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Becoming Ali: Digital History, Newspaper Discourse, and America's Most Famous Boxer, 1960–1975

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Abstract

Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. publically changed his name to Muhammad Ali on 6 March 1964. In doing so, he signalled his allegiance to the Nation of Islam – a controversial religious sect that advocated racial separatism and black nationalism – as well as his intention to defy established cultural expectations for black athletes in the United States. Through his name change, he provoked diverse reactions from the media that changed over time. This study analyses the discursive significance of Ali's two names – Clay and Ali – as a way to analyse complex and shifting journalistic attitudes toward him between 1960 and 1975. To do so, it employs a mix of digital and traditional methodologies: specifically, distant and close reading. As such, this thesis is part of a growing body of digitally driven scholarship that is re-shaping sport history in the new millennium.

The foundation of this study is a distant reading of almost 40,000 articles written about Ali between 1960 and 1975 from 13 newspapers. This group of publications was selected to be geographically and culturally diverse, and includes three major white-run dailies and ten black newspapers from across the United States. Distant reading – a form of quantitative analyses that uses graphical representations to visualise trends and themes within large bodies of literature – indicates that rather than moving gradually toward acceptance of his Muslim name and its associated identity, journalists shifted their attitudes toward Ali at three key junctures. In March 1964, journalists overwhelmingly referred to him as Cassius Clay, not Muhammad Ali. This practice continued until September 1967, when newspapers began to print the two names almost interchangeably. The final shift occurred in March 1971, when journalists reversed their earlier rejection of the Muslim name completely and began referring to him almost exclusively as Muhammad Ali.

Guided by the shifts identified by distant reading, this thesis then moves to a detailed close reading of individual articles with the aim of uncovering the deep, discursive forces that shaped usage of Ali's two names. An analysis of articles published between March 1964 and September 1967 reveals that although both black and white newspapers comprehensively rejected Ali's Muslim name, there were important differences in their motivations. The rejection of the name by white newspapers was symptomatic of their broader refusal to engage critically with racial issues during the mid-1960s. By comparison, the black press rejected the name

because it signified Ali's affiliation with the Nation of Islam, whose program of black nationalism and racial separatism threatened to undermine the integration movement.

The relatively interchange way that newspapers used the two names between September 1967 and March 1971 was influenced predominantly by Ali's refusal to be drafted into the United States Army. Close reading also reveals a number of deeper discursive factors that prompted journalists to display less animosity toward Ali's Muslim name. Ali's punishment at the hands of legal and athletic authorities earned him a measure of sympathy from the press. However, close reading indicates that this changing personal narrative was augmented by broader cultural shifts occurring in the United States throughout this period. The rise of radical black power groups and growing criticism of the Vietnam War made Ali's activism appear increasingly moderate by comparison, and enhanced his appeal to mainstream audiences. The influence of these personal and cultural factors culminated in March 1971, after which journalists referred to him almost exclusively as Muhammad Ali.

These trends are then examined within a single publication: the *Louisville Defender*. Examining journalistic narratives from the *Defender* – Ali's hometown black newspaper – enables a more granular examination of the factors that shaped press attitudes toward the boxer. By incorporating analysis of Louisville's unique racial culture as well as the influence of individual personalities at the *Defender*, this close reading further reveals the diversity of attitudes toward Ali across the United States. Rather than being swayed by hometown parochialism, the *Defender* energetically critiqued Ali's racial and religious beliefs and aligned itself with the attitudes of other black publications around the country.

Distant and close readings show that American newspapers did not embrace the name Muhammad Ali until March 1971. At the height of his career, he provoked complex and critical reactions from journalists with a diverse range of racial, religious, political, cultural and geographical backgrounds. Modern cultural memories of the late boxer tend to eschew these aspects of Ali's cultural identity, favouring more benevolent visions of the late boxer as a peacemaker or civil rights hero. By analysing shifting attitudes toward Ali between 1960 and 1975, and interrogating the complex discursive factors that drove these shifts, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced historical understanding of his cultural significance.

Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, financial support and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my higher degree by research candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Publications included in this thesis

Included as Chapter 1:

Townsend, Stephen, Gary Osmond, and Murray G. Phillips. 'Clay vs. Ali: Distant Reading, Methodology, and Sport History.' *Journal of Sport History*. In press, date of acceptance: 28 July 2018.

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Journal Articles

- Townsend, Stephen, Gary Osmond, Murray G. Phillips. 'Wicked Wikipedia? Communities of Practice, the Production of Knowledge and Australian Sport History.' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 5 (2013): 545 – 59. DOI: 10.1080/09523367.2013.767239

- Phillips, Murray G., Gary Osmond and Stephen Townsend, 'A Bird's-eye View of the Past: Digital History, Distant Reading and Sport History.' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1725–1740. DOI: 10.1080/09523367.2015.1090976

Book Chapters

- Townsend, Stephen, Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips. 'Wicked Wikipedia? Communities of Practice, the Production of Knowledge and Australian Sport History.' In *Sports History: Critical Concepts in Sports Studies Vol. 1*. Edited by Wray Vamplew, 269–86. London: Routledge, 2014.

Selected Conference Abstracts

- Townsend, Stephen. 'Myth-busting Memories of Muhammad Ali.' Paper presented at the 2017 HMNS Postgraduate Student Conference, University of Queensland, Brisbane QLD, Australia, 6–7 October 2017.

- Townsend, Stephen. 'Big Data for a Big Boxer: Distant and Close Readings of Muhammad Ali.' Paper presented at the inaugural Ali in Un/Expected Places Symposium, University of Turku, Finland, 17–19 May 2017.

- Townsend, Stephen. 'What's in a Name? Cassius Clay v. Muhammad Ali.' Paper presented at the 20th biannual Sporting Traditions Conference, Darwin NT, Australia, 30 June–3 July 2015.

- Townsend, Stephen. 'What's in a Name? Cassius Clay v. Muhammad Ali.' Paper presented at the 43rd annual North American Society for Sport History Conference, University of Miami, Miami FL, United States of America, 22–25 May 2015.

- Townsend, Stephen. 'Distant Reading an American Cultural Icon.' Paper presented at the 6th annual Griffith University Cultural Research Postgraduate Symposium, Griffith University, Brisbane QLD, Australia, 17 November 2014.

- Townsend, Stephen. 'Toe-to-Toe with Muhammad Ali and Digitised Newspapers.' Paper presented at the 33rd annual Australian Historical Society Conference, University of Queensland, Brisbane QLD, Australia, 7–11 July 2014.

- Townsend, Stephen. 'Toe-to-Toe with Muhammad Ali and Digitised

Newspapers.' Paper presented at the 42nd annual North American Society for Sport History Conference, Glenwood Springs CO, United States of America, 30 May–2 June 2014.

- Townsend, Stephen. "Creating Wiki-Histories: Knowledge production and the Wikipedia Community.' Paper presented at the 19th biannual Sporting Traditions Conference, University of Canberra, Canberra ACT, Australia, 2–5 July 2013.

Contributions by others to the thesis

The body of this thesis is comprised of four journal articles, three of which were collaboratively written with my thesis advisors: Associate Professor Gary Osmond and Associate Professor Murray Phillips. The details of these contributions are visible on pages five to eight.

Statement of parts of the thesis submitted to qualify for the award of another degree

None

Research Involving Human or Animal Subjects

No animal or human subjects were involved in this research.

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List of Abbreviations and Terms

CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NNPA	National Newspaper Publishers Association
NOI	Nation of Islam
NYSAC	New York State Athletic Commission
OCR	Optical Character Recognition
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Non-violence Coordinating Committee
WBA	World Boxing Association

Foreword

This is a thesis (dissertation) with publications. ‘Thesis with publications’ is the University of Queensland’s nomenclature for what might otherwise be referred to as a ‘thesis by publication’. This format may be unfamiliar to some readers, and the following serves to explain the organisational features of this thesis.

Conceptually, this thesis by publication does not differ greatly from a traditional thesis. It contains an introduction, chapters, and a conclusion. Like a traditional thesis, the introduction, chapters, and conclusion have been written and arranged to have a clear narrative flow. Where this thesis *does* divert from tradition, is that each of the four chapters was written for publication in academic journals, and have either been published or are in press. Each chapter therefore functions as both an integrated part of this thesis, *and* as a stand-alone article. In order to allow readers to engage with the content without knowing the broader context of this thesis, each chapter (article) has its own introduction and conclusion. As a result, all four chapters contain overlapping methodological and conceptual explanations. Some figures are also common to all chapters.

Each chapter was written for publication in a different scholarly journal. Chapter 1 has been accepted for publication by the *Journal of Sport History*. Chapter 2 has been published in *Sport in History*. Chapter 3 has been accepted for publication by *The International Journal of the History of Sport*. Chapter 4 has been published in the *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*. The content of each chapter appears in this thesis exactly as it would in its respective journal. Each of these journals has slightly different formatting and style requirements. As a result, there are minor inconsistencies with regards to spelling, grammar, and referencing styles. I have, however, homogenised the font, as well as the formatting of notes and bibliographical information. Notes appear at the bottom of each page and there is a complete bibliography at the end of the thesis. The numbering of notes is reset at the beginning of each chapter. The numbering of figures is also reset at the beginning of each chapter. Figures also appear larger in this thesis than they do in their respective publications, to aid readability. Specific information regarding style and formatting is outlined in brief interleaving sections between each chapter.

Introduction

> Some people will happily settle for a smile and joke in a hotel lobby, and others will insist in crossing two or even three of his moats before they feel comfortably "private" with the Champ…Ali's quick mind and his instinct for public relations can easily make the third moat *seem* like the ninth; and this world is full of sporting journalists who never realized where they were…
>
> Hunter S. Thompson[1]

In early 1978, Hunter S. Thompson wrote a two-part profile on Muhammad Ali for *Rolling Stone* magazine. Compiled from time spent with the aging champion as he prepared to fight Leon Spinks in Las Vegas, Thompson's profile is filled with stories of irreverent and semi-debauched encounters with Ali and his entourage. Amongst the chaos, Thompson reached an important realisation about his subject. He concluded that there was a nearly impenetrable ring of 'moats' between the boxer's public and private personas and, despite claiming to have nearly breached these defences, he was unable to break through to the *real* Ali. Thompson was not the first writer attempting to find this *real* Ali, and he certainly was not the last. Countless others have attempted to look past his dynamic and often paradoxical public persona, in search of a simpler and more relatable figure. To date, however, Ali has evaded simple explanations. He was sometimes a showman and sometimes an activist. He was open-minded in some ways and frustratingly dogmatic in others. He was kind to some people but incredibly cruel to others. He was openly anti-intellectual but addressed some of the twentieth century's most complex social issues with remarkable clarity. This perhaps goes some way toward explaining the motivation behind the abundance of Ali biographies – perhaps if we can understand the *real* Ali, the man behind the paradoxes, we might be able to explain his extraordinary life.[2]

The ongoing desire to understand Ali at a personal level has resulted in a substantial body of biographical literature. Writer and literary critic Joyce Carol Oates estimates that there are "at least 50 books" written about Ali, most of which are

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[1] Hunter S. Thompson, 'Last Tango in Vegas: Fear and Loathing in the Far Room, Part Two,' in *The Great Shark Hunt*, ed. Hunter S. Thompson (London: Picador, 1980), 594–595.

[2] According to *Guinness World Records*, Ali was *the* most written about person in history. It is difficult to validate this claim, so it suffices to say here that he is *one of* the most written about people in history. See: Michael Ezra, *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2009), 1.

biographies.[3] Whilst the biographical obsession with Ali has produced some compelling works, it has also ensured that writing about the late boxer has predominantly focussed upon Ali himself, rather than his broader cultural impact. The task of analysing Ali at a sociocultural level would traditionally fall to academic historians, who have, as Randy Roberts argues, 'written surprisingly little about the boxer/activist.'[4] The reasons for this are difficult to discern, but it is possible that the wealth of popular material written about Ali has led academic historians to assume there are no new discoveries to be made. Despite this, a relatively small group of scholars, including Gerald Early, David K. Wiggins, Michael Ezra, Maureen Smith, Grant Farred, Louis Moore, Randy Roberts, and Johnny Smith, have looked beyond the man and contextualised him within the racial, political, gendered, social, and cultural dimensions of his time.[5] There remains, however, significant scope for examining Ali at a sociocultural and historical level – particularly with regards to his representation in the press.

It is within this critical, historical framework that my thesis is located. Taking a lead from Rita Liberti and Maureen Smith's study of Wilma Rudolph (another prominent black athlete and activist) this thesis does not seek personal truths about Ali, nor deliver a 'biographical rendering' of his life.[6] Rather, this thesis is concerned with the meanings that Americans ascribed to Ali during the 1960s and 1970s. It critically examines perceptions of Ali, specifically within the newspaper press, as a way to better understand his place within the racial, political, and cultural landscape of the United States of America during the 1960s and 1970s. As such, I do not intend to look past the paradoxes and complexities of Ali's public persona, but rather to embrace them in order to better understand how they shaped press perceptions of Ali. This thesis will critically analyse the varied and complex ways that American newspaper journalists perceived Ali and, by doing so, contribute to a more nuanced understanding of his place in the cultural landscape of the United States of America.

[3] Joyce Carol Oates, 'Muhammad Ali, Beginning to End for the First Time in a Book,' *New York Times*, 28 November 2017, accessed 5 April 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/28/books/review/jonathan-eig-muhammad-ali-biography.html.

[4] Randy Roberts, '*Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon* by Michael Ezra (Review),' *American Studies* 52, no. 1, 167.

[5] Citations for the works of each author (some have written multiple pieces) can be found in the bibliography, and in footnotes throughout the thesis.

[6] Rita Liberti, and Maureen M. Smith, *(Re)Presenting Wilma Rudolph* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 3.

Muhammad Ali in Black and White

The decision to focus on newspaper representations of Ali was driven by a number of factors. Ali's life was scrutinised by almost every variety of media including television, radio, magazines, and in the arts. Newspapers, however, are particularly well suited to serve as a lens through which cultural attitudes toward Ali might be studied. As historian Jeffrey Hill argues, newspapers tend to 'give the readers what they want,' and each publication, to some extent, reflects the values, attitudes and beliefs of the community it serves.[7] Newspapers are not consulted in this thesis for empirical data about Ali's career but rather as 'invaluable window[s] into popular culture' or as portals through which historical attitudes toward him might be glimpsed.[8] In doing so, this thesis aligns itself with the cultural turn in historical scholarship – a movement that embraces interpretation, subjectivity, and ambiguity as meaningful elements of the analytical process.[9]

The proliferation of newspapers across the United States of America is such that each publication consulted in this thesis represents a range of geographical, political, racial, and religious viewpoints. Newspapers can therefore provide us with a 'spectacular heterogeneity' of attitudes, opinions, and perspectives on Ali.[10] Despite experiencing a steady decline in popularity throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the newspaper press was still an important cultural institution for many Americans during Ali's career.[11] Historian Christopher Daly notes that newspapers were particularly influential during the civil rights era, as they transmitted and shaped public attitudes toward race, religion, and political activism.[12] Furthermore, the newspaper press is already a fixture of Ali literature – there is not a single biographical or historical study of the boxer that does not quote contemporary newspaper sources. However, despite the preponderance of newspaper content, these

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[7] Jeffrey Hill, 'Anecdotal Evidence: Sport, the Newspaper Press, and History,' in *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis,* ed. Murray G. Phillips (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 121–127.

[8] Adrian Bingham, 'Reading Newspapers: Cultural Histories of the Popular Press in Modern Britain,' *History Compass* 10, no. 2 (2012): 142.

[9] It should also be noted that newspapers are complex sources, and should not be seen as perfect reflections of the society in which they exist. Newspapers influenced, and were influenced by, public attitudes toward Ali. However, content written about Ali was also shaped by various cultural, institutional, and personal factors. I acknowledge these factors throughout the thesis and have incorporated them into my analysis of sources.

[10] Bingham, 'Reading Newspapers,' 142.

[11] Christopher B. Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative of a Nation's Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 314.

[12] Daly, *Covering America*, 314.

sources generally have been used to augment rather than to guide analyses of Ali. As a result, the broader cultural and institutional forces that shaped press attitudes toward him have not yet been fully explored. Newspapers therefore present an ideal resource for studying attitudes toward Ali because they are culturally rich, diverse, influential, and understudied. They are also available in unprecedented abundance in the digital era.

The 'Infinite Archive'[13]

The recent digitisation of historical documents, like newspapers, provides us with new opportunities to study press attitudes toward Ali in a comprehensive and detailed way. In the late 1990s, many governments, academic institutions, and private enterprises took advantage of advances in digital photography and machine reading technology by making digital copies of physical archival documents.[14] These copies can be uploaded, stored, and arranged on websites, otherwise known as digital or electronic archives. Digitisation projects have targeted a large variety of historical texts such as letters, diaries, books, minutes, records, and speeches, in addition to film and audio recordings, photographs, artworks, maps, and even some archaeological findings. Newspapers have also been recognised as prime candidates for digitisation. The content of a newspaper is ephemeral and its construction fragile – digitisation not only allows these texts to persist long past their intended lifespan but also enables them to be placed in searchable databases. The prospect of huge tracts of archived newspaper content available online is undoubtedly exciting for historians, especially sport historians for whom newspapers are a key primary source.[15] There are however, a number of challenges posed by digitisation.

