



“I don’t deny him his rights. By the same token, I have mine:”
Floyd Patterson, Joe Frazier and the Black Press Challenge
the Muhammad Ali Mystique

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“Bust photographic portrait of [Muhammad Ali](#) in 1967” is
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In 2004, author Peter Wolfe submitted a guest editorial for *The Journal of Popular Culture* entitled “The Greatest? A Revisionist View.” In the space of three pages, he makes the argument that while Muhammad Ali is truly one of the finest boxers to ever step into the ring, his self-imposed label, “The Greatest,” needs to be reexamined. Wolfe argues that Ali benefitted from fights with mediocre opponents he failed to knock out, friendly referees who allowed him to commit illegal moves and fouls, and bad sportsmanship. Wolfe specifically mentions Ali’s decision “to taunt and punish” opponents unnecessarily. Perhaps the most glaring example of this was Ali’s contempt for light heavyweight champion Bob Foster. In addition to being a technically superior boxer, Ali also enjoyed a distinct physical advantage, outweighing Foster by forty-eight pounds (241).

Wolfe’s observations are useful in reexamining the ring career of Ali. But when this revisionist approach is applied to the social and cultural contexts that surrounded the men who were forced to endure the Ali legend, what new narratives and understandings do we have beyond Ali as “The Greatest”? Of additional importance, how do we separate these men from the legacies and labels Ali saddled them with?

Though not writing explicitly about Ali, Wiley Hall analyzes the “Uncle Tom” label and its impact on historical legacies in “Urban Rhythms.” In 2002, scholars were preparing to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its complicated meanings. Yet instead of beginning his analysis with the characters and their impact, Hall reflects on Ali’s use of the term “Uncle Tom” to demean and alienate Joe Frazier in the 1970s and Ali’s lukewarm apology for it some thirty years later. Instead of accepting Ali’s apology (“It was all meant to promote the fight”), Hall places the insult in its nineteenth century context illustrating how it took on a different, yet equally devastating meaning in the 1960s and 1970s. What Hall recognizes is that Ali’s use of the term, and long delayed apology, marked a watershed moment in the way African Americans related to and treated one another in a politically turbulent era:

Ali’s apology in March 2001 marked the end, symbolically at least, of the civil war within the Black community, an end to the brutal infighting and vicious backbiting of the 1960s and 1970s when, in the name of Black Power and Black Unity, Blacks ripped each other to shreds (1).

It is not a matter of diminishing Ali’s legend, but of allowing for the possibility to rethink labels and legacies and critically analyze the contributions of other observers and participants during this tumultuous era in American history. Suggesting that Floyd Patterson and Joe Frazier withstood and overcame Ali and his legend in and out of the ring takes nothing away from “The Greatest,” nor does it portray them as sycophantic “white hopes” or “Uncle Toms.” It only suggests that greatness is created, expressed, and interpreted in any number of ways. Much like legacies, the understanding of a term should never be above critical examination, revision, or expansion. It is in the words of these men and others that we find the means of such critical self-reflection.

The purpose of this research is to offer a critical examination of the largely under-acknowledged views and opinions of African American heavyweight champions throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, the voices of several prominent African American sportswriters will provide a more layered and complex picture of how the struggle for Civil Rights was viewed by other African American heavyweight champions as well as by members of the African American press. What we are left with is a more critical analysis of both the Ali legend and notions of solidarity among African American public figures during the Civil Rights movement.

The Religious and Political Foundations of Floyd Patterson and Joe Frazier

Much has been made about Muhammad Ali's political convictions, the turmoil of the 1960s, its counterculture and spirit of revolution, all of which has resulted in the near total neutralization of the political leanings of multiple African American athletes, most conspicuously Floyd Patterson and Joe Frazier. Outside of their views on race relations, each man had his own beliefs about what direction the country should be headed, why it should go that way, and who was best qualified to lead it.

However, much like their individual backgrounds, exploring the conditions that influenced Patterson's and Frazier's political leanings and personal ideologies during and after their careers helps explain several areas of their lives. Issues of religion, patriotism and racial identity were far more complicated than previous accounts and interpretations assert. What the individual voices of Patterson, Frazier, and members of the African American press reveal is that African Americans were not unified in their political views; they held diverse opinions about racial solidarity, and they did not all accept Muhammad Ali's opinions as universal truth. Patterson, Frazier and others also openly criticized

America's toleration and encouragement of racial discrimination, even from the self-proclaimed "People's Champion" Muhammad Ali. Existing narratives often paint the dissenting opinions of Patterson and Frazier as something they were born with, not something that grew and changed with them as they interacted with the world around them.

