran. When a reporter asked Ali how he felt about the women's liberation movement, Ali responded "In the Islamic faith, man is boss and the woman stays in the background."[99]

However, throughout his ring career Ali challenged traditional gender concepts and presented audiences with a redefined image of masculinity. Ali's many relationships with women suggested male chauvinism. Robert Lipsyte described Ali as "either coltish or preening" around women his age or older, and Ali's camp would regularly joke that "the champ likes his foxes." He also spoke often of his diet, made up predominately of steak, and seemed to suggest that his food endowed him with a combination of social

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[99]New York Times 28 April 1968 Lipsyte "The Only Real Heavyweight Champion"; 23 August 1970 (UPI) "Silent Majority Grows by Two"; Playboy 1975

status and masculine power. But, Ali often spoke to reporters about his physical beauty—his word—as well, and after fights would often declare "He never even marked my pretty face." Ali would brag about his grace and delicacy, and his ability to dance around the ring, what some reporters labeled "prancing." In the buildup to the 1964 fight, Sonny Liston told a reporter that Ali was a "fag."[100]

If Muhammad Ali, however unwittingly, challenged gender boundaries, he was clear about his own role in the world, a role that had been created by the actions of the Federal government, the various athletic commissions, and the press. When commenting on this role, Ali presented an image of himself as a hero for all time. "There are only two kinds of men," Ali told a college audience in 1969 "those who compromise and those who take a stand." At another lecture Ali declared "If necessary I'll have to die for what I believe. I'm fighting for the freedom of my people." In Chicago, Ali told a reporter "This is all beautiful, it's better than boxing for me. All a man has to show for his time here is what kind of a name he had. Jesus, Columbus, Daniel Boone. Now, Wyatt Earp, who would have told him when he was fighting crooks and standing up for his principles that there'd be a television show about him, that little kids on the street would say 'I'm Wyatt Earp, reach'?"[101]

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[100]New York Times "I'm Free"; 10 March 1971 Arthur Daley "Sports of the Times: The Mirror Told a Distressing Tale"

[101]New York Times 29 April 1968 Lipsyte "Only Real Heavyweight Champion"; 17 March 1967 Dave Anderson "Clay Prefers Jail to Army"; 27 April 1967 Robert Lipsyte "Clay Puts His Affairs in Order as Day of Decision Approaches"

The struggle over the image of Muhammad Ali was not limited to a contest between the boxer and his opponents. In the 4 April 1969 issue of Muhammad Speaks, the Nation of Islam newspaper, Elijah Muhammad penned an article that began "I want the world to know that Muhammad Ali has stepped down off the spiritual platform of Islam." The article, in reaction to an interview given by Ali about his desire to return to boxing, continued "This statement is to tell the world that we, the Muslims, are not with Mr. Muhammad Ali in his desire to work in the sports world." A week later, Elijah Muhammad prepared another statement that read: "Muhammad Ali is out of the circle of the brotherhood of the followers of Islam for one year. We shall call him Cassius Clay. We take away the name of Allah from him, until he proves himself worthy of that name." Attempts by reporters to gain more details of the dismissal were met with "very polite refusals to talk." Elijah Muhammad claimed that Ali was not religious enough, contradicting Ali's own claims of religiosity and echoing those of his adversaries. This announcement meant that Ali could not "speak to, visit with or be seen with any Muslim," nor could he take part in any Muslim religious activity.[102]

Stripped of his primary supporters in the Nation of Islam, Ali connected himself to black power advocates, albeit symbolically. In the fall of 1969, Muhammad Ali, still banned from the Nation of Islam, signed a contract to appear in the Broadway Musical "Big Time Buck White," about a black power leader. Ali donned a fake beard and a wig for the show, and all expletives were deleted at his request. The play, aside from several song and dance numbers—Ali would not dance because, he felt, it was beneath him as

[102]Ibid 20 April 1969 "Religion: Muhammad Ali Loses his Title to the Muslims" pE8; 6 April 1969 (UPI) "Cassius Clay Loses Status as a Muslim For Period of Year"

champion—also had a scripted question and answer segment. When an actor asked Ali, as Buck White, what would happen if the goal of black power was thwarted, Ali replied: "What's going to happen is that every black man is an angry man, even those who smile in your face, they don't like you. They smile 'cause they have to."[103]

Ali continued, "Now if we continue to be held down and tied to ghettos of hopelessness, then our anger is someday going to burst in an explosion and that explosion is going to unify all colored people in the world. Colored people are seeing the white man's quest for power as a definite threat to them . . . the black people and the brown people and the yellow people and the red people and the disaffected, disillusioned white people . . . they are making a black commitment." The conflict in Vietnam, to Buck White, was just another distraction, an "irrelevant explosion" designed to direct focus away from the struggle for international equality. "If we have to," he concluded, "we'll swipe your whole power and snuff out your souls like cheap . . . birthday . . . candles."[104]

In the years since Ali was stripped of his title, dissent in the United States had, in some sectors, grown conspiratorial and violent. Faith in the federal government waned, conspiracy theories abounded, and stirrings of a violent revolution seemed apparent. In 1967, as New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison was conducting a private investigation into the killing of President Kennedy, a Harris poll in the Washington Post purported to show that sixty-six percent of Americans believed that the assassination of