Digitisation prompts historians to critically re-engage with the power dynamics of archival research. Political and economic power is exercised over archival material.[16] According to Jacques Derrida, individuals and institutions with 'recognized authority' are the guardians of archival documents and they determine

[13] See page 23 for discussion of this term.

[14] 'The "State of the Art": A Comparative Analysis of Newspaper Digitization to Date,' *Center for Research Libraries*, 10 April 2015, accessed 10 July 2018, https://www.crl.edu/sites/default/files/d6/attachments/events/ICON_Report-State_of_Digitization_final.pdf.

[15] Hill, 'Anecdotal Evidence,' 123–124.

[16] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

who has the ‘hermeneutic right and competence’ to access and interpret the knowledge contained in these documents.[17] In an academic context, governments and universities wield this authority over archives.[18] Researchers who are politically, economically, or geographically isolated from these institutions traditionally have had great difficulty accessing the archival information they desire. Much of a physical archive’s power is tied to its materiality, or what philosopher and historian Achille Mbembe calls ‘this entanglement of building and document.’[19] Access to archival knowledge has been restricted to researchers within reach of the building in which an archive is housed, and those with the ability to navigate through its bureaucratic and epistemic entanglements. Digitisation unsettles the geographic aspect of this dynamic. Online archives are untethered from their physical locations and ‘unconstrained by place and space’ – they can, in theory at least, be accessed anywhere, by anyone, at any time.[20] This may be especially beneficial for researchers without institutional support, who may not have the resources required for interstate or international travel to and from archives.

Although this is an important step toward a more democratic dissemination of archival material, digitisation may further ‘entrench the distinction between institutionally funded scholars and amateur historians’ in other ways.[21] Private companies control many important archival collections. The advantage for researchers is that these companies have the resources to construct sophisticated online archives in which to house their collections. Less advantageous, however, is the cost of accessing these sites.[22] A number of commercial archives demand substantial subscription fees beyond the means of most researchers without institutional affiliation. For example, the archival research in this thesis was made possible by the University of Queensland’s subscription to ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Furthermore, the additional purchase of the site’s Black Newspapers Collection, upon which this research relies heavily, was the result of a complex negotiation process and

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Achille Mbembe, ‘The Power of the Archive and its Limits,’ in *Refiguring the Archive*, eds. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 19.

[20] Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, and Graeme Reid, ‘Introduction,’ in *Refiguring the Archive*, eds. Carolyn Hamilton et al (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 15.

[21] Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips, ‘Introduction,’ in *Sport History in the Digital Era,* eds. Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 14.

[22] Martin Johnes and Bob Nicholson, ‘Sport History and Digital Archives in Practice,’ in *Sport History in the Digital Era*, eds. Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 53.

a healthy portion of luck. In late 2013, I requested the university library purchase a subscription to this collection. This request was quickly rejected – it would cost nearly $280,000 Australian dollars and I was the only researcher who had expressed an interest in the material.[23] A few weeks later, however, I received some good news. Following an end-of-year financial review, the library had discovered a surplus of roughly $300,000 that needed to be spent immediately. My request, being fresh in their minds and the right amount, was hurriedly approved. It is improbable, perhaps impossible, that this serendipitous set of circumstances would have occurred were I an amateur researcher, or located at an institution with fewer resources. This experience illuminated an important realisation about the nature of digital archives. Although digitisation has mitigated some of financial barriers to conducting traditional archival research (such as travel or copying costs), gaining access to online collections attracts new costs that can far outstrip those associated with using physical archives. The cost of accessing digital resources like ProQuest Historical Newspapers ensures that access to archival material is restricted to researchers with institutional support. Rather than unsettling the tradition of institutional control over archival knowledge, digitisation has reinforced and, in some cases, widened the gap between professional and amateur researchers.

For historians with institutional support, however, digital archives like ProQuest Historical Newspapers have a wealth of advantages. Of the 13 publications consulted for this thesis, 12 were accessed via this database. [24] In addition to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, the purchase of the Black Newspapers Collection granted me access to nine, highly influential, black press publications.[25] These publications were of central importance to this research. Black newspapers wrote to, about, and on behalf of, African Americans. [26] These

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[23] According to a December 2013 email to the author from a research liaison at the University of Queensland Social Sciences and Humanities Library, the subscription would cost 'US$195,884 plus an annual access fee of US$5,940.'

[24] The *Louisville Defender,* which forms the basis for Chapter 4, was viewed on microfilm. This was facilitated by a generous loan from the University of Kentucky.

[25] The black newspapers collection includes: the *Atlanta Daily World*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Chicago Defender*, the *Cleveland Call and Post*, the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, and the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

[26] The 'black press' refers to newspapers written by African-American journalists for an African-American audience. These publications are also known as black newspapers. Black press newspapers defined themselves as an alternative to, and sometimes an opponent of, the mainstream white press. These publications focused on local, national, and international issues that concerned black Americans

publications shaped and transmitted attitudes toward Ali as well as broader issues of race, religion, class, and culture. Access to black newspapers, along with major white dailies, enabled me to conduct a more nuanced and complex analysis of Ali's place in the American cultural landscape than has previously been possible.

In order to conduct such an analysis, however, it was first necessary to identify all the articles in these publications that were written about Ali. This process was facilitated by ProQuest Historical Newspapers' advanced Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. This technology recognises the unique shapes that individual letters, words, and phrases make when they are transformed into digital images. Put simply, OCR software makes digital archives searchable. The search tools on ProQuest Historical Newspapers claim to employ OCR technology that is 99.95% accurate, which is further augmented by the high-quality digital scans taken of the newspapers listed above.[27] As such, I was able to search the database for articles written about Ali, confident that the OCR search would comprehensively and accurately identify all appearances of his name(s) in the newspaper text. A search for articles containing either 'Cassius Clay or Muhammad Ali' returned 37, 911 articles. This result was both exciting and terrifying. ProQuest contained a huge, and presumably rich, collection of source material – a boon for any historical research project. Such a large collection, however, does pose significant challenges: how was I to organise, read, and interpret 37, 911 newspaper articles?

Such challenges are not unique to this project. The overabundance of source material is an issue that confronts all historians working with digital archives. We now research, write, publish, and teach with access to what digital humanities scholar David M. Berry calls the 'infinite archive' – where a glut of information is just a few clicks of a button away.[28] Berry's term is evocative rather than literal. The 'infinite archive' is by no means a single, tangible collection – it is neither a website nor an accessible room. The term refers instead to the nebulous sum of all digitisation projects across the globe, and the massive volume of source material contained within

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and many were renowned advocates for black rights. A more comprehensive discussion and history of the black press can be found in Chapter One.

[27] For a more detailed discussion of OCR, see Chapter 1. See also: Gary Osmond, '"Pink Tea and Sissy Boys": Digitized Fragments of Male Homosexuality, Non-Heteronormativity and Homophobia in the Australian Sporting Press, 1845-1954,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 13 (2015), 1578–1592.

[28] David M. Berry, 'Introduction: Understanding Digital Humanities,' in *Understanding Digital Humanities* ed. David M. Berry (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

them. The 'infinite archive' is a new economy of knowledge based upon excess and abundance. This is a paradigm shift for historians who are more accustomed to source material being rare and difficult to access.

Historical source material has traditionally existed within an economy of scarcity. Even newspapers, which are plentiful when first produced, can become rare commodities soon after. Newspapers are not designed to be preserved eternally in their physical form. Newsprint, the stock that newspapers are printed on, is brittle and degrades quickly. The task of preserving newsprint, especially in large quantities, is time-, space-, and labour-intensive. As such, many newspapers (especially local or regional publications) were not archived. Those that were preserved are often kept by local libraries or historical societies, requiring historians to travel long distances to spend days poring over dusty document boxes in a dimly lit back room. There is a certain romantic appeal to this kind of archival research, as well as genuine epistemological advantages. Historian Arlette Farge argues that spending time, in person, with collections of physical documents can reveal unexpected details that allow researchers to understand more deeply the relationship between documents in an archival collection.[29] Robert Darnton echoes Farge's claims, and attests that 'marinating' in physical archives allows historians to better contextualise their sources.[30] When reading a newspaper, for example, it is possible to judge the importance of an article by its size or positioning relative to the items surrounding it. A skilled researcher also may be able to detect themes running through concurrent issues or in the writing of a particular journalist. Newspapers in digital archives are often stripped of this context.[31] Online archives often present individual articles in isolation, disconnected from the page or issue in which they were originally printed. As a result, historians working with digital collection must go looking for the same contextual information that would present itself in a physical archive.[32]

Despite concerns about context, historians and archivists have long sought efficient ways to store and access large volumes of archival material. The uptake of

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[29] Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 1–17.

[30] Robert Darnton, 'The Good Way to Do History,' *The New York Review of Books*, 9 January 2014, 52.

[31] Alexandra Chassanoff, 'Historians and the Use of Primary Sources in the Digital Age,' *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (2013), 461.

[32] ProQuest Historical Newspapers facilitates this by offering full-page scans alongside the default article-only scans that are returned by the site's search tools. Context is therefore harder to grasp when using this online archive, but not impossible.

microfilm technology alleviated storage difficulties without truly revolutionising archival research practices. Microfilm allowed for historical newspapers to be copied onto relatively compact and durable photographic reels. However, the processes involved were difficult and time-consuming, and copying the entire run of a newspaper was regarded as a 'large specialty microfilm job.'[33] As a result, it is rare for all but the most major newspapers to have more than one or two microfilm copies in existence. Furthermore, because microfilm is a physical medium it has to be transported to the historian, or vice versa. Microfilm lessened, but did not erase, issues of geographic distance and the scarcity of sources.

Digital archives, notwithstanding the aforementioned considerations of access and equity, present an entirely oppositional set of challenges. Instead of scarcity, there is now an overwhelming abundance of archived newspaper articles. The volume of digitally accessible historical newspaper material is nothing short of astonishing. Wikipedia's list of online newspaper archives provides links to over 1,400 individual collections worldwide.[34] There is, of course, some variability in the size, accessibility, and quality of each collection. Some are government-funded projects, which are generally sophisticated, huge, and often freely accessible. The National Library of Australia's Trove archive contains over 18 million scanned newspaper pages; Chronicling America, from the United States Library of Congress, offers nearly 13 million pages; the British Library provides access to 24 million pages through the British Newspaper Archive; and the combined efforts of the European Council libraries have so far made more than 18 million digitised newspaper pages available through Europeana Collections.[35] There are also corporately owned archives. Some, like Newspapers.com or NewspaperARCHIVE.com, primarily service amateur

[33] Susan A. Cady, 'Machine Tool of Management: A History of Microfilm Technology' (PhD Diss., Lehigh University, 1994), 51.

[34] Wikipedia, 'List of Online Newspaper Archives,' accessed 4 April 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives.

[35] National Library of Australia, 'Digitised newspapers and gazettes,' *Trove*, accessed 4 April 2018, http://help.nla.gov.au/trove/using-trove/digitised-newspapers; Library of Congress, 'About Chronicling America,' *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, accessed 4 April 2018, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/; British Library, 'About the British Newspaper Archive,' *The British Newspaper Archive*, accessed 4 April 2018, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/content/a_unique_archive; Europeana Newspapers, 'Europeana Newspapers is making historic newspaper pages searchable,' accessed 4 April 2018, http://www.europeana-newspapers.eu/.

genealogists and claim to have scanned nearly half a billion pages each.[36] Others, like ProQuest Historical Newspapers, are similarly vast (55 million pages) and cater to academic users by incorporating precise search tools and historically significant publications.[37]

The amount of available material also appears to grow daily. For example, ProQuest Historical Newspapers added more than 25 million scanned newspaper pages to their collections between 2014 and 2018.[38] Even more astounding, NewspaperARCHIVE.com claims to add one digitised newspaper page to its collections every second, which equates to roughly 80,000 pages per day, or 2.5 million pages per month.[39] The seemingly inexorable growth of archives further reinforces the perception that the volume of digitally archived material, newspapers particularly, is almost limitless. There are, of course, limits to the breadth and comprehensiveness of digital archives. While significant portions of newspaper content are digitised, according to a 2015 report compiled by the Center for Research Libraries 'the bulk of newspapers in print and microform are, as yet, relatively untouched.'[40] Additionally, of the publications that have been digitally copied, a significant number remain off limits due to copyright and ownership restrictions.[41]

However, the limitations of the archives themselves, whilst important, may not be as relevant to this discussion as the limitations of the historians working with them. The archive can only be as infinite as we allow it to be – as infinite as our research tools and methodologies allow it to be. Space too might be infinite, but for all our technological advances humans can see only a fraction of the cosmos, and access even less. Darnton asks, 'How can we navigate through the information landscape that is only beginning to come into view?'[42] Brett Bobley, director of the National Endowment for the Humanities' Office of Digital Humanities, echoes these concerns:

[36] Newspapers.com, 'About Newspapers.com,' accessed 4 April 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/about/; NewspaperArchive, 'Our Mission,' accessed 4 April 2018, https://newspaperarchive.com/about-us/.

[37] ProQuest, 'Proquest Historical Newspapers,' accessed 9 July 2018, https://www.proquest.com/products-services/pq-hist-news.html.

[38] ProQuest Historical Newspapers' 2014 product catalogue claimed that the database contained 30 million digitised newspaper pages. The company's current website (accessed July 2018) lists '55+ million digitized pages.' See: http://www.proquest.com/products-services/pq-hist-news.html.

[39] 'Our Mission,' *NewspaperARCHIVE.com,* accessed April 4, 2018, https://newspaperarchive.com/about-us/.

[40] 'The "State of the Art",' 15.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Robert Darnton, 'Google & the Future of Books,' *The New York Review of Books*, 12 February, 2009, accessed 1 May, 2018, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/02/12/google-the-future-of-books/.

> What if you are a historian and you now have access to every newspaper around the world? How might searching and mining that kind of data set radically change your results?[43]

Darnton and Bobley no doubt speak to the anxieties of many scholars watching as the horizons of the infinite archive continue to expand. With access to this archive, how can we be comprehensive in our research without being able to see the boundaries of the available knowledge? Perhaps a more meaningful question would be: how can we develop new techniques and methodologies to best take advantage of this glut of archival material?

This thesis is part of a burgeoning movement in sport history scholarship that seeks to answer these questions.[44] Traditional approaches to archival research are simply too time-consuming to be viable when confronted by gargantuan digital collections that contain a wealth of documents on a particular research subject. There is a limit to how much close reading can be done within the space of one project, one career, or one lifetime. We must therefore devise ways of working with vast collections of digitised newspapers that allow us to embrace this bounty of sources as comprehensively as possible. To do so, this thesis looks outside its immediate methodological environs and toward the field of digital humanities, or digital history more specifically.

Digital history is a discipline within the emerging field of digital humanities. Historian Stephen Robertson stresses the importance of recognizing digital history as a distinct discipline within the field of digital humanities.[45] Robertson, along with Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, argue that such distinctions are often difficult to perceive because digital humanities is 'infinitely malleable,' with each discipline

[43] Michael Gavin and Kathleen Marie Smith, 'An Interview with Brett Bobley,' in *Debates in the Digital Humanities,* ed. Matthew K. Gold (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 61.

[44] For a comprehensive discussion of pioneering digital work in sport history, see: Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips eds, *Sport History in the Digital Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

[45] Stephen Robertson, 'The Differences between Digital Humanities and Digital History,' in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, eds. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

borrowing new methodologies and tools from one another as they develop.[46] The interchange of techniques and methodologies between emerging digital disciplines does not, however, obliterate the distinctions between them. According to Robertson:

> we would be better served by reimagining digital humanities not as a single all-encompassing tent but as a house with many rooms, different spaces for disciplines that are not silos but entry points to central spaces…each of the many disciplinary rooms would have a distinctive character, reflecting a particular contribution and orientation to the field.[47]

Whilst digital historians might borrow methodologies from the 'central spaces' of the digital humanities, it is the purpose toward which these techniques are employed that lends the digital history room its 'distinctive character.'

This thesis borrows and adapts one such methodology: distant reading. Popularised by literary scholar Franco Moretti, distant reading is a computer-based method of quantitative analysis used to analyse themes and patterns in large collections of text.[48] It has been used to study language patterns, identify the emergence and disappearance of particular words, establish the authorship of certain texts, and for various other purposes specific to the field of literary studies. It is employed in this thesis to fulfil historical aims instead. Distant reading identifies shifting journalistic attitudes toward Muhammad Ali, in order to better contextualise him within the racial, political, and cultural dimensions of the United States during the 1960s and 1970s.

Distant reading allows this thesis to engage fully with the aforementioned 37,911 articles about Muhammad Ali available on ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Before conducting a more detailed discussion of distant reading, however, it is important to acknowledge that many mainstream historians, and sport historians particularly, have resisted this type of quantitative methodology. Although computer technologies like email and word processing have become fixtures of modern academic work, historians have been reluctant to employ digital tools in the core work

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[46] Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, 'Digital Humanities: The Expanded Field,' in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, eds. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), ix.