For Patterson, who converted to Roman Catholicism as a young man, and Frazier, who was a practicing Baptist since birth, the religious convictions that guided them were quickly turned against them as Ali rose to athletic and political prominence. Because each man routinely espoused the virtues of tolerance, patience, and forgiveness as instructed by their faith and influenced by their life experiences, they soon became lightning rods for criticism from an increasingly militant portion of African Americans. The result was that Patterson and Frazier faced rejection by significant numbers of both African American and white sports fans for their more moderate beliefs. However, like Ali, both men would continue to staunchly defend their respective faiths and political views and count African Americans and whites among their allies.

Patterson's Responses to the Ali Mystique

Ali routinely visited unnecessarily cruel punishment on other African American opponents for any offense, real or imagined, but Patterson's political and religious beliefs offered an especially tantalizing target for Ali and the Nation of Islam, both in and out of the ring. Keying in on Patterson's religion and gentle demeanor, Ali was able to turn their 1965 fight into a religious and racial struggle. Ali's merciless



["Boxer Floyd Patterson on January 23, 1962"](#) is licensed under CC-PD 1.0.

taunting of Patterson's faith, coupled with Ali's ability to turn African Americans against Patterson, result in narratives that are severely one sided, often ignoring issues of diversity and identity among individual African Americans during the Civil Rights era.

Unfortunately for Patterson, his choice to publicly defend his identity and faith against Ali's attacks were immediately used against him. One of the best-known insults he leveled at Ali was his continued refusal to address Ali by his Muslim name. Though Patterson biographer W.K. Stratton asserts that Patterson's and Ali's relationship outside of the ring and away from the cameras was cordial, even friendly, the intensity and severity of Ali's taunts suggest a desperate need for African American approval, insecurity about his own faith, genuine cruelty, or some combination of the three. In an interview for their 1965 bout, Patterson made his own position clear. While he respected Ali's decision to join the Nation of Islam, he refused to call him by his Muslim name until Ali stopped attacking him and labeling him as the "white-man's rabbit," which would not happen until both Patterson and Ali had retired from the ring.

Patterson would further complicate the situation in a piece he wrote for *Sports Illustrated*, entitled "I Want to Destroy Clay." Patterson explained what he meant when he said he wanted "to return the title to America." While Ali would cruelly spin Patterson's argument and further alienate Patterson from an even larger portion of African Americans, Patterson's explanations for wanting to destroy Clay/Ali convey his ideas of racial identity, sincerity and respect for self and others.

Another small, but meaningful incident between Ali and Patterson occurred seven years after their initial meeting. It complicates our understanding of Patterson, as well as Patterson's ability to effectively taunt Ali in a subtle and timely manner. During the build up

to their 1972 fight, Ali promised to knock out “the rabbit,” and while he was unconscious, get an “Uncle Tom” bandanna and tie it around Patterson’s head. When pressed to explain why he continued to call Ali Clay, Patterson’s response was equal parts insulting, sarcastic, and cynical:

Cassius Clay is a nice name. I like it. That’s what his mother calls him. She carried him for nine months, and, after all that aggravation, she named him Cassius Clay. It’s a nice name (Unger 34).

Patterson’s compassion and understanding also contributed to his firm sense of right and wrong when it came to race relations in the United States. When he addressed the topics of race, Muhammad Ali, and the Nation of Islam, Patterson’s blunt assessment of Ali and the Muslims was seen by many militant African Americans as an act of racial betrayal. A closer reading of the primary sources reveals that Patterson possessed a deep, realistic understanding of what was wrong with race relations in America. Patterson, like Ali, found comfort in religion, but demanded that all people respect it:

I am a Negro and I’m proud to be one, but I’m also an American. I’m not so stupid that I don’t know that Negroes don’t have all the rights and privileges that all Americans should have. I know that someday we will get them. God made us all, and whatever He made is good. All people---white, black and yellow---are brothers and sisters (Patterson and Gross).

Patterson demonstrates a keen understanding of contemporary race relations, the shortcomings that hindered him and other African Americans in the quest for equal rights in America, and the desire of all people to be treated with basic respect and dignity. However, his conservative politics also served to alienate him from both African Americans as well as younger, white liberals. The same Patterson who joined Civil Rights marchers in

the South to demonstrate his dedication to the cause of equal rights would later become an unapologetic supporter of the Vietnam War (Stratton 195).