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[103]New York Times 15 October 1969 Louis Calta "Cassius Clay to Appear in Broadway Musical";Joseph Dolan Tuotti, Big Time Buck White (New York: Grove Press, 1969) 105-106

[104]Tuotti, Big Time Buck White 105-106

Kennedy was the result of a conspiracy. The Central Intelligence Agency violated its charter and joined the FBI, the Secret Service, and the IRS to investigate domestic antiwar organizations, and President Johnson falsely claimed that Communists controlled the protest movement.[105]

If faith in the federal government was low, some groups attempted to take direct action to challenge the social order. On 22 June 1967 the Federal Bureau of Investigation announced that they had arrested 16 members of the African American Revolutionary Action Movement. RAM's first leader had been Robert F. Williams, who had fled to Communist China, and the group had maintained and expanded on many of Williams's more violent ideas. Among the 16 arrested in New York and Philadelphia were Arthur Harris, an unemployed 22-year-old, and Herman Ferguson, a 47-year-old assistant principal, as well as other members of the urban working and middle class. The members of RAM—men and women—were arrested with "30 weapons, more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition, explosive devices, 275 packets of heroin, radio receivers and transmitters, walkie-talkies and subversive literature.[106]

Described by the FBI as "a pro-Red China [group] and openly committed to the overthrow of governments by violence and assassination," the plans of RAM were no doubt frightening to many. The group, according to the New York Times, had immediate plans to assassinate Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, and Whitney Young, the executive director of the National Urban League. Shortly after these prospective

[105] New York Times 30 May 1967 "66% In Poll Accept Kennedy Plot View"; Moss Vietnam 241-2

[106] New York Times 22 June 1967 (RAM)

killings, RAM planned to kill other Civil Rights leaders, black and white. RAM members then sought to blow up gas stations around New York, and to firebomb a New York subway station during rush hour. The plot, which was well-planned and well-organized, prompted a New York court to reactivate the New York Criminal Anarchy Law of 1902, established in the wake of the assassination of President McKinley by an anarchist, to try the RAM members. The law made it a felony to promote the violent overthrow of the government, but the Supreme Court feared that the Law, as with most sedition laws, threatened free speech. A reporter believed that the Court would loosen Constitutional restrictions to try the RAM members, but would quickly intervene if any local communities attempted to silence nonviolent dissent.[107]

In February 1968, months after the RAM arrests, Chicago mayor Richard Daley addressed fears that inner city militants could spark riots at the Democratic National Convention later that year. Daley commented that the leadership in Chicago slums had shifted to militancy, and that black power leaders had recruited the urban poor to their ideology. The police, in response to threats, had trained for riot control with sniper rifles, shotguns, and tear gas and Daley stated that police officers would act as liaisons between the F.B.I., Secret Service agents, the National Guard, and the Army. Although white protestors were also expected to demonstrate at the Convention, Daley claimed that they

[107]In 1902 a Presbyterian minister, speaking of the assassination, claimed that McKinley had "reaped what he sowed," a sentiment echoed by Malcolm X after the Kennedy assassination. Following McKinley's death the government arrested editors and banned newspapers that held "anti-American sympathies." The New York Times joined politicians in calling for more stringent "anarchist laws" and the New York Criminal Anarchy Law was born. New York Times 22 June 1967 Emanuel Perlmutter "16 Negroes Siezed; Plot to Kill Wilkins and Young Charged"; "A Slow-Burning School Aide Is Among Terrorist Suspects"; 10 December 1968 "High Court to Act on Anarchy Law"; 15 December 1968 Fred P. Graham "Law; Old Statutes for New Challenges"; For McKinley assassination and effects, Passim, esp. New York Times 8 September 1901; 28 September 1901; 11 February 1902; 5 April 1902

were peaceful, while the militant blacks were more interested in violent confrontations with police. Daley's concerns were based on much of the inflammatory language (and actions) of black militants. In this context, Ali's quote—as Buck White—promising to "snuff out" white souls "like cheap birthday candles" stands as a representative example.[108]

Following Ali's initial reclassification remarks, sportswriter Red Smith declared that "Cassius makes himself as sorry a spectacle as those unwashed punks who picket and demonstrate against the war." Two years later, when Ali appeared on the British "Eamon Andrews Show" (by satellite), American television producer Donald Suskind connected Ali to the anti-war movement, criticizing him for being a draft dodger who called for the destruction of the white race. Ali defended his position by reminding Andrews that he was following proper legal channels. He had not fled the country like many opponents of the draft. "I'm not burning my draft card!" he shouted. "I'm not burning statues of the President!" Ali's response to Suskind—that he was (more or less) quietly following procedure--would contrast sharply with the activities of the larger anti-war movement. Eight months after Ali's appearance on the "Eamon Andrews Show," violent confrontations erupted between the police and anti-war protestors.[109]

In August 1968, as delegates from across the country converged on Chicago to select the presidential candidate for the Democratic Party, thousands of protesters filled

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[108] Ibid 6 February 1968 Donald Janson "Chicago Worried by Riot Potential in Convention Summer as Racial Unrest in the Slums Increases"

