

# The Fight

Frank Joyce

1971

While Cleaver and Newton punched it out for the white media—to the confusion of black and white alike, Mohammad Ali and Joe Frazier did it for the white bankers, and the entertainment of black and white alike.

Mohammad Ali wore red trunks. Joe Frazier wore green. For forty-five full minutes, the Red and Black and Green slugged it out in front of \$20 million dollars worth of fans.

Frazier won the fight. The promoters Jerry Perenchio and Jack Kent Cooke won the money. The white sportswriters won their revenge on Mohammad Ali, who has defied and infuriated them for years. What they wanted was a white gladiator to smash an uppity black athlete. In lieu of that, the Freep's Joe Falls and the Noose's Pete Waldimer had to make Frazier out to be another Floyd Patterson—a new white hope. But there's no particular reason to believe that Frazier will turn out to be another Patterson.

As an event, it was certainly more interesting and more important to most people than all the Apollo space shots put together. Even if you had to pay to do it—there was no radio—this was something you could identify with. So people paid. Life magazine paid Frank Sinatra to take photographs—or did he pay them? Gangsters and dope dealers, mostly black, from all over the country spent thousands of dollars on wardrobes, plane fares and scalped tickets to be there. For whites, tickets were being sold through European airlines and travel agencies for \$1,000 each—if you could get them.

Every available limousine in the New York metropolitan area was rented. And no one will ever know how much was bet on the fight throughout the world—but if you had it all you could enter the capitalist class.

And except for the fact that everyone got robbed, no one got gyped. No third round fall-downs; no sitting in the corner when you were supposed to come out fighting. It was a hell of a fight. Fifteen rounds of two Black men hitting each other as hard as they could and making your stomach hurt just to watch them.

Ali fell down—but probably won the last round except for that. The referees and judges gave the fight to Frazier and there's room for controversy there.

At least there'd better be. If the economy doesn't collapse completely and Nixon doesn't start the nuclear holocaust and Supreme court Chief Justice Warren Burger doesn't get Ali thrown in jail, the rematch might be worth \$30 million.

# fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #127, March 18-31, 1971

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