[47] Robertson, 'The Differences Between Digital Humanities and Digital History,' 290–291.

[48] Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).

of analysing and interpreting sources.[49] There are a number of reasons for this: a lack of confidence with computer technologies; the academy's relatively low regard for digital publication pathways; tensions between the digital humanities' promotion of collaborative work and academic history's lionisation of single-authorship; and concerns that online scholarship privileges recent historical events over more settled narratives.[50] These factors notwithstanding, perhaps the overriding reason for historians' resistance to methodologies like distant reading is the discipline's long-running distrust of quantitative, computer-based analysis.[51]

Digital History and the Disciplinary Divide

The origins of humanities computing, the forerunner to digital humanities, can be traced back to the work of Jesuit priest and professor Roberto Busa. In 1949, using machine-reading technology designed during the Second World War, Busa developed a concordance, or a complex literary index, of St. Thomas Aquinas' writings.[52] His *Index Thomisticus* was the first academic work to recognise the potential for computers (which are fundamentally quantitative machines) to augment literary analysis. Busa's work inspired other avant-garde humanists and a movement was born. For roughly thirty years, humanities scholars experimented with applying quantitative, computer-based methodologies to the study of literary collections. For the most part, these experiments were more advanced versions of Busa's indexing project and progress in this period was often hampered by the slow rate of technological advance.[53] It was not until the 1980s that technology finally caught up to the research ambitions of these early humanities computing scholars.

The proliferation of personal computers, new text-markup languages, and the introduction of the Internet lured humanities computing out of the machine-reading age, and opened up a world of digital possibilities.[54] However, despite these sophisticated new technologies, and the enthusiasm of the academics who

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[49] Osmond and Phillips, 'Introduction,' 6–8.

[50] Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki, 'Introduction,' in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, eds. Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 4–11; Osmond and Phillips, 'Introduction,' 6–8.

[51] Paul Turnbull, 'Historians, Computing and the World-Wide-Web,' *Australian Historical Studies* 41, no. 2 (2010): 131–148.

[52] Shawn Graham, Ian Milligan, and Scott Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscope* (London: Imperial College Press, 2015), 20–21.

[53] Susan Hockey, 'The History of Humanities Computing,' in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, eds. Ray Siemans, Susan Schriebman, and John Unsworth, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 3-19.

[54] Ibid.

championed their use, computer-based analysis failed to establish a foothold within mainstream humanities fields – especially history. Historians were willing to adopt the more practical gifts of the digital age – email, Skype, online journals, and word processors – but remained deeply reticent about allowing computers to do core historical work: interpreting and analysing sources. Historian Paul Turnbull argues that the most salient reason for historians' lack of engagement with humanities computing is a mistrust of the quantitative methodologies that underpin it.[55] Anxiety about history-by-numbers peaked in the 1970s following Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's ambitious *Time on the Cross* project, which used quantitative analysis to re-assess productivity and living conditions under the North American chattel slave trade.[56] Fogel and Engerman were harangued for relying upon numbers to tell a deeply human story, and the resounding criticism of their work 'damaged the fortunes of historical computing.'[57]

The field's discomfort with quantitative analysis was further compounded at the end of the twentieth century, as historians moved toward a greater appreciation of the subjective and interpretive nature of historical narratives [58] This period of epistemological re-invigoration was informed by a number of broader movements, which collectively might be called the 'cultural turn.'[59] Under the cultural turn, historians became 'much more comfortable with the ambiguity, the plurality and subjectivity of "texts," but correspondingly suspicious about the rigidity of numbers.'[60] Historical computing, with its positivist reliance upon numerical analysis, was pushed to the margins, and many scholars left history departments in search of more welcoming environs within sociology or cultural studies.

Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg argue that this divergence is particularly evident in the relationship between historians and archivists. Blouin and Rosenberg have identified what they call the 'archival divide,' which they describe as an epistemic fissure between the ways that historians and archivists see their

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[55] Turnbull, 'Historians, Computing and the World-Wide-Web,' 137.

[56] Peter Kolchin, 'More *Time on the Cross*? An Evaluation of Robert William Fogel's *Without Consent or Contract*,' *Journal of Southern History* 58, no. 3 (1992): 491–493.

[57] Turnbull, 'Historians, Computing and the World-Wide-Web,' 137.

[58] Bob Nicholson, 'The Digital Turn: Exploring the Methodological Possibilities of Digital Newspaper Archives,' *Media History* 19, no. 1 (2013): 61–64.

[59] Daniel A. Nathan, 'Asking a Fish About Water: Three Notes Toward an Understanding of "The Cultural Turn" and Sport History,' *Sporting Traditions* 27, no. 2 (2010): 29–31.

[60] Bob Nicholson, 'Counting Culture; or, How to Read Victorian Newspapers from a Distance,' *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17, no. 2, (2012): 238.

respective roles in constructing understandings of the past.[61] Although the two fields traditionally 'occupied what might be thought of as the same conceptual and methodological space,' there has been a methodological divergence in the digital era.[62] Historians, influenced by the 'various linguistic, cultural, and other "turns,"' moved away from strictly empirical understandings of the past.[63] Archivists, in an attempt to meet the challenges posed by an abundance of sources, embraced increasingly scientific or quantitative 'practices of records management.'[64] This poses important epistemic challenges for digital-era historians. Scholars hoping to uncover dynamic and subjective historical narratives in digital archives may be stymied by their rigid structure and by the quantitative-based techniques needed to search them.

The reluctance of academic historians to engage with quantitative methodologies has created a 'disciplinary divide' between those who deal in narrative and subjectivity, and those who work with computer-based analysis.[65] As Johanna Drucker argues, many historians view the techniques and methods employed by digital humanists as being 'at odds – even hostile to – humanistic values and thought.'[66] Acknowledging and remedying this divergence takes on ever-increasing importance as we move further into the digital age. Historians risk being left behind if we do not adapt our methods to meet the challenges of the digital era, especially those posed by big data. Digital humanities scholar Richard J. Lane notes that referring to historical or humanities source material as 'data' may be jarring for many practitioners.[67] Data or datasets are most often associated with the sciences – historians work with *sources*, or perhaps *collections* at most. Digitisation has changed this, initiating what media historian Jim Mussell describes as a shift from 'document to data.' [68] Massive numbers of historical sources have been digitised and new born-digital material is preserved every second. The digital nature of this material means

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[61] Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authorities in History and the Archives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–12.

[62] Ibid., 6.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] D. Sculley and Bradley M. Pasanek, 'Meaning and Mining: The Impact of Implicit Assumptions in Data Mining for the Humanities,' *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 23, no. 4 (2008): 411.

[66] Johanna Drucker, 'Humanistic Theory and Digital Scholarship,' in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, eds. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 86.

[67] Richard L. Jane, *The Big Humanities: Digital Humanities/Digital Laboratories* (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2017), 108–109.

[68] Jim Mussell, 'Doing and Making: History as Digital Practice,' in *History in the Digital Age,* ed. Toni Weller (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2013), 80.

that texts can be broken up into individual components – individual words or images become pieces of data to be archived, accessed, and analysed. This shift means that historical sources can be treated as complete, substantive documents in their own right and as collections of data.

This opens up possibilities for broad computer-based analyses of large collections of text that were simply not possible with traditional historical techniques. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the discipline's focus upon detail, nuance, and complexity. Busa, the progenitor of digital humanities, states:

> the use of computers in the humanities has as its principal aim the enhancement of the quality, depth, and extension of research and not merely the lessening of human effort and time.[69]

Distant reading enables researchers to survey rapidly and broadly a large body of digital documents. It also reveals patterns and trends that prompt deeper questions about the sources. It does not, however, lend itself to a nuanced analysis of these sources. For these reasons, this thesis uses distant reading in concert with traditional close reading methods, in order to fully capitalise on the hermeneutic advantages of this computer-based methodology.[70] The methodological marriage between distant and close reading ensures that the vast collection of Muhammad Ali newspaper on ProQuest Historical Newspapers is accessed in the context of facilitating a deep and nuanced understanding of individual publications, journalists, and articles.

Bridging the Gap: Distant and Close Reading

Distant reading will be used to visualise the contours of the ProQuest Historical Newspapers collection and to detect trends and patterns in the ways that newspapers nominally referred to the late boxer. Ali's two names, Muhammad Ali and Cassius

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[69] David M. Berry and Anders Fagerjord, *Digital Humanities: Knowledge and Critique in a Digital Age* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017), 6.

[70] Combining distant and close reading has been advocated by a number of historians working with digital sources. See: Frederick W. Gibbs and Trevor J. Owens, 'The Hermeneutics of Data and Historical Writing,' in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, eds. Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013); Steven E. Jones, *The Emergence of the Digital Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 63; Murray G. Phillips, Gary Osmond, and Stephen Townsend, 'A Bird's Eye View of the Past: Digital History, Distant Reading, and Sport History,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1725-1740; Nicholson, 'Counting Culture.'

Clay, are at the core of this process. Using ProQuest's OCR search to find articles containing these names allows me to see when Ali was at his most newsworthy. Graphing the publication date, year by year, of the 37,911 articles that contain these names reveals that Ali was most newsworthy between 1960 and 1975. These search terms also lend themselves to more complex forms of analysis. As historian Louis Moore argues: 'the political transition from Clay to Ali tugged at the moral fabric of America.'[71] The powerful religious, racial, and political associations of the two names were such that their usage (or non usage) by journalists carried significant discursive meaning. Examining the changing frequency with which they appeared in print therefore enables me to detect shifting press attitudes toward Ali between 1960 and 1975.

Distant reading, however, is an inherently quantitative methodology that privileges empirical ways of understanding press attitudes toward Ali. As such, it is only part of the bridge I hope to extend across the disciplinary divide. In order to interrogate and analyse the quantitative patterns and trends revealed by distant reading, this thesis employs more traditional, historical close-reading techniques. Guided by the results of the aforementioned macroanalysis, close reading will be used to interrogate more deeply individual articles and to explore the racial, religious, and political forces that shaped distant reading trends. By combining distant and close reading, this thesis aims to visualise changing press attitudes toward Muhammad Ali between 1960 and 1975, whilst also analysing the racial, religious, and political discourses that precipitated these shifting attitudes. Methodologically, this study shifts from broad to narrow, from distant to close, from quantitative to qualitative.

This same principle also determines the structure of the thesis itself – as it moves from distant reading in Chapter One, to close readings of multiple publications in Chapters Two and Three, and to an even closer reading of an individual publication in Chapter Four. Structurally, this thesis might be visualised as a lens constantly zooming in, moving from a macroscopic discussion of press attitudes toward Ali to increasingly microscopic analyses of the ways these attitudes manifested within individual publications. Chapter One provides a breakdown of distant reading, its application in this study, and the results it yielded. This chapter also provides a

[71] Louis Moore, *We Will Win the Day: The Civil Rights Movement, the Black Athlete, and the Quest for Equality* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2017), 167.

discussion of the racial, religious, and political meanings that underpinned Ali's two names – Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali – and details their central role in this thesis. Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali on 6 March 1964. In doing so, he confirmed his allegiance to the Nation of Islam, a controversial religious sect that advocated black nationalism and racial separatism. By searching 12 newspapers for appearances of Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali, respectively, I was able to produce distant reading graphs (Figures 1 and 2 in Chapter One) that map the usage of each name change. Owing to the powerful cultural meanings associated with each name, these changes are indicative of changing attitudes toward Ali himself.

Chapter One, and the distant reading contained within it, identifies three key turning points in attitudes toward Ali's names and, correspondingly, toward Ali himself. In March 1964, American newspaper journalists comprehensively rejected Ali's chosen name and called him Cassius Clay as a way to protest his allegiance to the Nation of Islam. This practice continued until September 1967, when journalists began to use the two names more interchangeably. In February 1971, newspaper attitudes toward Ali's chosen name completely reversed and he became known, almost exclusively, as Muhammad Ali. This distant reading therefore provides an answer to a long-held question: for how long did American journalists reject Ali's Muslim name? More importantly, however, it also provides this thesis with a framework for analysing the factors that drove dramatic shifts in press attitudes toward Ali in March 1964, September 1967, and March 1971.

Chapters Two and Three use close reading to interrogate, in detail, the reasons behind these shifts. Chapter Two focuses upon the initial rejection of Ali's Muslim name in March 1964 and examines the factors that drove newspapers to maintain this rejection until September 1967. The key finding of this close reading was that journalists at black newspapers rejected Ali's name just as comprehensively as their counterparts at white publications. The inclusion and analysis of black press publications is an important part of this project. A comparison of white and black press attitudes indicates that white newspapers refused to engage seriously with Ali's Muslim name because of the racial, religious, and cultural meanings associated with it. Black newspapers, on the other hand, refused to use Ali's Muslim name because they believed it threatened to undermine the integration movement, and also challenged notions of black, middle-class respectability.

Chapter Three homes in on the factors that precipitated a less negative

perception of Ali's name after September 1967, and also analyses the racial, religious, and political factors that facilitated complete acceptance of the name by journalists in March 1971. Ali's battle against the United States Army Draft Board is a key motif in this chapter. Following nearly a year of speculation regarding his draft eligibility, on 28 April 1967 Ali officially refused to be drafted into the United States Army and, in doing so, became a symbol of opposition to the Vietnam War. Convicted of draft evasion in June that year and, already having been stripped of his boxing titles and licenses, Ali was further encumbered with a five-year prison sentence and a $10,000 fine. Ali spent roughly four years appealing the sentence, during which time he was effectively an exile in his own country. A common narrative thread in the Ali story is that his time in exile allowed the American public to see him as a martyr, which in turn helped to make him a more empathetic and acceptable figure. The close reading conducted in Chapter Three reveals a more complex set of circumstances. Whilst Ali's martyrdom was an important factor in the press acceptance of his name in March 1971, there were also broader geopolitical and racial factors at play. Close reading reveals that the acceptance of Ali's name by American newspaper journalists was also driven by rising disenchantment with the Vietnam War (which helped to vindicate Ali's views on the conflict) and the emergence of militant Black Power ideologies (which made his brand of racial activism seem moderate by comparison).

Chapter 4 tightens the lens further in order to examine how these three attitudinal shifts manifested within a specific publication: the *Louisville Defender*. The *Defender* was not accessed via ProQuest and was instead read on microfilm. The *Defender* was a black newspaper, and the only publication of its kind in Ali's hometown of Louisville, Kentucky. Its role in this thesis is twofold. Firstly, the *Defender* was examined in order to establish whether the same broad attitudinal shifts could be detected without the aid of distant reading. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this publication was analysed in order to provide a far more fine-grain analysis of the geographical, personal, and institutional factors that shaped press attitudes toward Ali. Close reading of the *Defender* reveals that whilst the racial and cultural milieu of Ali's hometown played an important role in shaping press perceptions of him, the national black press discourse exerted an overriding influence. This chapter not only highlights the importance of contextualising newspaper journalism within its geographical and cultural surroundings, but also speaks to the power of the black press publisher's guild, the National Newspaper Publishers

Association and its ability to shape the opinions of affiliates across the country.

This thesis does not claim to be an all-encompassing account of Ali's public life. However, by consulting thirteen newspapers, including black publications, this is the most comprehensive and diverse analysis of press attitudes toward Ali yet conducted. It is also the first study to use Ali's two names as more than metaphorical devices – they are the analytical lynchpins of this study. Furthermore, the use of distant reading and the online ProQuest Historical Newspapers database also positions this thesis firmly within an emerging branch of sport history scholarship that is engaging with the digital era. This thesis stands as an argument that a marriage between traditional historical techniques and digital methodologies is not only feasible, but can produce rich, meaningful and fresh understandings of the past.

Preface to Chapter One

The following chapter – 'Clay vs. Ali: Distant Reading, Methodology, and Sport History' – is the methodological section of the thesis. Chapter One details the methodological and structural foundations of the thesis, and also examines some of epistemological considerations that shaped the project. As outlined in the Introduction, this project employs distant and close readings, in concert with one another, in order to analyse a huge collection of newspaper articles from two different perspectives. This approach is similar to a lens with zoom capability, with distant reading being conducted at the lowest levels of magnification of the lens, and close reading occurring with the lens zoomed in. Chapter One focuses upon distant reading, whilst Chapters Two, Three, and Four are concerned with close reading.

Distant reading reveals broad trends, patterns and themes, which are subsequently analysed more deeply via close readings of individual articles. Chapter One provides a detailed breakdown of distant reading methodology. In particular, this chapter explains the reasoning behind using Ali's two names – Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali – as the basis for this distant reading.

This article was accepted for publication by the *Journal of Sport History* on 28 July 2018. It conforms to the journal's style requirements and is written in accordance with United States spelling and grammar conventions. Unlike in the journal, however, endnotes have been converted to footnotes. Figure 1 and Figure 2 have also been enlarged for improved readability.