[109] The Times (London) 8 January 1968 Stanley Baldwin "Cassius Clay in TV Row"

the city to voice opposition to the Vietnam War. A legal demonstration in Lincoln Park tuned into a scuffle when a protester lowered the U.S. flag and replaced it with a red cloth. Police moved into the crowd swinging nightsticks, and the crowd began chanting "Pigs are whores!" and "Pigs eat shit!" Amidst the confusion one demonstrator grabbed a microphone and urged the protesters to disperse throughout the city. "If they use gas against us," his voice carried over the PA system "make sure they use gas against their own citizens." The National Guard had blockaded the exits of the park with sandbags and mounted machine guns. They stopped the cars of local residents, and a TV crew recorded a soldier, wearing body armor, a helmet, and a gas mask, point a grenade launcher at the child of a civilian mother trying to go home.[110]

The tear gas eventually spread to the Hilton, where the delegates and nominees were staying. At the corner of the hotel, two lines of police blocked what was left of the protesters. In response to harassment by the crowd, the police charged the demonstrators with clubs and mace and some chanted in unison "Kill, Kill, Kill." Police pushed a group of protesters through a plate glass window of a downtown bar, and the tear gas became so thick that Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic candidate, was disturbed in his shower. For seventeen minutes demonstrators fought with police in front of the Hilton hotel, all captured live by television news cameras. Inside the Convention Hall, Senator Abraham Ribicoff, after learning of the melee outside, criticized the Chicago police's "Gestapo tactics." Chicago mayor Richard Daley, obviously ruffled and in full view of network television cameras, shouted in response "Fuck you, you Jew son of a bitch! You lousy

[110] Gitlin 60s 330-336; Moss Vietnam, 299-301

motherfucker! Go home!" The sound of his voice was deleted, but evening news shows showed his statement.[111]

Not all threats to order were met with overt violence, however, and in another instance officials attempted to prevent disturbances by loosening restrictions imposed by the legal system of the United States. Two months after Daley's initial statements about law and order, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. In the wake of the murder, Army troops were sent to Chicago, Washington, and Baltimore to quell "civil disturbances," and officials speculated that troops would have to be sent to Detroit, Pittsburg, and Memphis. Following the riots, Army officials prepared plans to dispatch 10,000 soldiers each to 25 U.S. cities simultaneously in case of future outbreaks of violence. The logistical challenge of moving 250,000 soldiers throughout the continental United States presented a problem to Army officials, however, and they decided that accurate intelligence was crucial to ensure proper deployment.[112]

The Army activated 1,2000 domestic intelligence investigators—most of whom had previously conducted background checks for the defense industry—and ordered those field agents to study urban slums with the "greatest discontent," and where relationships between locals and the police were poor. Army intelligence officers were spying on African American civilians and "were operating on their own initiative in a way that was hard to control from Washington." These agents tapped phones, intercepting a call made by Democratic presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy in the

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[111]Ibid.

[112]New York Times 12 December 1970 William Beecher "Army Hits F.B.I. on Riot Inquiry"

summer of 1968. Another group of Army Intelligence agents grew beards, painted a van with a fake television logo, and parked outside of the main auditorium at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where they took photographs of "suspicious individuals." "I honestly believe we drifted into this area [gathering of Army intelligence domestically] without quite realizing what we were getting into," Robert Jordan, general counsel to the Army told a Senate investigating committee in 1970. The practice had been discontinued in 1969 when the Undersecretary of the Army declared that domestic intelligence gathering by the military was "potentially dangerous" and "might make people fearful," but defended the Army's encroachment on civil liberties "because no one else was around to do the job."[113]

This was not true. Muhammad Ali had been subjected to surveillance following a 1967 FBI memorandum claiming that the Nation of Islam was a paramilitary group bent on the destruction of the white race. The declaration stated that Ali "has utilized his position as a nationally known [sports] figure . . . [to promote] an ideology completely foreign to the basic American ideals of equality and justice for all." The Justice Department clearly believed that Muhammad Ali was as threatening to the social order as any revolutionary or anti-war organization. In 1969 the Supreme Court agreed to hear an appeal by Muhammad Ali's lawyers when a report surfaced that secret wiretaps conducted by the FBI had intercepted telephone calls made by the boxer. The Justice Department, fearing that sensitive intelligence activity would be revealed during the

[113]The Army Intelligence agent's ability to recognize potential "hotspots" was admittedly poor. The agents were more suited to background checks, and most of the research stemmed from police reports, as well as television and newspaper coverage of events, rather than covert operations or undercover work. Ibid.

hearing, protested the Court's decision to consider the case. The Court sent the appeal to a lower court, where the presiding judge was to examine the transcripts of the intercepted calls in secret.[114]

The FBI, in their investigations into Elijah Muhammad and Martin Luther King, had secretly monitored five of Ali's calls. After the FBI destroyed the tapes, the judge was forced to consult the logs of the recorded calls. The lower court judge ruled that the information obtained from the conversations had not affected the decision of the earlier court in finding Ali guilty of draft evasion, and the case failed to overturn the conviction. It is impossible to reconstruct the actual conversations, as the FBI logs only provided minimal descriptions. However, declassified F.B.I. documents concerning Ali show that agents secretly monitored many of his calls, and one agent was instructed to keep detailed accounts of Ali's television appearances, including those with Howard Cosell and Johnny Carson.[115]

