

Muhammad Ali

White Hope? What Hope?

Frank Joyce

1967

One doesn't expect to read much about spectator sports in the *Fifth Estate*. The multi-underground nature of professional boxing today, however, makes it and perhaps cock-fighting, an apt subject for followers of deviant American culture. Moreover, there is something of a tradition of writers, self styled or otherwise, commenting at least on heavyweight championships.

On Monday, February 6, 1967, in Houston, Texas, Mr. Muhammad Ali successfully defended his title for the eighth consecutive time—on this occasion against the challenger Mr. Ernie Terrell. The promenade at Olympia where the fight was televised in Detroit is not exactly ringside at the Houston Astrodome, but then who wants to go to Texas for anything anyway?

Perhaps the only man in more danger than Ernie Terrell that night was the cameraman, who operated the machine which projected the image from Houston to Olympia. From a vantage point precisely in the middle of the most expensive seats in the house—right about at the red line for those who follow hockey—the cameraman was protected by two privileged Detroit Policemen. They undoubtedly received their assignment from Gus Colacassides for services rendered.

Whoever he was, the cameraman discovered the first time he tried, he could not adequately focus the picture. He managed to make it worse and found himself surrounded by 8,000 people who had paid more than \$40,000 and come out on the coldest night of the winter to watch Mr. Ali punish Mr. Terrell.

Most of the 8,000 were hard-working black people who had come to see the best that ever did it. Some of them were dressed in their finest and sported foxes on their arms. Some were personalities like Reggie Harding. All of Detroit's gangsters who lacked the status, time, money or inclination to go to Houston were also there.

Some white people came to see Mr. Terrell, successor to Floyd Patterson as the WHITE HOPE, beat Mr. Ali. Like Mr. Terrell they call the champion Cassius Clay and they wished with all their hearts that this arrogant Black Muslim would be dethroned so that they could sleep a little more easily at night.

As they are more and more often these days, the white people were frustrated and disappointed. Mr. Ali promised to humiliate and punish Mr. Terrell. He did all of that. For fifteen rounds he outboxed, outdanced, out punched and out wrestled the six foot challenger. Whatever Terrell tried, Ali did it better.

That is the thing about Muhammad Ali. He is the greatest. It is like radio Hanoi. No one ever believes what they say either. So far though, it's all turned out to be true (including the admission last week by the pentagon that they have lost 550 more airplanes and over 400 more helicopters than they had previously admitted.) Muhammad does all of the things that a heavyweight champion is supposed to do in the ring.

He has fought the best the world has to offer and beaten them, including Ernie Terrell, the heavyweight champion of the world according to the WBA (World Boxing Association) otherwise known as the White Boxing Association.

Although your news-paper didn't tell you about it, Ali fought most of the second round with only one hand. He still landed more punches and received less than the challenger. Terrell, according to the Free Press, landed his best punches during the fight between the navel and the knee.

So much for White Hope.

Finally, *Ring* magazine which is to boxing precisely what *Downbeat* is to jazz, announced that it would not give its fighter of the year award for 1966 to Muhammad Ali as it had done in 1963 because:

"Since 1963, Clay has disqualified himself for a repeat award with these demerits:

"(1) Cassius has allied himself with the Black Muslims who avowedly are not friendly toward the United States of America and are not listed as a patriotic group.

"(2) Clay has entered a protest against his being drafted into the army and has laid claim to exemption from service, chiefly on the allegation that he is a student preacher of the Mohammedan religion.

"(3) The champion boxer of the world has been guilty of utterances which have not resounded to the credit of boxing. The Fighter of the Year must be recognized as an example to the Growing American Boy. Most emphatically is Cassius Clay, of Louisville, Ky., not to be held up as an example to the youngsters of the United States."

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