Chapter One

Clay vs. Ali: Distant Reading, Methodology, and Sport History

Muhammad Ali's name is one of the most significant, yet understudied, aspects of the great boxer's extraordinary life. Throughout his career, journalists used Ali's birth name (Cassius Clay) and his Islamic name (Muhammad Ali) to transmit their attitudes toward him. This study interrogates trends in newspaper usage of Ali's two names during the 1960s and 1970s as a way to understand changing public attitudes toward him during this period. It does so via a distant reading of 37,911 digitized newspaper articles obtained from ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. By quantitatively visualizing trends and patterns in the usage of the two names, this study reveals that American journalists did not embrace Ali's chosen name until 1971. Acceptance of the name in the press was not gradual, but was instead characterized by intense shifts at key points in Ali's career. Finally, this paper addresses the value of digital history – specifically distant reading – for sport history scholars.*

Keywords: Muhammad Ali, Distant Reading, Race, Digital History

Just two weeks after defeating Sonny Liston in Miami, Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. "shook up the world" once more by changing his name.[1] On March 6, 1964, Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, announced that his most famous convert would henceforth be known as Muhammad Ali.[2] That name, and the meanings that underpinned it, reverberated across the United States. In the days before taking his new name, the young boxer told a room full of reporters: "I don't have to be what you want me to be, I'm free to be who I want."[3] Many Americans were unwilling to grant Ali that freedom. The man they knew as Cassius Clay may have been brash, arrogant, and abrasive, but he was also seemingly immature, and unlikely to threaten the social order. Muhammad Ali was another matter. This new name signified that its owner was an acolyte of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Nation of Islam preached an

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[1] David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero,* (London: Picador, 1998), 213.

[2] "Clay Puts Black Muslim X in His Name." *New York Times*, 7 March, 1964, 15.

[3] Robert Lipsyte, "Cassius Clay, Cassius X, Muhammad Ali," *New York Times*, 25 October, 1964, SM135.

inflammatory doctrine of black nationalism and racial separatism, and came to be regarded by many Americans as a dangerous hate group.[4] As heavyweight champion, Muhammad Ali broadcast these beliefs from a national platform, angering those who advocated more moderate approaches to the country's racial problems. He was righteous, controversial, aggressively autonomous, and his new name symbolized this.

In many accounts of Ali's life, his two names serve important narrative functions. Authors have often used them as allegories for his changing persona, whereby Cassius Clay is said to have evolved into Muhammad Ali both in a personal sense and in the eyes of the American public. Although this is a common theme in the Ali literature, there are competing theories as to when this evolution happened. In *King of the World*, journalist David Remnick suggests that the Muhammad Ali persona may have usurped Cassius Clay in 1965, after his racially charged bout with Floyd Patterson. In the lead-up to their fight, Patterson proclaimed that he would take back the heavyweight crown for moderate Christian values. As a way of broadcasting his adherence to these values, he refused to call Ali by his Muslim name. The final chapter of Remnick's book (aptly titled "What's in a Name?") positions Patterson's refusal to use the Muslim name as an allegory for the broader rejection of Ali's controversial persona. Remnick concludes this chapter by noting that after his defeat, "Patterson paid the champion the highest compliment he could think of. He called him by his proper name [Ali]" – implying that if a staunch moderate like Patterson could embrace Ali's Muslim name, then surely the rest of the country could too.[5] Sportswriter Mike Marqusee positions Ali's 1964 trip to Ghana as a pivotal moment, arguing that afterwards "Cassius Clay was buried and Muhammad Ali superseded him."[6] The recently released *Blood Brothers*, written by sport historians Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith, focuses on Ali's time with Malcolm X in 1964 and 1965, and suggests that "more than anyone else Malcolm molded Cassius Clay into Muhammad Ali."[7] The conclusions reached by these authors indicate a varied, and ultimately conflicted, range of possibilities about when, and under what circumstances, Cassius Clay 'became' Muhammad Ali.

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[4] Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1965,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 1-14.

[5] Remnick, *King of the World*, 283.

[6] Mike Marqusee, "Sport and stereotype: from role model to Muhammad Ali" *Race & Class*, 31.1 (1995), 15.

[7] Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith, *Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship between Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X,* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), xviii.

Identifying changes in Ali's public persona is one thing, but knowing when the American public actually accepted his Muslim name is another matter. One way to clarify this issue is to consult the contemporary press. Cultural historian Michael Oriard argues that archived newspaper articles can provide a window into public attitudes:

> …sports journalism in newspapers and periodicals offers cultural critics perhaps a unique resource: a range of texts that at least bring us close to the varied and changing readings of actual audiences.[8]

Analyzing how Muhammad Ali's two names were used within the pages of American newspapers can "bring us close" to understanding how the public interpreted him throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Like many of their readers, American journalists were uncomfortable with Ali's racial and religious convictions. Ali's new name symbolized his unconventional beliefs, and helped to establish his outsider status. According to Marqusee, "This was a black man signaling by his name change, not a desire to integrate himself with mainstream America, but a comprehensive rejection of it."[9]

Initially, newspapers almost unanimously refused to print the name Muhammad Ali and continued to refer to him as Cassius Clay. Attempts to determine for how long this practice continued are often vague. Journalists are said to have persisted with the rejection of Ali's Islamic name "through the 60s," into "the late sixties," for "many years," or "long after he changed his name."[10]

A variety of factors have stymied more precise analyses of when exactly the American printed press accepted the name Muhammad Ali along with its associated meanings. Part of the problem stems from the magnitude of Ali's cultural presence, and the correspondingly huge range of texts that were written about him at the height of his career. Ali was arguably "the most socially significant athlete in American

[8] Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 17.

[9] Marqusee, "Sport and Stereotype," 14.

[10] Joyce Carol Oates, "The Cruelest Sport," *The New York Review of Books*, February 13, 1992, accessed April 1, 2017, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1992/02/13/the-cruelest-sport/; Marqusee, "Sport and stereotype," 14; Lawrence Allen Aldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War: Civil Rights and Vietnam in the African American Press*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 56. Jack Newfield, "The Meaning of Muhammad," *The Nation,* January 17, 2002, accessed March 17, 2017, https://www.thenation.com/article/meaning-muhammad/.

history" and also one of the twentieth century's most written about figures.[11] Newspapers from across the United States interpreted his every move in diverse ways. This makes press coverage of Ali a fascinating but also challenging area of inquiry – particularly with regards to locating, accessing, and analyzing sources. In order to capture the gamut of newspaper opinions about Ali, historians must wade through a seemingly infinite number of articles from a range of publications. Although historians often work with large bodies of source material, the issue of overabundance is amplified in this case. To date, it has been impossible for scholars to engage with this massive collection in a holistic way. There are, after all, "only so many texts that any scholar could be expected to study."[12]

Digitization offers solutions to this predicament. Large collections of historical newspapers, including many that covered Ali, have now been digitally scanned and placed online. These digital newspaper archives present opportunities for historians to access material that was previously beyond reach. Physical collections that may have occupied entire rooms in far-flung libraries are now available on laptops, phones, and tablets.[13] Although this has made many archived newspapers more accessible, it has also exacerbated issues of overabundance. Online newspaper collections often house a far greater volume of publications than their physical counterparts. Such a surplus of source material is symptomatic of what Digital Humanities scholar David M. Berry calls the "infinite archive" – a new economy of knowledge in which excess rather than scarcity is the new normal.[14] Such huge volumes of material can be overwhelming. It is easy to become "lost in the noise" or drown in a "cacophony of evidence" when working with hundreds, thousands, or even millions of documents.[15] New, computer-based forms of analysis, which are capable of dealing with such a surfeit of sources, can facilitate this task.

Distant reading is one such methodology. It employs quantitative analysis to holistically or "macroscopically" interpret large bodies of literature.[16] Distant reading aims to attain a 'zoomed out' or *distant* vantage point. It does this by assigning

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[11] Newfield, "The Meaning of Muhammad," 26.

[12] Bob Nicholson, "The Digital Turn," *Media History*, 19.1 (2013), 63.

[13] Richard Abel, "The Pleasures and Perils of Big Data in Digitized Newspapers," *Film History: An International Journal*, 25.1-2 (2013), 2.

[14] David M. Berry, "Introduction: Understanding the Digital Humanities" in *Understanding Digital Humanities*, ed. David M. Berry (London: Palgrave MacMillan 2012), 1-20.

[15] Shawn Graham, Ian Milligan, and Scott Weingart, *Exploring Big Historical Data: The Historian's Macroscope*, (London: Imperial College Press, 2016), 3.

[16] Graham, Milligan, and Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscope*, 1-35.

numerical values to discrete units of text and evaluates them via quantitative measures. Words and phrases are replaced by quantitative values, which then become graphs, maps, trees, or tables. These visualizations can then be analyzed or interpreted in order to discover trends, patterns and relationships. There is, however, an inherent trade-off. When texts are transformed into quantitative visualizations they are stripped of their ambiguity and subjectivity, which dramatically reduces their complexity. A graph, map, tree, or table cannot possibly capture the complex interplay of language, inference, semantics, and narrative imbued within a speech, book, poem, letter, or newspaper article. Franco Moretti, the literary scholar who developed and popularized distant reading, acknowledges this sacrifice. He calls it "a little pact with the devil," and notes that disengaging from the intricacies of individual texts can deliver significant hermeneutic benefits.[17] By "selectively reducing complexity," a distant reading makes it possible to identify "once-obscure patterns and relationships" that overlay an entire corpus of texts.[18] This is the purpose of distant reading: to reveal the broad themes that characterize an entire collection, rather than focusing upon individual documents. In other words, distant reading sees the forest, not the trees.

Identifying patterns and relationships in a body of texts is not a new concept. The interpretation of texts has long been a core function of many fields within the humanities. Historians have traditionally done this via close reading, an approach that privileges detail, nuance, and complexity. Not surprisingly, the meticulous and methodical nature of close reading is also highly time-consuming. For example, the 37, 911 texts that comprise this study would take even the most efficient practitioner more than two years to read.[19] A distant reading of the same sources can (theoretically) be conducted in a fraction of this time. This is an exhilarating, but also slightly unnerving, prospect. The perceived immediacy of a quantitative approach like distant reading gives the impression that it is an automated process – one that removes flesh-and-blood historians from the interpretive process. This is a salient concern, particularly as historians are still coming to terms with the epistemic implications of the cultural turn.[20] The cultural turn, along with humanities computing's somewhat

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[17] Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, (London: Verso, 2013), 48.

[18] Graham, Milligan, and Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscope*, 1.

[19] Working 8 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks of the year. This is assuming each article takes an average of 10 minutes to read (barely enough time for even a cursory close-reading, let alone deep analysis).

[20] For further reading on the cultural turn's impact upon the field of history, and sport history specifically, see: Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History* (London: Routledge,

checkered past, has made historians “much more comfortable with the ambiguity, the plurality and subjectivity of ‘texts’, but correspondingly suspicious of about the rigidity of numbers.”[21] Paranoia about history-by-numbers is no doubt partly responsible for the slow uptake of digital methods.[22] Sport historians have been among the most reluctant. Although this methodology has been in use by literary scholars for nearly two decades, it was not until very recently that sport historians began to meaningfully engage with distant reading.[23]

Distant reading’s potential to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances surrounding the acceptance of Ali’s name was demonstrated shortly after his passing in 2016. Victor Mather examined over one thousand articles published in the *New York Times* to argue that Ali did not become the preferred name in that newspaper until August 1970, when the boxer returned to the ring following his Supreme Court victory.[24] While Mather did not disclose his methodology, a subsequent study conducted by Laura Wagner adopted a more explicit distant reading approach by searching the news database *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* for headlines that used “Clay” and “Ali.” Wagner counted headlines from seven newspapers, two of which were black newspapers, from 1960 to 1975. Based on the resulting quantification, Wagner argued that newspapers rejected the name ‘Ali’ for “six years after the boxer introduced himself as Muhammad Ali” and did not abandon the name ‘Clay’ in headlines until 1971.[25]

2005); Murray G. Phillips ed., *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

[21] Bob Nicholson, "Counting Culture; or, How to Read Victorian Newspapers from a Distance," *Journal of Victorian Culture,* 17.2 (2012), 238.

[22] For further information on the history of humanities computing (or digital humanities) see: Paul Turnbull, "Historians, Computing and the World-Wide-Web," *Australian Historical Studies* 41.2, (2010), 137; Susan Hockey, "The History of Humanities Computing," in ed. Ray Siemans, Susan Schriebman, and John Unsworth *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2004), 1-19.

[23] See the summer 2017 issue of the *Journal of Sport History* for examples of pioneering digital sport history research. This special edition contains papers that were presented at the “Doing Sport History in the Digital Present” workshop, which preceded the 2016 North American Society for Sport History (NASSH) conference: Jennifer Sterling, Murray G. Phillips, and Mary McDonald, “Doing Sport History in the Digital Present,” *Journal of Sport History* 44, no. 2 (2017): 135-145. See also: Phillips, M.G., Osmond, G., & Townsend, S. (2015). A Bird’s Eye View of the Past: Digital History, Distant Reading, and Sport History. *The International Journal of the History of Sport, 32*(15), 1725-1740.

[24] Victor Mather, “In the Ring He Was Ali, but in the Newspapers He Was Still Clay,” *New York Times*, June 9, 2016 accessed April 28, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/10/sports/muhammad-ali-name-cassius-clay-newspapers.html?_r=0.

[25] Laura Wagner, “Muhammad Ali Changed His Name in 1964: Newspapers Called him Cassius Clay for six more years,” *Slate,* June 10, 2016, accessed April 28, 2017,

These distant readings of the Ali name change produced compelling findings, and also act as a barometer of the enduring cultural importance of Ali and his name. They also demonstrate distant reading's ability to engender fresh ways of seeing the past. Despite these virtues, Mather and Wagner's analyses are limited in their range of sources, methodological transparency, and depth of analysis. In this article we will also examine newspapers contained in the *ProQuest* dataset, but will expand the number of newspapers to twelve – including a further seven black publications. The main purpose of this new distant reading is not to locate an exact temporal point at which Ali's name was accepted, but rather to provide a more rigorous methodological framework to support a more complete understanding of shifting press attitudes toward him. The reading will include the contents of articles as well as headlines to explore the usage of the names in greater depth. As with Wagner's analysis, the timeframe is 1960 to 1975, bracketed by Ali's rise to national prominence following the Rome Summer Olympic Games and his career apogee 'Thrilla in Manilla'.

To illustrate the requirement of all historians to make multiple methodological, interpretive, and rhetorical decisions during any project, digital or otherwise, and to temper the valid concerns about distant reading discussed above, we outline and explain the decisions that were made throughout this project. First among these was the decision to place Ali's two names at the core of this investigation. Perhaps more than any other athlete, Ali's names are inextricably linked to his cultural significance. The changing ways the press referred to Ali throughout the 1960s and 1970s reveal insights into race relations in the USA, the civil rights and black power movements, twentieth-century press discourses, and the cultural power of names. Alongside analyzing the cultural power of Ali's two names, we will also outline decisions made in regards to the scope of analysis, and the aesthetic, hermeneutic, and rhetorical dimensions of quantitatively representing the Clay/Ali phenomenon.

The Power of Names

Many athletes and entertainers before Muhammad Ali adopted new names, often to make themselves more relatable or more exciting to audiences. Ali was one of the first major black public figures to change his name for religious or ideological

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http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/sports_nut/2016/06/muhammad_ali_changed_his_name_in_1964_newspapers_called_him_cassius_clay.html.

reasons. Others, most notably Amiri Baraka and Kareem Adbul-Jabbar, would follow his lead. Ali's name change was more significant than most because of his fame, and because both his birth name and his Islamic name were laden with deep cultural meanings.[26] The way the American press used these names illuminates the complex array of racial and religious discourses imbued within them. By renaming himself, Ali committed two intrinsically related yet distinct acts. By rejecting his birth name, he sought to shed the vestiges of white subjugation tied to his family name. Concomitantly, by taking the name Muhammad Ali he strengthened his ties to Elijah Muhammad, and affirmed his adherence to the Nation of Islam's controversial doctrine. The act of re-naming was a key part of the Nation's program for reclaiming the lost black identity of converts. Elijah Muhammad's followers were told that their birth names were a genealogical encumbrance from their enslaved ancestors, whose original African names had been replaced by those of their owners. Converts were expected to exorcize those roots by discarding their 'slave names':

> Those who became part of the Nation did so by rejecting Black identity as constructed through White power; the rejection of slave names like Jones, Williams or Pinn was a symbol of this move.[27]

The Nation of Islam asked its followers to reimagine their blackness as strength, part of which involved shedding reminders of their historical subservience to white slaveowners. The idea of symbolically casting off shackles by changing one's name was incredibly potent. However, the concept of 'slave names,' particularly in Ali's case, was fraught with complexities. Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr., like his father before

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[26] Ali's name change was primarily driven by the specific conditions of his relationship with the Nation of Islam. However, it was also part of a broader social shift in African American naming practices. Despite being relatively similar throughout the first half of the twentieth century, popular names for black and white Americans began to diverge from one another during the 1960s and 1970s. The civil rights movement and the black power era prompted African Americans to display their racial pride by adopting uniquely black names. These names were often inspired by African or Islamic naming conventions, and reflected the rise of Pan-Africanism and Afro-centrism during the 1960s and 1970s. For further reading see: Stanley Lieberson and Kelly S. Mikelson, "Distinctive African American Names: An Experimental, Historical, and Linguistic Analysis of Innovation," *American Sociological Review*, 60. 6 (1995), 928-946; Roland G. Fryer Jr. and Steven D. Levitt, "The Causes and Consequences of Distinctively Black Names," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 119.3 (2004), 767-805.