The above paragraphs serve to illustrate the pervading fears of an imminent armed revolution, a revolution inspired by and coincidental with, the rise of black militancy, of which the deposed heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali was a symbol. The government wanted to be prepared for future problems rather than attempting to address them; the judiciary loosened Constitutional protections of Free Speech; the Justice Department employed the services of the CIA and FBI to infiltrate

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[114]New York Times 25 March 1969 Fred P. Graham "High Court Hints Easing of Disclosure of Bugging"; Hauser, 191

[115] New York Times 25 March 1969 Graham "High Court Hints"; Kenneth O'Reilly "Racial Matters": The FBI's Secret File on Black AMerica, 1960-1972 (London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1989), 342; n61

antiwar organizations; the Pentagon allowed the United States Army to gather domestic intelligence, and state officials met violence with military occupation and overt violence. The treatment of Muhammad Ali at the hands of various state officials was no different—his refusal to step forward was met with swift action that blurred the lines of legality. Ali's legal representatives, however, continued to challenge the government's actions, and a case made by NAACP lawyers proved successful.

On 18 August 1970, lawyers from the Legal Defense Fund presented evidence before a Federal judge showing that the New York Athletic Commission had licensed more than 90 convicted felons—whose crimes ranged from embezzlement and robbery to rape and murder—to box in New York. A brief was submitted to the court claiming that Ali's public persona had influenced the Athletic Commission's actions, and his membership in the Nation of Islam, considered "as controversial then as the Black Panthers are today" also played a role. "It's alright to be a rapist or a robber and get a boxing license," Michael Meltsner of the Legal Defense Fund said "as long as you're not political." One month later, Federal judge Walter R. Mansfield ruled that Edwin Dooley's actions constituted an "intentional, arbitrary, and unreasonable discrimination against [Ali], not the even handed administration of law which the 14th Amendment requires." Compared to more concrete forms of danger, and despite attempts by his opponents to impose a threatening image upon him, Ali emerged as relatively moderate.[116]

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[116] New York Times 19 August 1970 Gerald Eskenazi "Clay Wins Round in Court Battle"; 15 October 1970 Craig R. Whitney "3-Year Ring Ban Declared Unfair"

It had taken three and a half years for Muhammad Ali to get the decision made by a non-elected political appointee overturned that had essentially ended his boxing career. When the announcement was made in October 1970, however, Ali was in Atlanta, Georgia, preparing for a fight with Californian Jerry Quarry. Months before the court ruling, promoters had secured Atlanta as a venue for an Ali fight. The State of Georgia had no state athletic commission, and State Senator Leroy Johnson and Atlanta mayor Sam Massell had organized the fight as part of a "sports extravaganza" that included the Atlanta Falcons and Georgia Tech. The fight was scheduled for late October, and a few days before the bout Georgia Governor Lester Maddox—who was in the midst of a reelection campaign—spoke out against the fight. Maddox, claiming that he was defending the parents of servicemen, declared a "Day of Mourning" and attempted to block the fight, but did not have the legal authority. "I hope Clay gets beat in the first round," Maddox declared "flattened out . . . to the count of thirty." Maddox—a staunch segregationist who equated racial equality with Communism--attempted to manipulate Ali's image to bolster his own standing among opponents of the boxer.[117]

The New York Times carried these comments and noted Lester Maddox's use of the name Clay as a way to insult Ali. Perhaps the statements of Maddox, coupled with the Atlanta Constitution's policy of using the name Muhammad Ali in the pre-fight coverage, forced the New York paper to reconsider it's descriptions of the boxer. Following Maddox's statements, and possibly recognizing its' own complicity in shaping Ali's image, the New York Times changed from the earlier policy of using the name

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[117]Atlanta Constitution 23 October 1970 Tom Linthicum "Maddox Declares Day of Mourning"

"Cassius Clay," and used his Muslim name exclusively. The only evidence to this change in direction is that the dates coincide—Lipsyte never mentioned what convinced the Times editors to use Ali. It seems clear, however, that when the New York Times found itself in the company of the segregationist governor Lester Maddox in using the name Clay, the editors reevaluated their position and used the name Muhammad Ali. Not all reporters accepted the name, however, as an account of pre-fight predictions by sportswriters showed. Most sportswriters favored "Clay" to win and Muhammad Ali and Jerry Quarry tied for third in the poll.[118]

In response to the Georgia governor's declaration, Ali presented an image of humble magnanimity. Ali, after hearing of Maddox's "Day of Mourning" declaration, replied that he did not know what that meant. A reporter responded that "It means it's a black day." "Oh yeah," Ali answered, grinning. "It's gonna be." Ali continued, "So Governor Maddox has set aside a day of mourning . . . but I can't blame the governor for speaking what he believes. It would be hypocritical for me to condemn him for what I do." In the days leading up to the fight, Ali was especially careful to refrain from overt political talk, for fear that the fight would be canceled. Even his normal braggadocio was subdued. After telling a German television reporter that Quarry would be beaten in the second or third round, Ali turned to American reporters and said "What I really said was that if I produce the way I know I can . . . the spectators will realize it is no contest after five rounds." It was Quarry who raised a hint of controversy when he demanded to have