Patterson and Ali obviously did not share the same views on Vietnam, and these differences in opinion bled over into Patterson's feelings toward the Nation of Islam and Ali's place within it. Patterson made it clear on several occasions that he did not view Islam as antithetical or inferior to his Roman Catholic beliefs. What he wanted, as did so many African Americans, was to be accorded the same respect and tolerance in return from Ali or any other Muslim. Patterson put it simply: "I don't deny him his rights. By the same token, I have mine" (Patterson and Gross).

Despite Patterson's modest, measured attempts to defend his faith and beliefs, Ali's attacks on Patterson left him open to criticism and scorn from those who differed with him on social issues, most noticeably American race relations and interracial marriage. Ali's ability to separate Patterson from African American support and empathy was best exemplified when Patterson purchased a home for himself and his family in an upscale, all white neighborhood in Scarsdale, New York.

Like Ali, Patterson's athletic achievements had earned him a fairly significant fortune, and Patterson strove to ensure that he and his family would never experience the crushing poverty that defined his childhood in Brooklyn. Not long after his purchase of a \$140,000 home in Scarsdale, New York, *The Los Angeles Sentinel* reported on the various types of harassment Patterson and his family endured, including his wife being refused service at the local beauty salon and his children enduring racial slurs and taunts from schoolmates. These and other acts of discrimination eventually forced Patterson to sell the home (Are Bigots Really 4B).

Rather than rallying behind Patterson, many African Americans followed Ali's lead, claiming that the harassment of the Pattersons was justified and further evidence of Patterson's true "whiteness." In journalist Mac Walton's recollection of the first Ali-Patterson fight, "Sad Night in White America," Walton completely strips Patterson of a public, African American persona. He refers to Patterson as a "Great White Hope," that he would "dance to the music of whites" on command, and accuses him of secretly longing for a white woman to make his transformation complete. Early in his diatribe, Walton takes an opportunity to publicly ridicule the Patterson family's racist harassment in Scarsdale:

Last Wednesday's Patterson is the same Patterson who said all the nice things about America (whenever you could find him); the same "Negro" who, with his wife, moved into the outhouses of White suburbia and promptly received a cross burnt on his lawn (6).

Walton's attack was exactly the same as Ali's: to claim Patterson was desperate to become white himself. How, then, did Walton reconcile the choice of homes of Ali, who spoke of African American superiority and racial segregation in all areas of life while purchasing at least three different mansions (including an English Tudor) in Chicago, Illinois, Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and Los Angeles, California, the last of which he boasted that he purchased for \$1.5 million dollars (Slater 35).

By the middle of the 1960s, we see in the primary sources a shift not just in the tone of exchanges between Ali and Patterson, but also in the intensity and fury of the mental and physical attacks Ali visited on his opponents. This change is important not only because it helps to present a more complete picture of the Ali mystique, but also because it adds dimension, depth, and humanity to those African American fighters who withstood his barrage and still retained their integrity and sense of self. Perhaps most importantly, they also displayed enough political acumen to know that eventual racial integration would

someday become a part of the American landscape, regardless of the rhetoric of the Ku Klux Klan or the honorable Elijah Muhammad.

In Ali's Own Words: "True" Blackness, Race Mixing and a Strange Approach to a Segregation Solution

Ali, the "radical" and "rebel" who publicly shamed other African American men for their devotion to their respective faiths while threatening to publicly crucify any opponent who spoke ill of Islam, proved to be the most fanatical and easily led of any of his contemporaries. To Ali, a man such as Patterson was not just an "Uncle Tom" or the epitome of an obsequious African American man; he was unequal to Ali in all areas, including his immortal soul, his physical being, and even his diet:

I've got an unseen power going for me. There'll be almost 4 billion Muslims praying for their brother in Islam. We've got sympathizers in his own camp. How is he going to buck all this? This little, old, dumb pork chop eater don't have a chance. From eating pork he's got trillions of maggots and worms settling in his joints. He may even eat the slime of the sea (Rogin).