[27] Anthony B. Pinn, *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 111.

him, was named in honor of a white Kentucky statesman.[28] This original Cassius Marcellus Clay was a politician, decorated Union soldier and, most importantly, an abolitionist. The Clays' paternal name celebrated the anti-slavery exploits of their nineteenth century namesake. Throughout his early years in the spotlight, young Cassius appeared very pleased with the classical poetry of his birth name.[29] However, the boxer adopted a far more critical attitude once he began to learn the Nation of Islam's version of black history. The newly awoken Clay came to understand that the "snappy alliteration" of his birth name hid a murky origin story.[30] When asked about his unusual name, Clay told journalists that in spite of Cassius Marcellus Clay's abolitionist credentials, a member of the Clay family had actually owned his ancestors:

> Cassius Marcellus Clay. He was a Kentucky White man, who owned my great-great-granddaddy and named my great-granddaddy after him. And then my granddaddy got named, and then my daddy, and then me.[31]

There was also a family rumor that the famed Henry Clay, a three-time Presidential candidate and Secretary of State under John Quincy Adams, may have been Ali's paternal ancestor. [32] Most of the evidence to support these claims is inferential at best.[33] All attempts to genealogically trace Ali's roots back to the famous Kentucky Clays have failed: "the gap between the white Clay family of the 19th Century and Muhammad Ali's father – a gap of at least two generations – was never bridged."[34] For Ali, however, the symbolism was powerful.

Links to the nineteenth-century Kentucky Clays lend a fascinating duality to Ali's birth name, as it celebrated the abolition movement in one sense whilst simultaneously reminding Cassius of his forebears' enslavement. Linguistics and

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[28] Remnick, *King of the World*, 82-83.

[29] Whilst in Rome for the 1960 Olympics, Clay remarked to reporters that he had a "beautiful name" that reminded him of "the Coliseum and those Roman gladiators." See: Matthew Schneider, "'What's My Name?' Toward a Generative Anthroponomastics," *Anthropoetics - The Journal of Generative Anthropology,* 15.1 (2009), accessed June 5, 2015, http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1501/1501schneider/; Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times,* 102.

[30] Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War*, 55-56; Schneider, "'What's My Name?'"

[31] Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, (London: Pan Books, 1997), 91.

[32] John Egerton, "Heritage of a Heavyweight," *New York Times,* September 28, 1980, accessed June 5, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/books/98/10/25/specials/ali-heritage.html.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

literary scholar Matthew Schneider argues that Clay Sr. was more than likely aware of the name's complex meaning. He passed down the paternal Clay name to his son:

> presumably in the same spirit in which it had been bestowed on him: as an assertion of racial pride and as a repudiation of the family's slave roots. The name that Ali rejected was therefore already a post-slavery name, meant to grant its bearer the kind of genuine identity that the Nation of Islam promised…[35]

If Clay was indeed cognizant of this implicit complexity, he did not acknowledge it publicly. Instead, he echoed Elijah Muhammad, who insisted that his birth name must be discarded "because it was his father's name, and therefore provided him with the genealogical connection to the slavery which past generations of his family endured."[36]

In its place, Clay was given a new name that more accurately reflected his changing racial and religious identity. For a few days after his official 'conversion', Clay briefly became known as Cassius X, or Cassius X Clay. The 'X' was a placeholder, designed to mournfully symbolize the loss of Clay's ancestral African name until he was deemed worthy of a full Islamic name.[37] Only the most esteemed members of the sect were granted full Muslim names. Even Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam's most recognizable preacher, retained his provisional name until the end of his relationship with Elijah Muhammad.[38] However, Elijah Muhammad recognized that fame could be an important asset, and bestowed a new name upon Clay in order to assure his allegiance.[39] Cassius X was quickly renamed Muhammad Ali –

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[35] Schneider, "What's my Name?" 1; Sid Ziff of the *Los Angeles Times* was one of the only journalists to explicitly interrogate the meanings behind Ali's birth name. Ziff (who was one of Ali's most consistent critics) argued in a 1967 editorial that Ali's name change was the act of a hypocrite, and that he should be "honored to bear the name" of an abolitionist. See: Sid Ziff, "Slave Name?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1967, B3.

[36] Janet Finch, "Naming Names: Kinship, Individuality and Personal Names," *Sociology,* 42 (2008), 713.

[37] Susan Benson, "Injurious Names: Naming, Disavowal, and Recuperation in Contexts of Slavery and Emancipation" in *The Anthropology of Names and Naming*, eds. Barbara Bodenhorn and Gabriele vom Bruck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 179-182.

[38] Malcolm Little (officially) became Malcolm X in 1952, and later adopted the name el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz when he embraced mainstream Sunni Islam following his split from the Nation of Islam. See: James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 53.

[39] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers*, 214-220.

Muhammad meaning “worthy of all praise,” and Ali meaning “most high”.[40] The new moniker pleased Ali. It was fitting too – he was, after all, ‘The Greatest’. However, the name’s literal translation was not nearly as powerful as the meanings that the American press and public ascribed to it.

To many Americans, unaware of the complex history of the Clay surname, Muhammad Ali’s new name symbolized his devotion to the strange and inflammatory teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Like all religions, the Nation of Islam’s theology is complex. Unlike Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, or mainstream Islam, however, the Nation’s teachings were explicitly racial. Elijah Muhammad, and Wallace Fard before him, taught their followers that, “God was a Black man and that ancient Black civilization was the original site of divine culture.”[41] The original man, being made in God’s image, was therefore black. Furthermore, the black man was intrinsically strong, virtuous, and holy, but had been tricked into slavery and deprivation by white devils. The sect’s theology promoted distrust of white Americans, which in turn, fueled black nationalist sentiment.[42] Many of the Nation’s sermons revolved around the need for black Americans to have their own nation and an autonomous government.[43] The doctrine also incorporated elements of cosmology and science fiction. Black Muslim preachers prophesized that 6000 years of white rule were coming to end, and that the devotion of Muslims would summon a spaceship whose lasers would bring about the annihilation of the white race.[44] The Nation of Islam wove race, religion, and fantasy into an alluring narrative for its followers, who were recruited from among the poorest and most disenfranchised sections of black America.[45] Converts were told they were strong, beautiful, and divine, not in spite of their black skin, but *because* of it.[46] What’s more, Elijah Muhammad told the faithful that devotion to the sect would allow them to assume their predestined place at the top

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[40] Gerald Early ed., *I’m a Little Special: A Muhammad Ali Reader*, (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 1998), 146.

[41] Maureen Smith, "*Muhammad Speaks* and Muhammad Ali: Intersections of the Nation of Islam and Sport in the 1960s," *International Sports Studies,* 21.1 (2001), 54.

[42] Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America*, 11-17.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers*, 18-19.

[45] See: Zoe Colley, “‘All America Is A Prison’: The Nation of Islam and the Politicization of African American Prisoners, 1955-1965,” *Journal of American Studies,* 48.2 (2014), 393-415; Mark S. Hamm, *The Spectacular Few: Prisoner Radicalization and the Evolving Terrorist Threat*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 19-34.

[46] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers,* 107.

of America's racial hierarchy. The act of renaming was an important part of buying into this shift in self-perception.

Ali's name change had personal significance as well as meaning within the Nation of Islam. However, the act also had broader cultural ramifications. As ethnicity researcher Daniel Nakashima argues:

> …each person's name is a construction of meanings that are relevant for that person and for others…what one calls oneself, personally as well as ethnically, is thus a site of political struggle, where conventional racial classifications can be transgressed, accepted, or ignored.[47]

When Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. changed his name to Muhammad Ali he sent signals to the world about how he wished to be seen, and the terms by which his identity might be interpreted. Ali's new name – conceived in the maelstrom of the civil rights era and enmeshed as it was with the Nation of Islam's black-nationalist doctrine – was inevitably interpreted on racial terms. The name Muhammad Ali thus became a site of struggle, where conflicts between competing visions for the future of black America were played out. This struggle was particularly visible in the pages of American newspapers throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Reading Ali by the Numbers

In order to read the Clay/Ali struggle from a distance, we consulted *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, an online, subscription-based archive of mainly American publications. The authors accessed this archive via an institutional subscription, which includes 13 American newspapers. We selected twelve of these for analysis – the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* and nine Black Press publications: the *Atlanta Daily World*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *Cleveland Call and Post*, *Chicago Defender*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, and *Pittsburgh Courier*.[48] The inclusion of black newspapers in this collection is of particular value. The Black Press "articulat[ed] the social and political aspirations of African Americans in their own

[47] Daniel Nakashima, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Names, Multiracial/Multiethnic People, and the Politics of Identity" in *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed Heritage Asian Americans,* eds. Theresa Williams-León and Cynthia L. Nakashima, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 113.

[48] The *Wall Street Journal* was excluded because it did not cover sport during the 1960s and 70s.

words [and] reveal a point of view not often communicated by the mainstream press."[49] It should be noted that the Black Press was not monolithic – a range of cultural and institutional nuances influenced each publication. These publications did, however, exhibit a sense of discursive unity on many key racial issues. As a result, this article often refers to the Black Press in a collective sense. The inclusion of this understudied branch of journalism, along with sources from the more widely known white press, is an opportunity to build a more complete understanding of Ali's representation in American newspapers

The following section outlines the choices made to distant read Ali's two names through *ProQuest Historical Newspapers.* They are described here in a step-by-step fashion. In reality, however, distant reading is a non-linear process. Like a traditional history project, distant reading requires constant toggling between different avenues of enquiry and demands a measure of experimentation and flexibility.[50] The first step was to establish the chronological parameters for the project.[51] This was done via a preliminary distant reading of Ali's newsworthiness across his lifetime. The search techniques and data-gathering processes used in this initial investigation formed the basis for later distant readings. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers* has an inbuilt search function, which uses optical character recognition (OCR) software to locate specific words or phrases within articles. The reliability of OCR is often a bugbear for distant reading scholars – the software can be 'fooled' by poorly scanned documents or may find unrelated words and phrases that look similar to those requested[52] – however *ProQuest* is often regarded as the "gold standard of historical

[49] Carmelita Pickett, "African American Newspapers, 1827-1998," *Reference Reviews*, 26.3 (2012), 51-52.

[50] Jefferson Bailey, and Lily Pregill, "Speak to the Eyes: The History and Practice of Information Visualization," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 33.2 (2014), 185.

[51] In reality, this 'preliminary' distant reading was conducted somewhere near the middle of the project, after a number of tangential or dead-end investigations had taken place.

[52] OCR technology looks for the shape, or outline of words. For further reading on OCR issues in digital archives see: Gary Osmond, "'Pink Tea and Sissy Boys': Digitized Fragments of Male Homosexuality, Non-Heteronormativity and Homophobia in the Australian Sporting Press, 1845-1954," *The International Journal of the History of Sport,* 32.13 (2015), 1583; Abel, "The Pleasures and Perils of Big Data," 9.

database searching."[53] The site claims that its OCR software is near perfect, through a combination of high-quality scans and manual 'clean-up' of articles by editors.[54]

Setting up an OCR search in *ProQuest* is most effectively done via the 'advanced search' options, which allows specific parameters to be set and adjusted according to one's needs. One of the advanced search's most important features is the ability to search for multiple terms simultaneously.[55] This preliminary search looked for articles and headlines containing "Muhammad Ali" and/or "Cassius Clay" between January 1, 1942 (the year of Ali's birth) and December 31, 2013 (the limit of available titles) within the twelve aforementioned publications. Once these parameters were established, the search took a matter of seconds. A results page then appeared, which contained PDF copies of the 37,911 articles that contained "Muhammad Ali" and/or "Cassius Clay," and displayed the frequency of results per day, week, month, year, and decade.[56] These values were transcribed and transferred into a *Microsoft Excel* spread sheet. From here, the data could be tabulated, re-arranged, and transformed into a line graph.

This line graph tracked the number of articles that contained either name, year by year, revealing that the press covered Ali most intensely between 1960 and 1975. This is not surprising. Ali came to national prominence after winning a gold medal in the light heavyweight division at the Rome Olympics. His rise to fame as a professional fighter, and his most controversial social actions, occurred throughout the 1960s. His most famous bouts, the 'Fight of the Century,' the 'Rumble in the Jungle,' and the 'Thrilla in Manila,' all came in the first half of the 1970s, with the latter fought on October 1, 1975. The years between 1960 and 1975 were when Ali was most active as both a fighter and an activist.

The results of this preliminary investigation guided a more distant reading. The date range was narrowed to January 1, 1960 and December 31, 1975, and

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[53] Barry Popik, "Digital Historical Newspapers: A Review of Powerful New Research Tools," *Journal of English Linguistics*, 32.114 (2004) 117.

[54] *ProQuest* claims its OCR software is 99.95% accurate. See: "ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Centuries of Discovery Online" (pamphlet) accessed April 12, 2017, http://media2.proquest.com/documents/Historical+Newspaper+Brochure.pdf.

[55] The "advanced search" also has the facility to link words or phrases within a search. For example, it is possible to search for articles containing "Cassius Clay" and/or/not "Muhammad Ali." These searches were used to supplement the primary distant readings in this paper.

[56] The specificity of the search terms was highly beneficial. Searching for full names was a key part of ensuring the relevance of search results. "Clay" or "Ali" are relatively common words, and could have been used by journalists in a variety of different contexts. Conversely, during the 1960s and 1970s "Muhammad Ali" or "Cassius Clay" could only have been used in reference to the man in question.

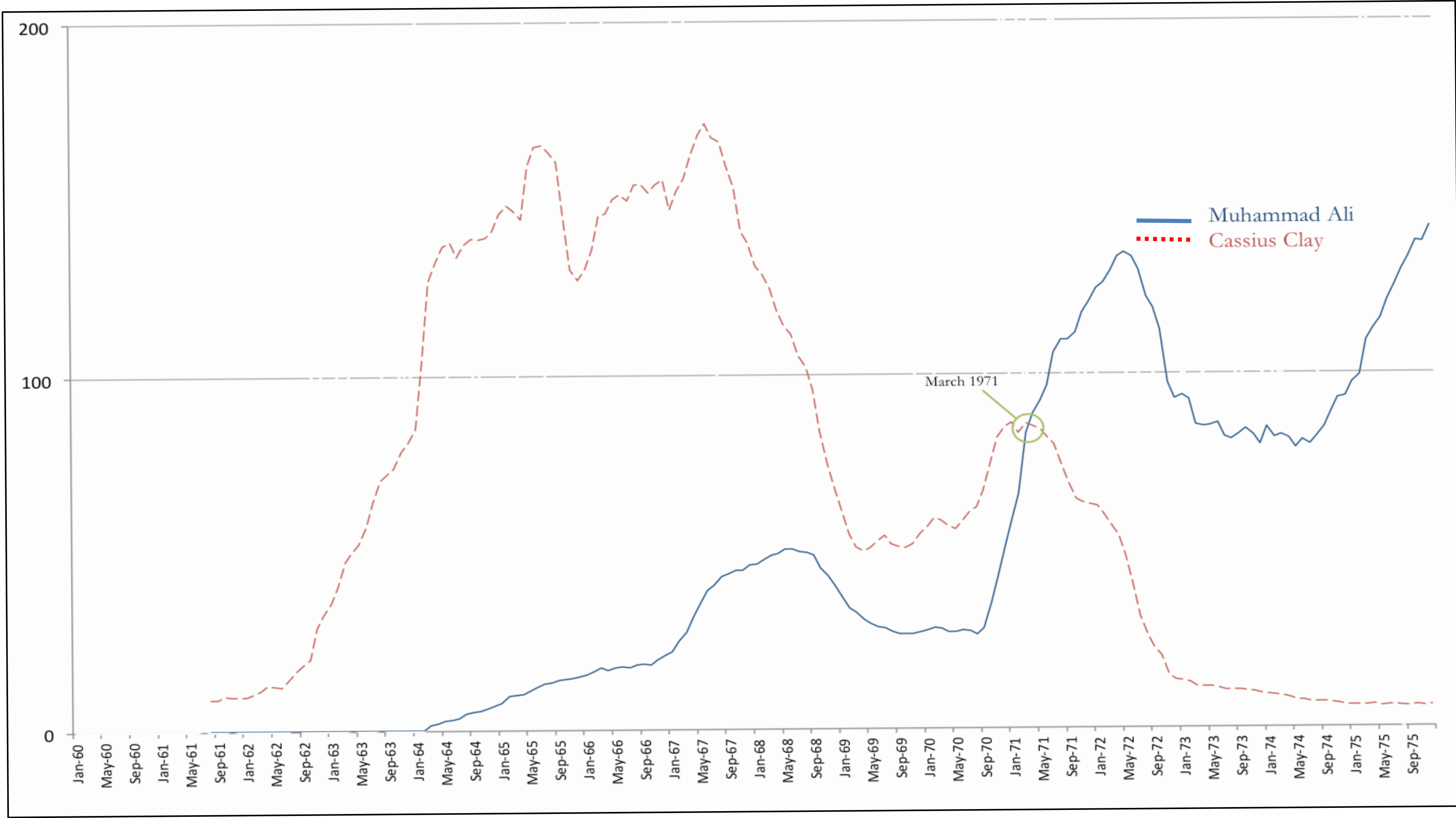
separate searches were conducted for each name in order to facilitate a comparative analysis. We then counted the number of articles containing “Muhammad Ali” for each month, and repeated the process for “Cassius Clay.” In total, 191 monthly values were collected for each name. These values were then tabulated, and transformed into another line graph, which compared the frequency of articles containing “Muhammad Ali” against the frequency of articles containing “Cassius Clay” over a 15-year period. In order to produce a simpler, neater, and more digestible graph, we applied moving-average-trend-lines, which smoothed the data lines of each graph.[57]

Figure 1 shows the progression of journalists’ usage of Ali’s two names. The most immediately noticeable feature of this graph is the moment in March 1971 when “Muhammad Ali” triumphed over “Cassius Clay.” This confirms previous authors’ conclusions about when journalists embraced the name Muhammad Ali – lending further credence to the long-held belief that the name Cassius Clay did indeed persist “through the 60s” and “long after he changed his name.”[58] It also amplifies Wagner’s findings by pointing to a specific month in 1971. Distant reading makes it possible to put a concrete timeframe on journalists’ rejection of Ali’s chosen name: seven years.