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[118]Atlanta Constitution 25 October 1970 Darrell Simmons "Quarry Finishes 'Third' in Poll" (include NYT dates)

a white official and remarked that he would not fight "with a colored doctor in [his] corner."[119]

The fight, held at the "dingy old Sports Arena" in Atlanta, fulfilled Ali's prediction. Quarry was badly cut in the face early in the bout, and the referee stopped the fight after the third round. Ali's first fight in three and a half years exceeded the coverage given to his fights in 1966 and 1967. The bout was the largest closed-circuit bout ever, shown in 205 theaters in the United States and Canada. Closed Circuit receipts alone totaled $3,490,000. The fight was also transmitted via satellites to Europe, the Far East, and Africa, free on home television screens. The city of Atlanta earned five-hundred dollars from the fight—the cost of rental for the Sports Arena. Despite the international and domestic television coverage, the fight also attracted an unprecedented amount of support from the black community.[120]

Ali had enjoyed strong support from younger members of the African American community since his first refusal to be inducted. A New York Times reporter had noted that Ali's refusal had generated "considerable emotional impact" on the streets of Harlem, where some found "vicarious enjoyment and admiration of [Ali's] decision to fight 'the man'." Stokely Carmichael had described Ali as "my hero," and Martin Luther King had said "You certainly have to admire his courage. Here is a young man willing to give up fame . . . willing to give up millions of dollars to do what his conscience tells him

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[119]Atlanta Constitution 24 October 1970 George Cunningham "I'm Stronger than Ever Before---Ali"; 23 October 1970 Al Thomy "Ali Says He Can Go 15 Rounds"; "Quarry Demand White Official"

[120]Ibid 25 October 1970 Jesse Outlar "International Exposure: Local Blackout: City World Await Ali-Quarry Fight"; 27 October 1970 George Cunningham "TV Rights for Fight Biggest Ever"

is right." When Ali served as the Grand Marshall in the 1967 Watts parade, parade chairman Billy Joe Tidwell said that Ali was chosen because "he epitomizes a new era in the history of the black man in America."[121]

In Atlanta, Civil Rights leaders and prominent members of the black community showed considerable support for Ali, contributing to his image as an important member of elite black society. Among the attendees of the Ali/Quarry bout in Atlanta were Coretta Scott King, Whitney Young, Dr. Ralph Abernathy, Harry Belafonte, Diana Ross, Sydney Poitier, Al Hirt, Hank Aaron, Clarence Williams, Adam Clayton Powell, and Julian Bond. After the fight, Coretta King presented Ali with an award honoring the memory of Martin Luther King. Mrs. King said that the award recognized Ali's contribution "to the dignity of man." After the fight Bill Cosby joked with reporters that he was the only person to ever silence the champ. "I met him about four years ago. He was walking down the street and I walked up to him and said 'You're crazy.'" Cosby said. "We argued and I won. I'm the only guy that can whip him." If the fight itself lasted only nine minutes, Atlanta Constitution editorialist Reg Murphy predicted that the impact would be longer lasting. "It should have destroyed, once and forever, the stereotype of black Americans as shuffling, nodding failures" since "thousands of black Americans . . . have found success in the biggest possible way."[122]

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[121]As Chapter One shows, the reaction to Ali among older African Americans was mixed. Ibid 1 May 1967 Duane Riner "Develop 'Peoplehood' Carmichael Asks"; "Must End 'Tragic Adventure' in Vietnam, Dr. King Says"; New York Times 14 August 1967 Robert Windeler "Watts Fete Led By Cassius Clay"

[122]Atlanta Constitution 27 October 1970 Al Thomy "Dignitaries Pack Arena"; Alex Coffin and Aaron Taylor "They Waited 6 Hours, It Lasted 9 Minutes"; Wayne Minshew "Bill Cosby-Only Man to Put Brakes on Ali"; Thomy "Atlanta, City of Oz"; 28 October 1970 Reg Murphy "Sport and Sociology at the Auditorium"

In the years since Ali's absence from the ring, the mood in many areas of the black community had grown disillusioned and violent. While in 1966 the views of Muhammad Ali and the Nation of Islam appeared dangerous and radical to many white observers, by 1970, with the solidification of black militancy and the activities of more radical groups like the RAM and the Black Panthers, Ali seemed somewhat moderate, if not dated. Although Ali had enjoyed the support of the black community, where he effectively balanced the more radical demands of Elijah Muhammad with the personal appeal of more moderate leaders, it seems that by 1970 Ali had become more acceptable to many in the American public. In many ways, however, Ali seemed to present himself as more radical than before, and the buildup to his fight with the heavyweight champion Joe Frazier illustrates this fact.