While we do know that Ali was devoted enough to Islam to risk significant jail time, it's rare that we see the less attractive, prejudiced, violent and strange aspects of Islam that he not only accepted without question, but routinely preached to others, whether they wanted to hear it or not. In addition to believing that African Americans and whites would be completely separated by 1970 because Elijah Muhammad prophesized it and "everything he predicted comes true," Ali also believed in a stranger, more violent act of Allah's will that would go farther than racial segregation; it would bring the complete destruction of the white race (Rogin).

As Ali dutifully relayed to *Sports Illustrated's* Gilbert Rogin, the Muslim "Mother Plane" would soon be coming to destroy the "White devils" of the world. According to Elijah

Muhammad (and by extension, Ali), this celestial vehicle of genocide was “a half-mile by a half-mile square...It is capable of staying in outer space six to twelve months at a time without coming into the earth’s gravity. It carries 1,500 bombing planes with the most deadliest explosives.” Rogin’s interview with Ali demonstrates that the champion was familiar with Islam’s sanctioned genocide of whites, and he spent much of his time staring into the night sky, observing the stars and weather, awaiting its arrival. Aptly labeling Ali as “a strange, uncommon man” Rogin was made privy to what to expect when the day of reckoning would come for every white person in the world:

Said Clay the day before the fight: ‘On a clear night when you can see all the stars, look for the brightest. Watch it for a while. You’ll see it shaking, that high up. Little White objects jump off it, make a circle, come back. Those are the bombers. On them are Black men who never smile.’

Another area of Muslim philosophy that Ali appeared to take to heart above all others was the issue of race relations and interracial marriage, with the potential offspring of such unions being especially offensive. Conveniently ignoring the significant quantum of Irish blood he inherited from his mother’s ancestors, Ali’s rants about the evils of race mixing and the horrors that were bi-racial children are conveniently absent from existing narratives.

Speaking to *Ebony* magazine in April 1969, Ali, who would be referred to by *Ebony* reporter Louie Robinson as “saintly” (37) was blunt in his assessment of African Americans who were not as pure of blood as he believed himself to be. His views on race mixing deserve to be quoted at length to demonstrate both his blind devotion to Muslim doctrine as well as the complicity of the African American press for their fawning, sycophantic

devotion to Ali in spite of his unabashed racism and scorn for those African Americans that had the misfortune to be even the slightest bit different than him:

All of Ali's lectures and sermons hew a rock-hard Black Muslim line, though each bears his inimical personal touch. Thus, an Ali "argument" against inter-racial marriage---a cardinal no-no in the Black Muslim faith---goes like this: 'No intelligent Black man or Black woman in his or her right Black mind wants White boys and White girls comin' to their homes, schools and churches to marry their Black sons and daughters to produce little pale, half-White, green-eyed, blond-headed Negroes. And no intelligent White man or woman in his or her right White mind wants Black boys and Black girls comin' around their homes, schools, and churches to marry their White sons and daughters and in return introduc[n] their grandchildren as little mixed-up kinky-headed, half-Black n[---]' (Massaquoi 174).

Instead of rebuking or even acknowledging the contradictory nature of Ali's statements (particularly his many dealings with white fans, politicians and businessmen), Massaquoi and the editors of *Ebony* instead chose to attack former African American champions who could not or would not accept his ideology, labeling them and their supporters as "White washed Blacks." However, this was not new territory for Ali, who, at some point during his exile, offered his own "final solution" to the problem of race mixing. Speaking with journalist Mark Kram about the subject of a possible moon landing during a drive to Milwaukee, Ali wished to fill the first ship to the moon with all the earth's white women because "They *dangerous*," and to fill another ship with "all those kinky-headed half-Black n[---] from mixed marriages" (Kram 94). In spite of these and other erratic, racist offerings, Ali would be placed on the cover of *Ebony* twelve times between 1967 and 1982.

The ideological comparisons and exchanges between Patterson and Ali are not so much amusing anecdotes as they are examples of the assertion of an authentic African American identity, with or without external approval. Ali claimed all African Americans, including poor ones, as "his people," despite his choice not to live anywhere near any urban

areas in the variety of cities in which he owned homes. Regardless of whatever Ali did or did not do, say or not say, his racial identity was constantly reaffirmed, celebrated and defended. For Patterson, who attempted to assert his blackness through his actions and words instead of his possessions, he would be forced to endure the “Uncle Tom” status that Ali had unfairly saddled him with. Though Patterson would continue to challenge Ali’s stances both personally and in the press, it would be both Joe Frazier and members of the African American press, most notably *Chicago Defender* journalist A.S. “Doc” Young, who would issue perhaps the bluntest criticisms of Ali’s political and social beliefs.