[57] A moving-average-trend-line averages the values between a pre-determined number of intervals. This has the effect of *smoothing* the datasets it is applied to, and can help to clarify trends or patterns in a graph.

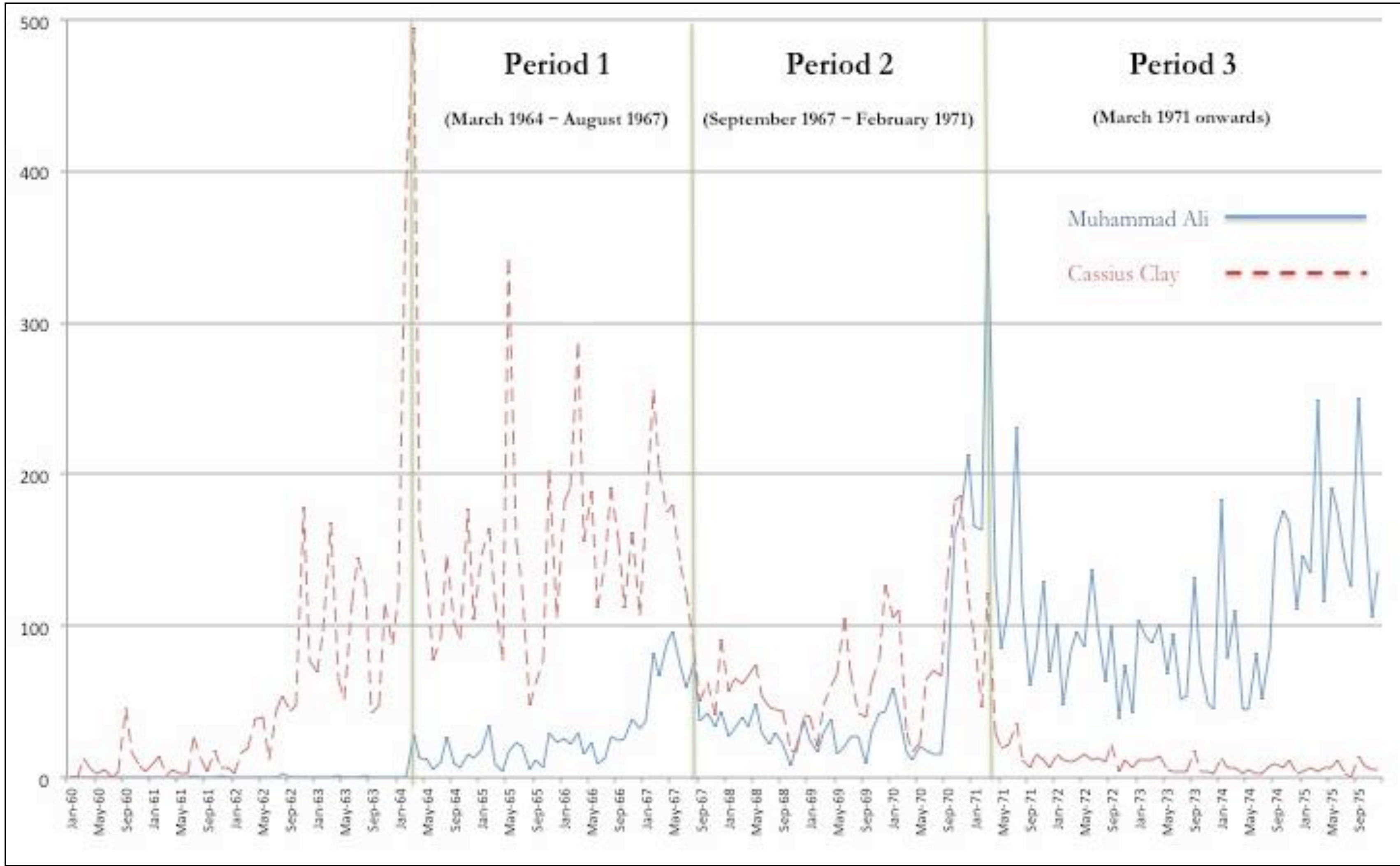
[58] Oates, “The Cruelest Sport”; Newfield, “The Meaning of Muhammad.”

Figure 1: Number of articles containing “Muhammad Ali” vs. “Cassius Clay” (moving-average-trend-line): 1960 - 1975



The crossover point in March 1971 is the most immediately obvious feature of this graph. Whilst this is a meaningful discovery, like Wagner's distant reading, this smoothed graph lacks the detail required for a deeper analysis of the years before and after journalists accepted Ali's Islamic name. A more granular visualization is needed. By removing the moving-average-trend-lines, and restoring the original 'raw' data-lines, Figure 2 presents a more chaotic, but richer representation of Ali's press coverage.

Figure 2 – Number of articles containing “Muhammad Ali” vs. “Cassius Clay” (totals): 1960 – 1975.



Where Figure 1 foregrounds a single moment of transition in March 1971, the more detailed visualization in Figure 2 is better able to communicate the multiple patterns and trends that developed in the lead-up to the ascendance of "Muhammad Ali." Specifically, Figure 2 indicates that the usage of Ali's two names was characterized by a number of dramatic shifts. Before analyzing what these shifts might mean, it is prudent to consider how both Figures 1 and 2 communicate messages about the past.

Distant reading visualizations have two main purposes: as exploratory tools, and as communicative devices.[59] In their exploratory capacity, this study's distant readings prompted questions about newspaper discourse on Ali, which led to further analysis, and eventually the writing of this article. By virtue of their appearance in this article, these graphs are fulfilling their second purpose. Visualizations communicate complex narratives in a "single moment."[60] This lends them significant rhetorical power.[61] The graphs that appear in this article have been designed "based upon what [we] want [our] audience to learn."[62] In the same way that writers manipulate language, syntax, and punctuation to persuade readers, graphs can also be made more convincing via aesthetic alterations.[63] This notion is at odds with scientific understandings of data visualizations as neutral and unbiased representations of fact.[64] In reality, visualizations are cultural constructions, which can be shaped via a multilayered process of hermeneutic and rhetorical choices.[65] Acknowledging the constructed nature of data visualizations is a vital step toward graphs, maps, and trees gaining acceptance amongst the humanist traditions of subjectivity, reflexivity, and ambiguity. It is therefore important to consider the choices made whilst designing Figures 1 and 2.

Figures 1 and 2 take the form of line graphs because these types of visualizations most effectively communicate relationships between frequency and

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[59] Graham, Milligan, and Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscope*, 164.

[60] Graham, Milligan, and Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscope*, 159-165.

[61] Luc Pauwels, "An Integrated Conceptual Framework for Visual Social Research" in *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*, eds. Eric Margolis and Luc Pauwels (London: Sage Publishing, 2011), 18-19.

[62] Graham, Milligan, and Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscope*, 182.

[63] Lisa Otty and Tara Thomson, "Data Visualization and the Humanities" in *Research Methods for Creating and Curating Data in the Digital Humanities*," eds. Matt Hayler and Gabriele Griffin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 116.

[64] "Data Visualization and the Humanities," 117.

[65] "Data Visualization and the Humanities," 118.

time.[66] Rhetorical factors also shaped the graphs in less obvious ways. In both visualizations the datasets for "Muhammad Ali" have been plotted against one another, as opposed to having one graph for each name. This may seem like an obvious choice, but it is one that is shaped by rhetorical thinking. Including both datasets on a single graph immediately prompts the viewer to assume that "the data points are somehow related to each other," thus demanding a comparative interpretation.[67] The relative smoothness and roughness of Figures 1 and 2, respectively, also has a persuasive purpose. In the case of Figure 1, the smoother moving-average-trend-line invites the viewer to focus upon the only point at which the Muhammad Ali and Cassius Clay lines cross one another: March 1971. By comparison, Figure 2 is far messier. Both lines are constantly in close proximity to one another, which makes the March 1971 crossover less prominent. However, this allows the reader to see multiple patterns and relationships at various points along the graph.

Figure 2 indicates that journalists' usage of Ali's two names shifted dramatically in March 1964, August 1967, and March 1971. These shifts also form the borders of three distinct periods. Although the lines spike and dip within these periods, distinct trends are visible – especially regarding the relative usage of each name. These periods, and the transition points between them, have been emphasized with the addition of vertical lines – another rhetorical design feature. From March 1964 to August 1967, journalists overwhelmingly referred to Ali as Clay (84% of articles). From September 1967 to February 1971 the two names were used far more interchangeably, although "Cassius Clay" (59%) was still used more frequently than "Muhammad Ali" (41%). March 1971 saw another shift in journalists' usage of Ali's names. In this third period, newspapers almost completely reversed their long-held practice of referring to Ali by his birth name. From March 1971 onwards, journalists overwhelmingly preferred to call him "Muhammad Ali" (89%) rather than "Cassius Clay" (11%).

Potential catalysts for these shifts become apparent when we overlay the distant reading with knowledge of Ali's life during the 1960s and 1970s. Importantly, the transition points between these periods correspond almost perfectly with key moments in Ali's career. On March 6, 1964, Cassius Clay publically announced that

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[66] Graham, Milligan, and Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscope*, 171–172.
[67] Graham, Milligan, and Weingart, *The Historian's Macroscope*, 169.

he had taken the name Muhammad Ali. Journalists initially rejected the name for a host of reasons, but mostly because of its links to the Nation of Islam. In August 1967, newspapers began to use both names more interchangeably. A likely catalyst for this shift was Ali's battle with the Army's Selective Service, which culminated in his conviction for draft evasion in June 1967. Throughout this period, Ali was steadfast in his refusal to serve, and many Americans came to respect his courage in standing up to the government and opposing the increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam. While many journalists were still uncomfortable with the Islamic name, it is likely that increasing public sympathy for Ali made them less willing to openly insult him by using his 'slave name.' It was not until March 1971 that Muhammad Ali overwhelmingly superseded Cassius Clay in journalistic parlance – nearly seven years after he changed his name. This shift was bookended by Ali's return to the ring in October 1970, and the quashing of his draft evasion conviction by the Supreme Court in June 1971.

Sharpening the Focus

The correlation between these distant reading trends and events in Ali's life is revealing. Firstly, it is now possible to be much more specific about when a cross section of significant press outlets in America adopted the name Muhammad Ali: March 1971. Secondly, it is clear that American journalists did not come to accept Ali's Islamic name, or the identity it represented, in a gradual way. Instead, opinions of Ali in the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by distinct periods that were separated by sharp attitudinal shifts.

These discoveries are certainly valuable, but they generate more questions than they answer. For all its virtues, distant reading remains a "blunt tool to study a complex subject."[68] Data visualization can tell us when journalists shifted from one name to the other, but cannot reveal why. This realization does not devalue the methodology. Instead, it helps to clarify distant reading's value to historians. Rather than delivering ready-made answers about the past, one of the defining features of distant reading is that it "bring[s] us up short," or disturbs our preconceptions about a

[68] Cameron Blevins, "Space, Nation and the Triumph of Region: A View of the World from Houston," *Journal of American History,* 101.1 (2014), 126.

familiar topic.[69] Such a disturbance can provoke new questions or suggest innovative lines of enquiry that can then be interrogated by more traditional methods.

In this case, the periods and transition points identified by distant reading prompt a number of fresh and important questions about newspaper attitudes toward Ali. What were the differences between the ways black and white journalists wrote about Ali? Did black and white journalists ascribe different meanings to Ali's two names, and were there differences *within* the black and white presses?[70] How did the press, particularly the Black Press, respond to Ali's criticism of the integration movement? What effect did the religious affiliations of newspapers have upon editorial opinions of Ali's non-Christian name? What language did the "crusty, cigar-chomping crowd of old school reporters" at major newspapers use to describe Ali?[71] Did dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War, and Ali's 1967 stand against the draft, affect usage of his 'slave name'? How did journalists perceive Ali's relationship with the burgeoning black power movement of the late 1960s? What events, or combination of events, in 1971 influenced acceptance of Ali's Islamic name: his comeback fight against Joe Frazier in March, and/or his Supreme Court acquittal in June? These questions, born out of distant reading, add new layers of inquiry to the Ali story.

In addition to the immediate benefits of seeing Ali in alternative ways, it is hoped that this distant reading encourages sport historians to engage more readily with digital methodologies. As Digital Humanities scholar Ted Underwood argues, "distant reading is better understood as part of a broad intellectual shift that has also been transforming the social sciences."[72] As noted above, historians, and especially

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[69] D. Sculley, and Bradley M. Pasanek, "Meaning and Mining: The Impact of Implicit Assumptions in Data Mining for the Humanities," *Literary and Linguistic Computing,* 23.4 (2008), 423.

[70] This is arguably the most pressing question to arise from this study. Supplementary distant readings showed no significant quantitative differences between the way black and white newspapers used Ali's names between 1960 and 1975. However, existing literature on the Black Press suggests that there are deeper nuances to be investigated. Black newspapers approached racial issues from a middle class, integrationist platform, and this would have had a marked influence on their opinions of Ali. For further reading see: Stephen Townsend, "From 'Pitifully Ignorant' to the 'People's Champion': Shifting Perceptions of Muhammad Ali in the *Louisville Defender*, 1964-1971," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 115, no. 4 (2017): 611-43; Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006) 196; Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage During National Crises with Special Reference to Four Newspapers, 1827-1965*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998) 118.

[71] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers*, 224.

[72] Ted Underwood, "Distant Reading and Recent Intellectual History" in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016,* eds. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2016), 530-533.

sport historians, have been less receptive to this intellectual shift than our contemporaries in other areas of the humanities.[73] The burgeoning field of Digital Humanities has spawned a growing number of innovative projects. These may incorporate programs capable of analyzing nuanced semantic relationships within important texts, network analyses that reveal connections between key historical figures or amongst social media users, 3D models that can recreate historical artifacts, virtual reality experiences, or geographical information systems (GIS) programs that weave place and space into stories about the past.[74] Many of these studies require advanced computer programs and highly developed technical skills. This distant reading of Muhammad Ali was not intended to replicate the technological sophistication or skillset of these projects. However, it represents a step toward the digital future of sport history. The findings of this project indicate that even a relatively simple foray into the realm of quantitative analysis can produce meaningful results. This distant reading of Muhammad Ali thus serves multiple purposes: it is an opportunity to ask new questions about one of the most important figures in sport history; it is an example of the benefits to be gained from working with digital sources; and it is part of an emerging branch of sport history scholarship that is engaging with the digital world.

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[73] Sport historians have shown a growing interest in digital methods as demonstrated by: Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips (eds.), *Sport History in the Digital Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015) and the addition of a special workshop on digital scholarship to the 44th annual convention of the North American Society for Sport History in 2016: Jennifer Sterling, Murray G. Phillips, and Mary G. McDonald, "Doing History in the Digital Present", *Journal of Sport History (special issue)*, 42.2 (2017).

[74] For a fuller explanation of current trends in the Digital Humanities see: Matthew K. Gold, and Lauren F. Klein, *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

Preface to Chapter Two

Chapter Two uses close reading to analyse newspaper attitudes toward Ali between the first two turning points identified by distant reading: March 1964 and September 1967. The chapter focuses upon the rejection of Ali's name and identity following his announcement in March 1964 that he had joined the Nation of Islam. This close reading is concerned primarily with the different factors that drove journalists from black and white publications to reject Ali's name. Distant reading indicates that black newspapers rejected Ali's name and its associated identity almost as comprehensively as white publications. Distant reading does not, however, explain why black and white newspapers were so unwilling to use Ali's Muslim name. This close reading reveals that although black and white newspapers rejected the name at roughly the same rate, their reasons for doing so were markedly different. This chapter also foreshadows some of the factors that led to the second shift in September 1967, but leaves the bulk of that analysis for Chapter Three.