In an article for the New York Times, reporter Robert Lipsyte wrote that boxing was now enjoying another "technicolor trip with Ali." When Ali recited a poem promising to knock Frazier "out of sight and the launching of a black satellite"—a copy of a poem promising to do the same to Liston in 1965--Lipsyte suggested that Ali sounded dated. Although "a symbol for many men of many different goals," Lipsyte continued, Ali had taken a long absence and seemed oblivious to the changing times. Eldridge Cleaver, leader of the Black Panthers, had remarked that in Ali's 1965 fight, "the white hope for a Patterson victory was, in essence, a counterrevolutionary desire to force the Negro, now in rebellion and personified in the boxing world by Ali, back into

his place." In his 1971 fight against Joe Frazier, Ali again presented this binary opposition, projecting the image of an "Uncle Tom" onto his opponent.[123]

Ali told a reporter that "Nobody wants to talk to [Frazier]. Oh, maybe Nixon will call him if he wins. But ninety-eight percent of my people are for me. Anybody black who thinks Frazier can whup me is an Uncle Tom. Everybody who's black wants me to keep winning." To another journalist, Ali predicted that "When he gets ringside, Frazier will feel like a traitor. When he sees those [black] women and men aren't for him . . . he'll lose a little pride." Joe Frazier claimed that, while watching television one evening, he saw Ali tell a reporter "The only people rooting for Joe Frazier are white people in suits, Alabama sheriffs, and the Ku Klux Klan. I'm fighting for the little man in the ghetto." If Ali enjoyed the support of the elite African American community—evident from the Quarry fight—he also claimed to represent those masses who were still struggling to survive. Throughout the pre-fight buildup, Ali portrayed Frazier as a tool of the white establishment, a "great black white hope."[124]

The Muhammad Ali/ Joe Frazier fight was a massive undertaking that carried enormous symbolic weight. The bout, held in the relatively new Madison Square Garden, was Ali's chance to regain the heavyweight championship title that had been taken from him by Edwin Dooley and his imitators. It had the largest closed circuit coverage ever, with 350 theaters in the United States and Canada filled past ninety percent capacity, with an estimated take of 17 million dollars. Victor Solomon, the

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[123]New York Times 27 March 1969 Robert Lipsyte "Sports of the Times: Is That you, Muhammad Ali?"; 29 June 1971 Steve Cady "Winner By Decision: Muhammad Ali"

[124]Hauser, Muhammad Ali, 235

executive director of CORE, reached a deal with the promoters to show the fight, whose proceeds would go to "benefit the black community." And although some politicians still used the bout to grab headlines—Oklahoma City banned the fight in public buildings--the fight was transmitted via satellite to over 33 countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa for free viewing.[125]

In the first rounds of the fight, Ali opted not to use his signature speed, and instead stood flat-footed, seemingly in an attempt to knock Frazier out. Ali talked and clowned, as if "this was his show and that he was privileged to stage-direct it as he pleased," but his performance in the early rounds was inconsistent, and Frazier was able to corner Ali on the ropes. Later in the fight Ali found his stride, and in the ninth round it looked as if Frazier was in trouble. Frazier, however, appeared unstoppable, and in the 11th round nearly knocked Ali out. Ali rallied to regain control of the fight, and won the fourteenth round after defending himself during the previous two. Going into the fifteenth—and final round—the fight appeared dead even. Both fighters were visibly marked by the punishment of the earlier rounds; Frazier's right eye was nearly swollen shut and Ali's jaw was considerably bruised.[126]

In the middle of the fifteenth round Frazier connected a left hook to Ali's chin, and Muhammad Ali fell backwards and landed on the mat. His old friend and corner man, and the originator of the phrase "float like a butterfly; sting like a bee", Drew

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[125]New York Times 9 March 1971 William N. Wallace "Knockdown Blow is Perfect on TV"; 27 January 1971 "Ali Fight Banned in Oklahoma City"; 19 January 1971 "CORE Gets Bout on Closed Circuit"

[126]New York Times 10 March 1971 Arthur Daley "Mirror Told Distressing Tale"; Skill, Brains, Guts

"Bundini" Brown soaked a sponge in water and sprayed Ali. Ali rose quickly and continued to fight through the round, landing several punches on Frazier, but the knockdown had decided the fight. Ali lost to Joe Frazier by decision on 8 March 1971, the first loss in 29 professional fights. Those watching on closed-circuit broadcasts saw the knockdown punch replayed 16 times. Reporters noted that most closed circuit audiences left the theaters before the playback reached the 16th showing.[127]

The fight was a blow to many fans in the black community, but Ali remained philosophical. One onlooker at the fight screamed "Whitey wins again!" after the decision was announced, but after the fight Ali was calm. "It's a good feeling to lose," Ali said "A great leader has his followers. When the leader fails, his followers cry. I don't cry so maybe they won't cry. I have to rejoice in defeat like I rejoiced in victory so my followers can conquer their defeats, the tragedies every day, someone in the family dies." Less than a week after his victory over Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier accepted an offer to speak in front of the South Carolina State Legislature—the first time in forty years a black man had spoken before the assembly. In his speech, Frazier joked about beating Ali, and claimed that Ali had declared himself "God" before the fight. "Well God," Frazier asked in mock response, "How you feeling now?"[128]

Although Ali often feigned indifference, and never showed signs of fear or regret, his legal challenges had run out. In April 1971 the Supreme Court agreed to hear a one hour oral argument before the nine justices. Ali's lawyer Chauncey Eskridge and Erin N.