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Joe Frazier, “Doc” Young and the Black Press: An Underutilized Resource

Though Floyd Patterson would tolerate Ali’s rants about African American identity and authenticity, two sources that offered fairly harsh, and accurate, criticism of Ali’s claims were Joe Frazier and journalist A.S. “Doc” Young. Reexamining

their observations in the primary sources (specifically African American newspapers and periodicals) provides valuable insight into not only their feelings and observations regarding Ali’s views on race, race relations and African American identity, but also represents the diverse nature and understanding African Americans had regarding their place in America during the height of the Civil Rights movement.

While Joe Frazier’s legacy has been largely defined by Ali’s harangues that preceded each of their three fights, Frazier’s responses in the press are largely unknown. Much like Floyd Patterson had done in 1965, Frazier made a concerted effort to utilize the media and

sympathetic journalists to defend and assert his identity. However, the political, social and athletic landscapes on which Patterson had confronted Ali in the 1960s had changed dramatically by the time Frazier faced Ali in 1971. It was into this scene of turmoil, distrust and fear that the faith-based pragmatism of Joe Frazier would be engulfed by the rhetoric of separatism and segregation preached by Muhammad Ali.

Despite the growing attractiveness of groups like the Black Panthers and the tenets of Black Power ideology, Frazier and other African Americans embraced the reality that America was a land of multiple beliefs, ethnicities, and colors. Survival dictated that peaceful, integrated coexistence was the way of the future. Shortly after securing the title in 1971, Frazier returned home to Beaufort, South Carolina, and delivered an impassioned plea to the people of his home state for interracial cooperation, understanding, and the urgency of now:

We must save our people and when I say "our people" I'm not speaking about Blacks only. I mean Whites and Blacks. We need to quit thinking who's living next door, who's my little daughter going to play with, who is she going to sit next to in school. We don't have time for that (Joe Frazier Home 34).

Beginning with an interview printed in the *Chicago Defender*, Frazier makes a point that is remarkably similar to those made by many of the track and field athletes involved in the 1968 Olympics. Just as many of those athletes resented and resisted Harry Edwards's tacit assumption that he spoke for all African American athletes, Frazier rejected Ali's numerous claims that he was representative of all African Americans. Frazier was also scathingly honest when he acknowledged the economic gap that existed between himself and most other African Americans:

He's hurt the poor Blacks. They can't possibly live the way he and I can and they can't afford what he and I can. Yet somehow they think they

can after they hear him sound off. You can't speak for the Blacks. We're all individuals and I know I don't want someone speaking for me and I'm sure most other people don't want someone speaking for them (Frazier Gains 24).

Though Frazier did believe in racial unity, empowerment and self-determination, he was also very honest about the role that economics played in that struggle. He was also enough of a realist to know that the average American might not be able to identify with the rhetoric of a millionaire athlete, especially an African American athlete.

However, it would be Frazier's article in *Ebony* magazine in 1972 that would demonstrate just how deep his alienation from much of the African American community had become. Like Patterson, Frazier did not author the article out of spite or malice, but as a matter of defense. Given the time to collect and express his thoughts and feelings completely, Frazier was not only able to assert his authenticity as an African American male, but also identified several inconsistencies in Ali's harangues to African Americans that deserve examination.

One of Ali's main talking points that Frazier argued against most vehemently and logically was the Nation of Islam's push for racial segregation in America. While Frazier does mention the ironic nature of this argument given the racial makeup of not only the Louisville syndicate that helped give Ali his start, but also his integrated corner (most notably his Italian trainer, Angelo Dundee), he analyzed Ali's rhetoric as it applied to most African Americans. While Frazier does make informed, valid points about the role that economics, fame and opportunity play in the lives of African Americans, his most important observations concern race relations in America.

Like Patterson, he acknowledged the discrepancies that existed between African Americans and whites in the early 1970s. However, both Frazier and Patterson displayed

their racial and nationalist pride when they voiced their opinions on integration and segregation in America. While Frazier made no secret of his love for his country (he would constantly accuse Ali of cowardice for refusing induction into the army), he was also acutely aware of its shortcomings and inconsistencies. Frazier argued that the rhetoric of Ali and the Muslims was largely impractical for most African Americans because of the economic disadvantages most faced, but that fiery rhetoric and race baiting hurt their overall goals of social equality:

I feel I have no right to preach race hate because anything I say reflects on the little man in the ghetto. Most of the Black racists, like Ali, go into the ghetto and preach their race hate about Whitey. They get the brothers all worked up and then they go to their fine luxurious homes far away from the ghetto while the cops beat on the poor misguided Blacks who thought they could take things into their own hands (Frazier 72).