This chapter frames its analysis within questions about the overly simplistic nature of Ali's social memory. It extends some of the issues raised in the Introduction, and argues that current memories of Ali (especially in the aftermath of his death in 2016) eschew the divisive effect he had upon the black community during between March 1964 and September 1967. Although this chapter primarily uses close reading analysis to reveal the nuances in black and white attitudes toward Ali, it also includes a brief explanation of the distant reading processes that guided this close reading. This chapter reinforces the utility of combined distant and close reading methodologies as ways for historians to challenge entrenched social memories of well-known people and events.

This article was published by *Sport in History* in May 2018. It conforms to the journal's style requirements and is written in accordance with British spelling and grammar conventions. Unlike the journal, however, endnotes have been converted to footnotes. Figure 1 and Figure 2 have also been enlarged for improved readability.

Chapter Two

Remembering the Rejection of Muhammad Ali: Identity, Civil Rights, and Social Memory

When Muhammad Ali died in June 2016, he was remembered by the media as a hero in the fight for racial equality. Tributes for the great boxer were meaningful in many respects, but they were also incomplete, sanitised, and misleading. This paper aims to re-complicate our understanding of Ali's portrayals in the media by analysing newspaper discourse in the years immediately following his conversion to the Nation of Islam. Specifically, this investigation compares and contrasts the complex ways that black and white journalists used both his birth name (Cassius Clay) and his adopted name (Muhammad Ali) as a way of signalling their attitudes toward him. Close reading of newspaper articles published between March 1964 and September 1967 reveals that black journalists rejected Ali's adopted name and identity almost as comprehensively as their white colleagues. This aspect of Ali's legacy has been largely forgotten by the contemporary media, which calls us to consider the cultural construction of social memory, particularly when it revolves around sporting icons.

Keywords: Muhammad Ali, Memory, Newspapers, Black Press, Close Reading.

The death of boxer Muhammad Ali on 3 June 2016 triggered a remarkable 'outpouring of adulation and sadness' from media outlets across the globe.[1] Despite falling within a year punctuated by major celebrity deaths and political upheaval, Ali's passing was one of the most significant news stories in 2016. Throughout the world, but in the United States particularly, remembrances and obituaries of Ali portrayed him as an almost saintly figure. He was, according to the *Washington Post*, 'beautiful, controversial, transcendent,' whilst the *New York Times* called him 'The Champion Who Never Sold Out',[2] the *Chicago Defender* crowned him the

[1] Daniel Ashton, 'Muhammad Ali: mourning another great in the age of social media', *The Conversation*, 7 June 2017, https://theconversation.com/muhammad-ali-mourning-another-great-in-the-age-of-social-media-59413.

[2] Dave Sheinen, 'Beautiful, controversial, transcendent: Muhammad Ali dies at 74', *Washington Post,* 4 June 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/boxing-mma-wrestling/beautiful-controversial-transcendent-muhammad-ali-dies-at-74/2016/06/04/7eb10474-29ff-11e6-b989 4e5479715b54_story.html?utm_term=.16e9e357c2b4; William C. Rhoden, 'Muhammad Ali: The

‘Champion’s Champion’; the *Pittsburgh Courier* mourned ‘a fearless breaker of racial barriers’; and the *Los Angeles Times* urged its readers to remember him as ‘America’s first and last Muslim hero’.[3] Ali deserved the accolades – he was a sublimely talented athlete and a public figure of inescapable cultural importance. However, in their rush to sanctify the late boxer, many media outlets elided important elements of Ali’s contentious past.

One of the most celebrated features of Ali’s public persona was his ability to incite controversy. Contemporary representations of the late boxer tend to oversimplify our understanding of *why* Ali was controversial. In the aftermath of his death, Ali was often lauded as a universally beloved hero of black America because he defied the white establishment. Although this hagiographic portrayal of Ali carries great emotional power, it lacks nuance. During the 1960s and 1970s, Ali’s unorthodox beliefs and his vociferous black pride earned him many white critics, but also alienated large portions of the black community. This part of Ali’s legacy is absent from most contemporary remembrances.

The omission of complex and unpalatable perspectives from Ali’s contemporary persona encourages historians and cultural critics to consider the socially constructed nature of memory. Social memory (which is also called cultural or collective memory) refers to the ‘the processes and politics associated with communities’ efforts to remember and to forget the past’.[4] Social memory does not refer merely to the recollection of the past, but also to the social forces that shape these recollections. According to sport historian Daniel A. Nathan, social memories are ‘anchored in the present’ and are produced when communities interpret past people, events, and movements according to contemporary values, attitudes and beliefs.[5] The past is therefore not remembered as it was but rather as a version of history that is curated in ways that best serve the cultural requirements of people in

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Champion Who Never Sold Out’, *New York Times,* 6 June 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/07/sports/muhammad-ali-the-champion-who-never-sold-out.html.

[3] Kai El ‘Zabar, ‘The Greatest’, Champion’s Champion – Muhammad Ali’, *Chicago Defender*, 4 June 2016, https://chicagodefender.com/2016/06/04/the-greatest-champions-champion-muhammad-ali/; Jenna Fryer and Bruce Schreiner, ‘‘Ali! Ali!’: The world says goodbye to The Greatest’, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 June 2016, https://newpittsburghcourieronline.com/2016/06/10/ali-ali-the-world-says-goodbye-to-the-greatest/; Lorraine Ali, ‘Muhammad Ali: America’s First and Last Muslim Hero’, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 June 2016, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-et-muhammad-ali-americas-first-muslim-hero-20160604-snap-story.html.

[4] Jaime Schultz, *Moments of Impact: Injury, Racialized Memory, and Reconciliation in College Football* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 2.

[5] Daniel A. Nathan, *Saying It’s So: A Cultural History of the Black Sox Scandal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 61.

the present.

The curators of social memories take on many guises (writers, artists, actors), each of whom selects elements of the past that are remembered, but also those that are forgotten.[6] Historian Holly Thorpe notes that selective forgetting is a particularly powerful force in shaping the social memories of celebrities like Ali, especially post-death.[7]According to Thorpe, critical perspectives of the deceased are often silenced during the memorialisation process, which, in turn, produces social memories that are celebratory and oversimplified. In Ali's case, many of these critical perspectives had been washed away before his death, however, his passing helped to intensify the process. [8] Many media outlets chose to sanctify rather than analyse Ali, which required them to selectively forget how divisive Ali was within the black community during the 1960s and 1970s.

Ali's death cemented his 'godlike' persona.[9] Consulting press sources from the height of his career is one way to see past this façade. At certain points during the 1960s and 1970s, Ali was more recognisable as a figure of division than of unity. There was, according to journalist Dave Zirin, 'no athlete more reviled by the mainstream press'. [10] His conversion to the Nation of Islam, his publically stated belief in racial separatism, and his refusal to fight in Vietnam incited complex, and often hostile, reactions from the American press. These reactions exposed cultural fault lines in American society. Erasing this part of the boxer's social memory makes sense from a publicity perspective: unity is far more palatable than division. However, by concealing memories of Ali's divisiveness, we risk losing arguably his most valuable cultural role – as a lens through which the complexities and nuances of 1960s and 1970s America might be viewed. Studying reactions to Ali's most controversial moments, and the racial, religious, and cultural discourses that shaped

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[6] Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5; Gary Osmond, "Forgetting Charlie and Tums Cavill: social memory and Australian swimming history," *Journal of Australian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2009): 94.

[7] Holly Thorpe, 'Death, Mourning, and Cultural Memory on the Internet: The Virtual Memorialization of Fallen Sports Heroes', *Sport History in the Digital Era,* eds. Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 184.

[8] According to Michael Ezra, Ali himself played a key role in this process. Ali and his public relations team constructed some of the most influential of these. Since the late 1980s, they have curated a range of celebratory representations, including: Thomas Hauser's best-selling biography (see note 17), the multi-million dollar Muhammad Ali Center in downtown Louisville (Kentucky), a moving appearance at the opening ceremony of the Atlanta Olympic Games, and a host of corporate and philanthropic projects over many years.

[9] Thorpe, "Death, Mourning, and Cultural Memory," 185.

[10] Dave Zirin, 'The Hidden History of Muhammad Ali', *Jacobin,* 4 June 2016, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/06/the-hidden-history-of-muhammad-ali/.

these reactions, can help us to more deeply understand American society during the civil rights era and beyond.

Doing so requires us to gaze beyond Ali's sanctified façade. One way to accomplish this is through analysing media discourse surrounding Ali. Attitudes toward the boxer could be examined via a number of different news media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, or television. This study will focus on newspapers, and will also build upon the precepts of digital sport history.[11] According to Michael Oriard, newspapers are particularly valuable sources for studying public discourse:

> …sports journalism in newspapers and periodicals offers cultural critics perhaps a unique resource: a range of texts that at least bring us close to the varied and changing readings of actual audiences.[12]

Jeffrey Hill argues this is because newspapers 'give the readers what they want' and therefore 'spoke, or [were] felt to speak, for the people of the community [they] served'.[13] Seen in this way, archived newspapers can act as windows into the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the people for whom they are written. The content of these publications is also shaped by the cultural predispositions of their staff.[14] As a result, newspapers are complex texts, in which the opinions and ideologies of journalists coalesce with those of their readers. This complexity is a particularly evident when examining articles written about Ali, as both writers and readers could interpret him in 'competing ways'.[15]

These competing interpretations are perhaps best exemplified by the debate over his adopted Muslim name. Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. nominally became Muhammad Ali on 6 March 1964.[16] His new name cemented his allegiance to the

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[11] Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips (eds), *Sport History in the Digital Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

[12] Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 17.

[13] Jeffrey Hill, 'Anecdotal Evidence: Sport, the Newspaper Press, and History', in Murray G. Phillips (ed), *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 121–127.

[14] Hill, "Anecdotal Evidence," 127.

[15] Michael Oriard, 'Muhammad Ali: The Hero in the Age of Mass Media', in *Muhammad Ali: The People's Champ*, ed. Elliot Gorn (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 10–12.

[16] Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith, *Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship between Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X,* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 218. Ali never legally changed his name. According to the authors' correspondence with the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky, this was because the Social Security Administration did not require it at the time. So long as a person could

Nation of Islam: a religious sect that was both feared and misunderstood by the American press. The nation's newspapers immediately and 'almost unanimously' rejected the new name, and continued to call him Cassius Clay in protest.[17] The practice rankled Ali: 'People change their names all the time and no one complains. Actors and actresses change their name. The pope changes his name. Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson changed their names'.[18] However, whilst Ali may have been indignant about the refusal of the press to use his Muslim name, he understood all too well the reasons behind it: 'If I changed my name from Cassius Clay to something like Smith or Jones…nobody would have complained'.[19]

American newspapers rejected the name Muhammad Ali because it was freighted with incendiary racial, religious, and political meanings, at a time of great civil unrest. Ali's new name was explicitly non-white, non-Christian, and signalled his allegiance to a group that advocated black nationalism and, in some cases, black superiority. According to sportswriter and Ali biographer, Mike Marqusee: 'this was a black man signalling by his name change, not a desire to integrate himself with mainstream America, but a comprehensive rejection of it'.[20] If Ali's name signalled his desire to stand apart from mainstream America, the printed press showed little desire to bring him back into the fold. By refusing to embrace Ali's Muslim name, American newspapers positioned themselves in opposition to the radicalism and anti-establishment ideals they believed it represented.

Until recently, it has been difficult to know for exactly how long the press rejected the name. In the days following Ali's death, Victor Mather of the *New York Times*, and Laura Wagner for *Slate* magazine, concluded that major US newspapers did not embrace the Muslim name until 1970 at the earliest, and more likely 1971.[21]

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reasonably establish their identity under their chosen name (for someone with Ali's profile this was not a problem), they could legally go by any name they wished. It is also unlikely that Ali, or any member of the Nation of Islam, would wish to consult the white-run courts on a matter pertaining to black pride/identity. See also: Josh Peter, 'Why Muhammad Ali never legally changed name from Cassius Clay', *USA Today*, 11 July 2016, https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/boxing/2016/07/11/muhammad-ali-name-change-cassius-clay/86956544/.

[17] Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* (London: Pan Books, 1997), 102.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Mike Marqusee, 'Sport and stereotype: from role model to Muhammad Ali', *Race & Class*, 31.1 (1995), 15.

[21] Victor Mather, 'In the Ring He Was Ali, but in the Newspapers He Was Still Clay', *New York Times*, 9 June 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/10/sports/muhammad-ali-name-cassius-clay-newspapers.html; Laura Wagner, 'Muhammad Ali Changed His Name in 1964: Newspapers called him Cassius Clay for six more years', *Slate,* 10 June 2016,

Both Mather and Wagner employed what might broadly be termed distant reading techniques, which involve using quantitative analysis to track themes or trends across large bodies of digitised literature.[22] We recently conducted a more detailed and comprehensive distant reading, which refined and extended Mather's and Wagner's methods and revealed other important findings. This close reading article is built upon the findings of our earlier macroanalysis, the results of which are visible in Figure 1.[23]

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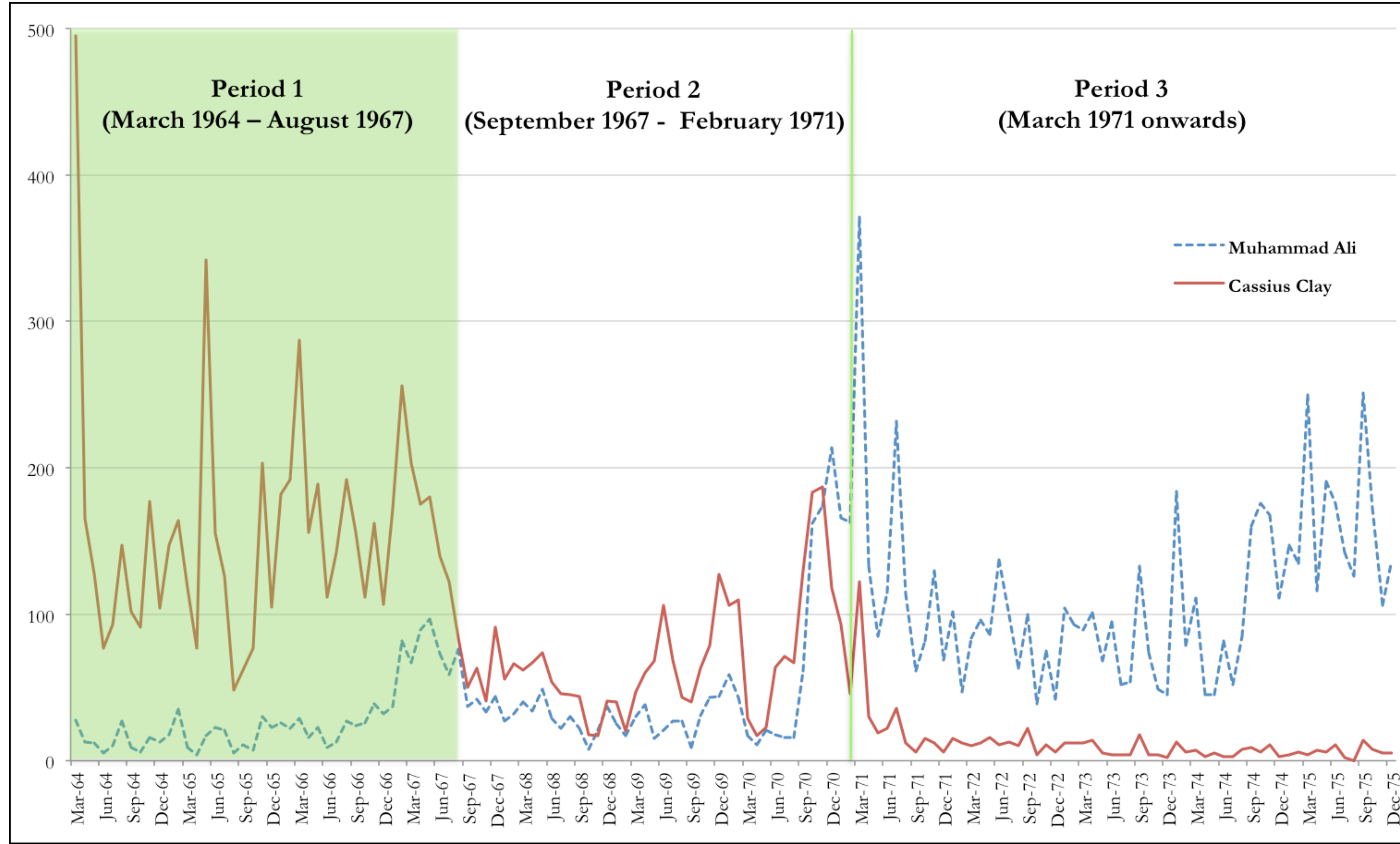
http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/sports_nut/2016/06/muhammad_ali_changed_his_name_in_1964_newspapers_called_him_cassius_clay.html.

[22] Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013); Murray G. Phillips, Gary Osmond, and Stephen Townsend, 'A Bird's Eye View of the Past: Digital History, Distant Reading, and Sport History', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1725-1740.