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[127]New York Times 9 March 1971 Wallace "Knockdown Blow"; Skill, Brains, Guts

[128]New York Times 10 March 1971 "Ali-It's a Good Feeling to Lose, but I Won"; 11 March 1971 "Frazier Asked to Talk to State Legislature"; Lipsyte "Sports of the Times: Ali in Defeat"; Skill, Brains, and Guts

Griswold, the US Solicitor General, were each allotted a half hour to speak. The Justice Department sent a brief to the court questioning Ali's religious convictions, and mentioned that the boxer had yet to be reinstated by the Nation of Islam as a Muslim minister. Eskridge told reporters that he hoped that a landmark Supreme Court ruling in 1970 would help Ali's case. The ruling stated that in order to receive conscientious objector status a claimant need not be "religious in the traditional sense to be eligible for exemption." Instead, a draft-eligible youth need only to show that he held "ethical beliefs of a religious nature." A New York Times reporter reminded readers that in the 20 draft cases heard by the Supreme Court since 1958, the government had lost eleven of those.[129]

If his prominence had been tempered by his failure to recapture the heavyweight title, and his political views seemed moderate in comparison to the growing militancy in certain sectors of the black community, Muhammad Ali still stood as a powerful figure of dissent, especially concerning draft resistance to the Vietnam War. By 1971 domestic opposition to the United States involvement in Vietnam had grown. The demonstrations against the war increased, and although most Americans polled in 1970-71 disagreed with antiwar demonstrators, the Administration faced a crisis. The Army of the Republic of North Vietnam--considered a way to continue the war while diminishing US forces,

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[129]New York Times 18 April 1971 "Supreme Court to Hear Ali's Appeal of Draft Conviction Tomorrow";20 April 1971 "Ali is no Pacifist, U.S. Tells Court"; 27 June 1971 (AP) "U.S. Supreme Court Expected to Decide Ali Case Tomorrow"

and made up of South Vietnamese soldiers--was ill-equipped, suffered rampant corruption, and faced mass desertion.[130]

Of central importance, however, was the level of dissent within the United States military itself. By 1969, a New York Times reporter speculated that dissent within the Army alone had a central core of a few hundred soldiers, with sympathy in the ranks for the antiwar movement numbering in the thousands. The reporter counted over sixteen underground "subversive" newspapers published by enlisted men, with the numbers growing weekly. While those more "sophisticated and disciplined" recommended that soldiers remain in the Army and fulfill their duties while voicing disagreement, other newspapers advocated going AWOL and fleeing to Sweden or Canada. Anti-war newspapers were published in Fort Dix, New Jersey, Fort Hood, Texas, and Fort Gordon, Georgia, and a case in Fort Jackson caused considerable controversy. An interracial enlisted group known as "GIs United Against the War in Vietnam" were arrested "on dubious charges" by Army intelligence officers. The case became highly publicized, and led many pundits to speculate on the effects of active dissent in the Armed Forces.[131]

Army officials, no less concerned about possible consequences, responded that such action was a natural outgrowth of civilian resistance since both the military and the antiwar movement drew individuals from the same age groups. The reporter noted that some soldiers held protest marches while off-duty. Others employed tactics introduced by civil rights demonstrators in the American South. But members of the black

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[130]Moss, Vietnam 242,324

[131]New York Times 20 April 1969 Ben A. Franklin "Army Dissent; It Raises Knotty Problem for the Military"; "How to Deal with Radical Dissent"

community had voiced opposition to the war well before 1969, and to many of them Ali represented "a symbol of defiance . . . during a war in which 22% of the battlefield deaths" were black, while African Americans made up only ten percent of the population.[132]

In 1967 a reporter for The Nation traveled to the Kahn Hoi section of Saigon. Kahn Hoi, situated across the river from the central district of the city, was home to Trinh Minh, a "dirty, dusty" row of bars and nightclubs. This area, the reporter noted, was favored by black soldiers to those clubs of Tu Do in central Saigon, where the white soldiers congregated. Green Beret Sergeant William Barksdale told the reporter that he found the predominately white clubs hostile—the Vietnamese women considered themselves "white" and espoused the racial views of their white companions—unlike Trinh Minh, where the food and music were reminiscent of black clubs in the US. After a few beers, the reporter commented, the discussion at Kahn Hoi bars turned into what Barksdale believed "would be thought by most Americans to be the views of militant extremists." Muhammad Ali and Stokely Carmichael were hailed as heroes for resisting white authorities. "They may be mad at Clay and Carmichael for opposing the war," Barksdale said "but on the big issue they realize these fellows are on their side."[133]

The "big issue" that Barksdale referred to was "What sort of United States would the GIs return to?" For many in the black community both home and abroad, as well as in the views of government officials, newspaper reporters, and the public at large,

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[132]Ibid; 30 April 1967 "The Draft: Cassius vs. Army"

[133] The Nation 3 July 1967 Karl H. Purnell "The Negro in Vietnam" pp8-10

the beginnings of an answer to that question could be linked to the Supreme Court's ruling in Muhammad Ali's case. In their pre-hearing brief, the Legal Defense Fund claimed that "there are major implications in the case not only for Ali, but for many Black Muslims who face [similar] sentences." Some editorialists speculated that a victory for Ali would result in mass draft resistance that could possibly end the conflict in Vietnam. A Justice Department lawyer also expressed these fears when he said "If [Ali] wins, all the Muslims will refuse to take the oath, and where will we get soldiers?"[134]