While Frazier's views on race and politics are not unusual, his views on militancy do not fit with the narratives crafted by African American or white sportswriters of the era, and certainly not with the tirades of Ali that many had taken as gospel truth. For Frazier, militancy was only effective when delivered with a specific message and in a non-violent manner. Just "rapping and getting everybody stirred up" served no purpose and did nothing to advance race relations in America (his own flight from Beaufort, S.C. after a racially charged incident with a white farm owner at the age of 15 was testament to the dangers of such agitation). As he viewed it, African Americans and whites would never be separate from one another, and eventual coexistence would become reality, however unpleasant. When confronted with Muhammad Ali's remarks concerning Vietnam, and the state of race relations in America, he was ultimately molded into the unofficial champion of conservative, white American politics.

While several journalists and a few contemporaries did question the inconsistencies in Ali's statements and actions, one of his most vocal critics was African American sports reporter A.S. "Doc" Young. Unlike the reporters from *Ebony*, Young remained critical of Ali throughout his heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. Young was not so much critical of Ali's athletic prowess, but of his relationships to and with other African American heavyweight boxers and the African American community. What he and a select few took issue with was Ali's demonization and humiliation of other African American athletes who did not agree with his politics and worldview.

As early as 1962, Young freely admitted he was genuinely amused by Ali's loquacious nature, poetry and sense of humor. Because Ali had not yet made race a focal point for building interest in his fights, Young believed he would prove to be a far more exciting and entertaining champion than either Floyd Patterson or Sonny Liston (Biggest Mouth 21). Yet by 1965, Young's contempt for Ali was becoming more and more apparent. Still adamantly calling him Clay, Young began to question his political affiliations, his treatment of other African American fighters (particularly Floyd Patterson) and scolded him for injecting his religion, which he saw as bizarre and cultish, into his fights (Will Floyd Regain 26).

As the 1960s drew to a close and changes in the Civil Rights movement became more frequent and dramatic, Young tread carefully when it came to issues of race among the heavyweight contenders for Ali's now vacated crown. By the time of Ali's and Frazier's first encounter in 1971, Young was no longer able to dismiss Ali's personal, increasingly racist attacks. Even as Young dismissed Ali's growing celebrity, he attempted to claim (incorrectly) that the fight had no social, historical or cultural importance and that it was

“merely a championship fist fight, an evening’s entertainment, a sporting event, a diversion.” (Picking the Fight 26).

However, Young was quick to note the bigotry that the event created, as well as Ali’s role in creating that ill will. Despite his seeming naiveté about the fight existing independently of racial, social and cultural meaning, Young recognized that Ali attempted “to exploit and belittle another black man, as he had done on previous occasions” (26). As Young stated, his observations were not done in the spirit of attack as white sportswriters such as Jimmy Cannon and Arthur Daley had done when criticizing Ali’s religious and political beliefs. Instead, it was a criticism of his treatment of fellow African American heavyweights:

It is no secret that I have been one of Muhammad Ali’s severest critics—not because of any personal animosity on my part but on the basis of certain principles: He was wrong to attempt to mash his religion, one of the most controversial of all religions, on sport [a point which Ali reportedly conceded]. He was wrong to inject racism, Crow Jim [sic] into sport; it was terribly mean of him to single out Black opponents, as he nearly always did, for punishment, vilification, derision (Joe Wins 24).

As Young pointed out, lionizing Ali’s rhetoric while ignoring or applauding many of his less than admirable traits and actions only reinforced negative notions and misconceptions about African American representation in both the press and popular opinion.

Where many African Americans had been split politically along the moderate ideology of Dr. King and the radical rhetoric of Malcolm X, African American spokesmen in athletics ran a distant second to Ali, making him the *de facto* voice of African American athletes and sports fans, whether they wanted him to be or not. Though publications such as *Ebony* would present Ali’s voice as representative of the entire African American fan base, Young pointed out that African American athletes and fans, just as in politics, were

not a monolithic group. They expressed a wide variety of opinions on not just the contests, but also their own identities and presentations to the public at large.