On the day before the Court announced its' decision, Ali remained confident and steadfast. "If the judge look at me in what I believe, they'll vindicate me. But if they send me to jail I'm not going to leave the country. You don't run away from something like that. When you go to jail for a cause, it's an honor." He again compared himself to more overt forms of danger. "If I beat up a woman or robbed somebody or killed a man, then I'd be worried." The Court had spent the end of the 1971 session addressing concerns about publication of the Pentagon papers. A Federal Court Order prevented the New York Times from printing the papers, but the Christian Science Monitor uncovered details of a 1962 plan to pull the United States military out of Vietnam. Justice Thurgood Marshall disqualified himself from Ali's case because he had acted as United States

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[134]New York Times 218 April 1971 "Supreme Court to Hear Ali's Appeal"; 1 July 1971 Robert Lipsyte "Sports of the Times: Case Closed"

Solicitor when the initial case came up in 1967, and The New York Times noted that a 4-4 decision would uphold the prison sentence.[135]

On 28 June 1971 the Supreme Court of the United States overturned the conviction of Muhammad Ali on the basis that his 1967 induction order was improper. The Court's decision details the developments of the case. Before his refusal to step forward, Ali had appeared before his draft board in Louisville where he claimed exemption from induction based on his religious beliefs. He was denied that exemption, and he appealed to the State Board, who sent his file to the Justice Department. Following procedure, the FBI interviewed his parents, neighbors, business partners, and religious associates. Then Ali appeared at a hearing with his parents, a Muslim minister, and a lawyer, and the presiding officer judged--using the FBI background report as well--that Ali was sincere in his objection to war and that the Appeals Board should declare him a conscientious objector.[136]

As the Kentucky Appeals Board was about to recognize Ali's conscientious objector status, the Department of Justice wrote a letter to the Board "advising it that [Ali's] claim should be denied." The Board, based on the advice of the Justice Department, denied Ali's reclassification and ordered that he appear for induction, but gave no reason for the decision. After numerous appeals, several boxing matches, and a world tour, Ali--all appeals lost--was ordered to step forward, and refused. He was found

[135] The assassination of President Kennedy and the killing of the South Vietnamese Premier had voided the plan. New York Times 27 July 1971 (AP) "U.S. Supreme Court Expected to Decide Ali Case Tomorrow"; 28 June 1971 Robert Lipsyte "Judges Ruling Today: 5-3-1, Favor Ali?"

[136] Clay v. United States, 403 U.S. 698 (1971)

guilty and sentenced to five years in prison, fined $10,000, and he was denied a request to leave the country to work. In essence, the Supreme Court's decision stated that he should never have been drafted in the first place. Four years after he was originally found guilty and four and a half years after he was stripped of the heavyweight title, the Supreme Court refused to decide Ali's case on the grounds of his religious faith; rather, they blamed the entire episode on the actions of the Justice Department.[137]

In order to qualify as a conscientious objector in 1971, an individual had to show three things. First, that "he is conscientiously opposed to war in any form," second that "this conviction is based on religious training and belief "and third "that his conviction is sincere." The letter from the Justice Department to the Appeal Board argued that Ali's beliefs did not make him opposed to all wars but only certain wars. In answer to the second requirement, the Justice Department claimed that Nation of Islam doctrine stemmed from racial and political, rather than religious, categories, and that Ali would not fight in Vietnam because he objected to United States policy as interpreted by Elijah Muhammad. Finally, the Justice Department contended that Ali had not initially claimed conscientious objector status, only after he was to be inducted. But the Appeal Board failed to explain on which of the three grounds it refused to deny Ali's appeal.[138]

The Supreme Court ruled that Muhammad Ali had met two of the requirements for deferment. They found that Ali's beliefs were founded on "religious training and belief" and that he was "sincere in his conviction." The court could not prove that Ali

[137]Ibid

[138]Ibid

"objected to war in any form" because of the Muslim call to jihad—the holy wars of Armageddon. Although jihad was a war of the spirit and mind, it was also a "bloody war." "When ye encounter the unbelievers," Justice Douglass quoted the Koran, "strike off their heads, until ye have made a great slaughter among them . . . O true believers, if ye assist God, by fighting for his religion, he will assist you against your enemies; and will set your feet fast." Douglass supported Ali's belief in the jihad. "Clay should [not] be subject to punishment because he will not renounce the 'truth' of the teaching of his respective church that wars may exist which are just wars."[139]

Essentially, the Court could not prove that Ali met only two of three requirements, but since the Louisville Draft Board had not explained why it had denied his conscientious objector status, the Justices blamed the Board's decision on the Justice Department. They also scolded the Department. "Here, where it is impossible to determine on exactly which grounds the Appeal Board decided, the integrity of the Selective Service system demands, at least, that the Government not recommend illegal grounds." The decision listed several precedents—some of them sixteen years old--available to the Justice Department that would have stopped Ali's induction in 1966. "The long established rule of law embodied in these settled precedents" the Court concluded, "thus clearly requires that the judgment before us be reversed."

[139] Douglass concluded his concurring opinion by suggesting the antiquarian and harmless nature of the jihad. "The last attempt to use the jihad as a significant force was made in 1914 by the Ottoman sultan; but it failed and the jihad has fallen into disuse." Ibid

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