In Young's column on March 24, 1971 he recounts a conversation between two fans shortly before the March 8 fight between Ali and Frazier. The column does not just cover the results of the fight, but the politics, culture, and issues of self-identification that many African American fans had attached to the fight. Though Young may have railed against Ali for the multiple meanings he attached to the fight, he was quick to notice the diversity of those meanings that existed for African American fans. What Young's article and analysis revealed was that African Americans who backed Frazier were not all conservatives and that Ali did not speak for an entire group of people:

Hell, I don't have to buy that Muhammad Ali jive if I don't want to. Who decreed that Ali is God anyway? Where did that stuff start about him being 'the people's champion?' Aren't we all people? You mean to say I'm not people because I like Joe Frazier? (Add 1 32).

Whether Young took journalistic license or not, perhaps the most important part of the exchange is the question of the African American athletes and the meaning of their tangible impact on the world at large. When it came to the subject of Ali being anti-establishment, the question is posed: what, exactly, was Ali actually doing, instead of saying he would do, that earned him the status of being anti-establishment, a countercultural icon and the voice of African Americans?

And what's all this nonsense about Ali being the anti-establishment guy? He's fighting FOR the establishment. He isn't fighting for any hippie association. He'll take the money, won't he? He's going to pay taxes, isn't he? I mean: if he's so much anti-establishment, why doesn't he do something really way out, like refusing to pay income taxes? (Add 1 32).

The point, whether Young concocted the exchange or if the conversation actually occurred, was a legitimate one. What tangible contributions had Ali actually made to any non-Muslim causes? As Richard Hoffer illustrated in the events that surrounded several of Ali's speaking engagements, he sought only attention and a validation of his fluctuating celebrity status.

Whether wanting only to discuss his new briefcase-sized portable phone during a speaking engagement at Randolph-Macon College or calling a group of African American students who dared to heckle him and question his politics "n[---]" during an appearance at Mulhenberg College in 1970, Ali's "lectures" often served only to inflate his ego and satiate his need for attention. The Muhlenberg incident would somehow grow even stranger; after accusing African American students of giving him "more trouble than the Whites," he also angered enough of the white students in attendance to the point that several challenged him to a fistfight (Hoffer 13).

It was occurrences such as these that lent credibility to the question that Patterson, Frazier, Young and others had been asking: what, specifically, had Ali done for African Americans other than himself? With events like the Muhlenberg debacle, the novelty of hearing him rail against an adversary that was increasingly difficult to identify was beginning to wear noticeably thin by the 1970s. As journalist Brad Pye asked, what had "Cassius Clay done for anyone beside himself"? (B1).

Conclusions

In September of 1975, A.S. "Doc" Young once again addressed the question of Ali's behavior in his long running "Good Morning, Sports!" column. Calling Ali "the most insensitive so-called black man in the history of sports," Young found that he was not alone

in expressing concern over Ali's unique brand of racism. Citing *Chicago Sun-Times* journalist Lacy J. Banks, Young found that his fellow scribe was not just uneasy with Ali's tactics, but offended by them. As Banks said, "I have to be honest with you. I have a gut revulsion against blacks aping the stereotyped images the racist whites still nurse of black people." Yet as the same article would show, it was not just sports journalists or athletes who knew about the potential dangers of Ali's racist contempt for those African Americans who opposed him ideologically. As Chicago based psychiatrist Dr. Ellis Johnson attempted to explain, Ali's brand of racism might be profitable. However, Banks ended his opinion "on a rather weak note: 'I sure hope Ali does not overdo this'" (A Reason to Hate 26).

This returns us to the question asked by Brad Pye: what, specifically, had Ali done for anyone other than himself? With Ali's death on June 3, 2016, memories of the man and his deeds will grow fonder, and the simplest actions will become larger, more heroic and altruistic. Yet dissenting voices do exist, and deserve to be as much a part of the larger narrative as do those that are complimentary, apologist, or fawning. The purpose in including critical, often harsh voices is not to undermine legacies, but to offer additional insight into a complex set of events that were experienced by a complex collection of characters.

While these additional voices are not always complimentary, they speak to the difficult nature of an era where race, identity, and nationalism were constantly called into question. And though the historical actors who experienced this turmoil do not always agree with one another, they speak to their own unique truths, and add to our understandings of those truths, as well as the people who created them.

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