[23] See: Phillips et al., "Bird's Eye View of the Past," 1728–1730 for further details regarding the methods used to conduct this distant reading.

Figure 1 – Number of articles containing “Muhammad Ali” vs. “Cassius Clay” (totals): 1964 – 1975.



Using the online archive *ProQuest Historical Newspapers,* we tracked how twelve United States newspapers used 'Muhammad Ali' and 'Cassius Clay' between 1960 and 1975.[24] The data that forms this distant reading was obtained via the site's 'advanced search' function. Using optical character recognition software (OCR), all twelve publications were searched for articles containing 'Cassius Clay'. The number of articles was counted per month and recorded chronologically in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The process was then repeated for 'Muhammad Ali'. The article count for each name was then transformed into a line-graph (Figure 1), which was constructed using the Microsoft Excel chart tool.

This graph tells a compelling story about Ali's two names, and the changing ways they were used by journalists during the 1960s and 1970s. Importantly, as indicated by Figure 1, the newspapers in this study did not fully embrace Ali's Muslim name until March 1971. In addition to solidifying previous theories about Ali's names, Figure 1 also reveals new insights. The graph indicates that newspapers did not move toward an acceptance of Ali's Muslim name in a gradual way. Rather, their usage of both names was characterised by distinct periods. Between March 1964 and August 1967 (Period 1) Cassius Clay was overwhelmingly preferred over Muhammad Ali. Between September 1967 and February 1971 (Period 2), Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali were used more interchangeably. From March 1971 onwards (Period 3), Muhammad Ali had definitively usurped Cassius Clay as his preferred moniker. Given the cultural meanings attached to both names, it is reasonable to conclude that these temporal shifts correspond with broader changes in press opinions of Ali.

Whilst each of these periods warrants further investigation, this article will focus on newspaper articles written between March 1964 and August 1967. This period was chosen because it is when Ali's name was at its most divisive, as evidenced by the almost complete rejection of Ali's Muslim name by the press. In order to reveal a more nuanced vision of press attitudes toward Ali, this article will compare and contrast the ways that black and white newspapers used the two

[24] This group of publications included three white publications, and nine black. White: *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*. Black: *Atlanta Daily World*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *Cleveland Call and Post*, *Chicago Defender*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, *Pittsburgh Courier*.

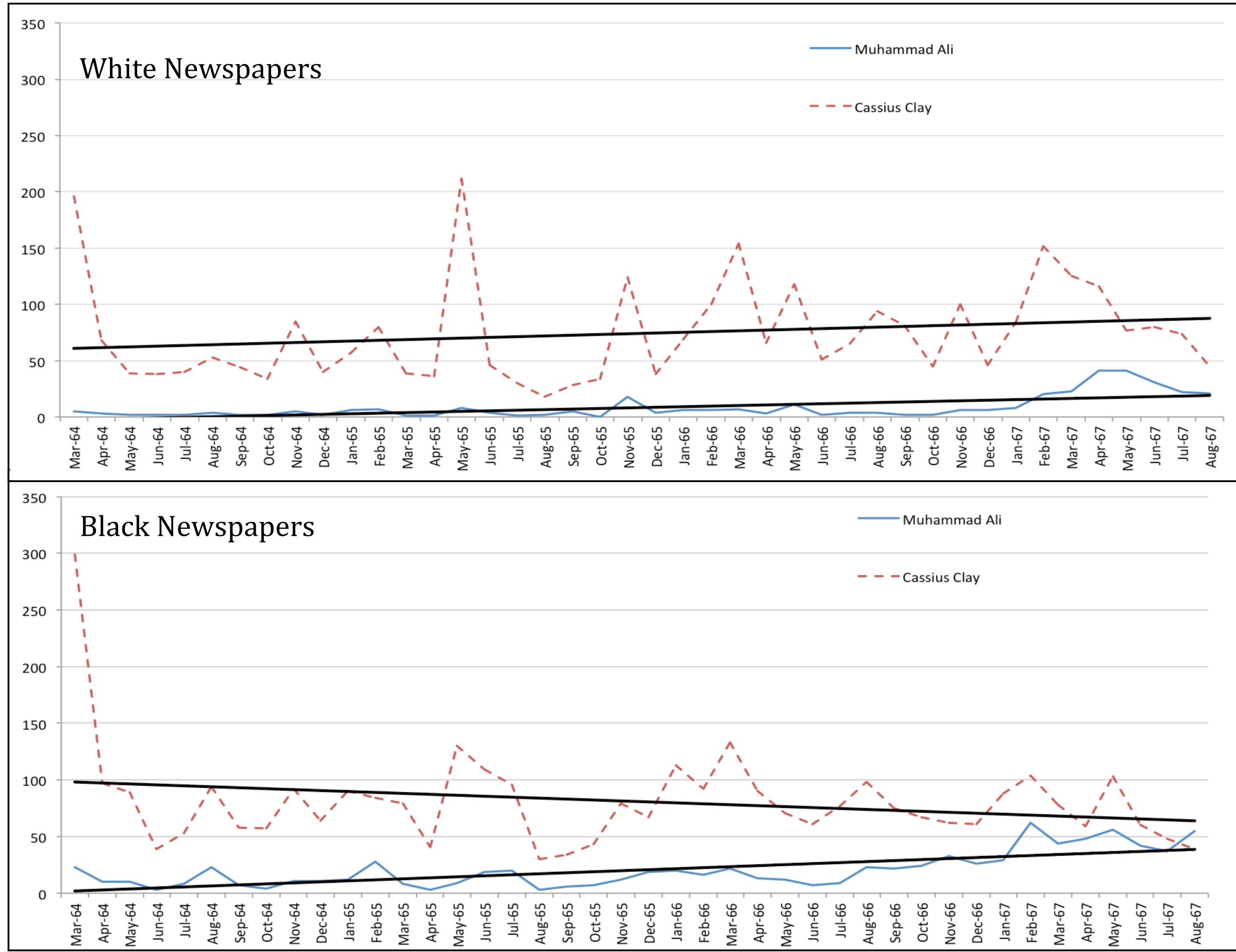
names.[25]

A more targeted distant reading of articles (Figure 2) from the same newspapers within this period – between March 1964 and August 1967 – reveals small differences in patterns of usage between black and white newspapers.[26] 'Cassius Clay' was preferred over 'Muhammad Ali' 74% of the time in black publications and 89% of the time in white papers. Figure 2 also indicates that black newspapers were occasionally more willing to use Ali's Muslim name than their white counterparts – the black newspapers graph shows sporadic spikes in the usage of 'Muhammad Ali'. Toward the end of the period, there was a decrease in the usage of 'Cassius Clay' and a corresponding increase in articles containing 'Muhammad Ali' in black newspapers. White newspapers maintained their preference for 'Cassius Clay'. Overall, these graphs indicate that there were minor quantitative differences between usages of Ali's two names by the black and white presses. However, the most compelling story told by Figure 2 is that black journalists appear to have rejected Ali's Muslim name almost as comprehensively as their white counterparts. This conclusion is a significant contribution to the historiography of the late boxer.

[25] Black newspapers are defined here as publications that identify with the traditions and aims of the black press. The black press is addressed in more detail on page 18 but might be briefly defined as newspapers written by black journalists, for black readers. Black journalists, particularly during and after the civil rights era, often wrote for white publications. However, white journalists rarely, if ever, wrote for black newspapers. The white press cannot be so neatly defined, mainly because white newspapers did not self-identify as *white* newspapers (they did not have to). In this context, white newspapers might also be called 'mainstream' newspapers. Michael Huspek argues that the relationship between the black and white presses was 'oppositional' – whereby the white press was seen as 'A' and the black press positioned itself in opposition as 'not-A'. See: Michael Huspek, 'Black Press, White Press, and Their Opposition: The Case of the Police Killing of Tyisha Miller', *Social Justice* 31, no.1/2 (2004): 218.

[26] These graphs suggest that black newspapers wrote more articles about Ali during this period (4728 vs. 3916). Rather than indicating greater interest in Ali from black journalists, this simply reflects the greater number of black publications included in the study. This is due to the authors' institutional subscription to *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, which provided greater access to black publications than white.

Figure 2 – Number of articles containing “Muhammad Ali” vs. “Cassius Clay” (totals with linear trend-lines): White vs. Black newspapers, 1964- 1967



To further investigate this finding, we must go beyond a quantitative analysis. Close reading will be employed in order to interrogate why the black and white press initially refused to embrace Ali's name, and to provide a fine-grain analysis of the cultural and historical context of this practice. Close reading is a methodology that is used differently throughout the various humanities disciplines.[27] Our application involves carefully scrutinising individual texts in order to reveal deep meaning.[28] Specifically, close reading will be used to identify and examine the engagement of Ali's two names in the black and white press, and to contextualise these discourses within the broader racial, religious, and political ideologies of the time.

Clay vs. Ali in white and black newspapers

When Sonny Liston defended his heavyweight title on 25 February 1965, he was the sentimental favourite for the first time in his career. Liston still elicited a mixture of fear and loathing from much of the American public, but they found his opponent in this particular fight, Cassius Clay, to be even more disagreeable. Clay had been a popular figure after winning a gold medal at the Rome Olympics in 1960, but by the time of the Liston fight he was a divisive figure.[29] Many journalists interpreted his confidence as hubris and were apprehensive about his rumoured ties to the Nation of Islam. The newspaper press wanted Liston to teach Clay a lesson in humility. They also hoped that by beating Clay, Liston would ensure that the Nation of Islam could not use the heavyweight championship to broadcast their controversial beliefs. Despite these misgivings, most sportswriters were confident that he would be defeated: Liston was the 7-1 favourite and was predicted to dispatch Clay easily.

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[27] There is ongoing debate within literary studies regarding the use and purpose of close reading. Some scholars argue that close reading should treat texts as being self-contained and self referential, whilst others believe that close reading should locate a text within its broader social and historical context. We believe that the latter view of close reading (otherwise known as formalism, or new historicism) is more appropriate for historical analysis. For further reading on the close reading debate, see: Andrew DuBois, 'Close Reading: An Introduction' in *Close Reading: The Reader*, ed. Frank Latricchia (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 1–40; Shannon R. Smith, 'Complexity, Critique, and Close Reading: Sport History and Literary Studies', *The International Journal for the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1832; Katherine Bode, 'The Equivalence of 'Close' and 'Distant' Reading; or, Toward a New Object for Data-Rich Literary History', *Modern Language Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2017): 92; Jane Gallop, 'The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading', *Profession* (2007): 181–186.

[28] Jeffrey Hill, *Sport and the Literary Imagination: Essays in History, Literature, and Sport* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), 22.

[29] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers*, 10.

When Clay won, American newspapers were forced to consider him far more seriously. Not only was he a more formidable boxer than they initially believed, but he also made it clear that the Nation of Islam would heavily influence his public persona. In the days after the Liston bout, Clay confirmed his allegiance to the Nation of Islam and adopted the name Muhammad Ali. During the period directly following this, the nation's journalists grappled with the notion of a heavyweight champion whose very name signalled his belief in black nationalism and racial separatism. Between March 1964 and August 1967, journalists from both black and white newspapers rejected this name as a way of protesting the racial and religious beliefs associated with it. Ali was most frequently referred to by his birth name (Cassius Clay), whilst his Muslim name (Muhammad Ali) became conspicuous by its absence. On the rare occasions it did appear in print, Ali's chosen name was almost always used mockingly. In March 1964, two weeks after he changed his name, the *Los Angeles Times* began a story about Ali's possible dethronement as heavyweight champion by introducing him as, 'Cassius Clay – pardon, Muhammad Ali…'[30] The opening line of a column by Sid Ziff in the same publication reads, 'Cassius Clay, er, excuse me, Muhammad Ali'. [31] Other writers were perhaps slightly more polite in their rejection of the name, but no less deliberate. A few months later, *Washington Post* writer Dave Brady opened an article by acknowledging that his subject 'prefers to be known' as Muhammad Ali. [32] Despite this, Brady wrote his entire piece without using the Muslim name once. Instead, he referred to his subject as Clay or Cassius no less than thirteen times. The *New York Times* also left little doubt regarding their objections to Ali's Muslim name. The renowned Arthur Daley was also an enthusiastic critic of Ali and he rarely missed a chance to censure the young champion.[33] Daley's description of an interview with 'Cassius' in 1966 is particularly telling:

> …he [Ali] frowned at the mention of a sympathetic article Floyd Patterson had written about him, 'It was nice, but he insists on calling me Cassius Clay,' said the young man who prefers his Black Muslim name of Muhammad Ali. Don't

[30] 'Muhammad Ali May Lose Crown Today', *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 1964, B1.
[31] Sid Ziff, 'Clay the Dreamer', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1965, B3.
[32] Dave Brady, 'Ex-Handler Says Clay Confused', *Washington Post*, 20 November 1965, D1.
[33] Stefan Fatsis, 'The Sportswriter Who Hated Muhammad Ali', *Slate,* 6 June 2016,http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/sports_nut/2016/06/the_new_york_times_arthur_daley_never_stopped_hating_muhammad_ali.html.

> let it bother you, Cassius, old boy. He's not the only one.[34]

Daley, along with his editors, was insistent that the *New York Times* should not refer to Ali by his Muslim name until he changed it legally.[35] Ali never did.

Black publications also clearly preferred Clay to Ali. Al Monroe, a regular sports columnist for the *Chicago Daily Defender*, gleefully recalled announcer Harry Markson's refusal to use Ali's Muslim name when introducing him to the crowd at Madison Square Garden.[36] Ali was a ringside guest at the March 1964 fight between welterweights Holly Mims and Luis Rodriguez and left the arena because of the slight.[37] Monroe conspicuously referred to Ali as Clay throughout the article, and imparted a venomous sense of satisfaction in his description of the evening:

> …the fans forgot about Cassius Clay and the announcer's refusal to introduce him as Muhammad Ali. Even the booing of Clay evaporated once the ring action was on.[38]

Monroe's wry mockery of Ali's desire to be called by his Muslim name was hardly unique amongst black journalists. The *New York Amsterdam News* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel* seemingly could not bring themselves to write 'Muhammad Ali' without adding 'Cassius Clay That Is…' or 'Don't Call Me Cassius Clay'.[39] The *Chicago Defender* sarcastically reported that 'Clay (Oops, Ali)' had attended a Nation of Islam meeting in Boston, whilst the *Baltimore Afro-American* exclaimed that 'Cassius, er Ali, is the Greatest!'[40] Like their counterparts at white publications, black journalists appeared to take some pleasure in mocking Clay's new name. This was often more than light-hearted teasing, and belied a deeper unease with what the name represented.

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[34] Arthur Daley, 'Listening to Cassius', *New York Times*, 4 August 1966, 53.

[35] Robert Lipsyte, *Sportsworld: an American Dreamland* (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1975), 95–96.

[36] Al Monroe, 'What's in a Name? Lots If One Is Cassius Clay', *Chicago Daily Defender*, 24 March 1964, 22.

[37] Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, 102–103.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Les Matthews, 'Muhammad Ali Speaks (Cassius Clay That Is)', *New York Amsterdam News*, 28 March 1964, 28; Brad Pye, 'Exclusive - Champion Cassius Clay Takes a Bride', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 13 August 1964, 1.

[40] 'Clay (Oops, Ali) Attends Muslim Meet in Boston', *Chicago Daily Defender*, 22 April 1964, 28; Sam Lacey, 'Cassius, Er Ali, Is the Greatest', *Baltimore Afro American*, 25 December 1965, 9.

The discomfort of the printed press with Ali's Muslim name was greatly influenced by their support for the civil rights, or integration, movement. The years immediately following Ali's name change saw the culmination of more than a decade of civil rights struggle. The *Civil Rights Act* of 1964, the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965, the Selma marches, the fair housing movement, the Watts and Harlem riots, and the Long Hot Summer all occurred between March 1964 and August 1967. During this period, a number of different groups, including the Nation of Islam, offered competing visions for the future of black America. The civil rights movement, as epitomised by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Student Non-violence Coordinating Committee (SNCC), championed racial integration, and favoured peaceful protest and legislative pathways to achieve their goals. Conversely, the Nation of Islam preached a black supremacist doctrine that called for separation of the races and the establishment of an autonomous black state. Most newspapers, black and white, supported the more moderate integration movement. However, black and white journalists also understood race and the struggle for equality in very different ways. These differences created a range of nuanced opinions about Ali and the Nation of Islam.

Reading deeper: white newspapers

White journalists generally viewed Ali's allegiance to the Nation of Islam with a combination of apprehension and misunderstanding. Much of this stemmed from fears about the group's assumed radicalism and their potential for violence. Although the Nation of Islam was ostensibly pacifist, the raising of a paramilitary group called the Fruit of Islam certainly suggested that they anticipated, or were at least prepared for, violence.[41] Elements of the Nation's rhetoric also hinted at its extremist tendencies. Malcolm X, who was the sect's most charismatic and prominent spokesperson, frequently prophesied a violent end for white America. Moreover, he suggested that this violence could be meted out by disenfranchised blacks, like those within the Nation of Islam:

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[41] Maureen Smith, '*Muhammad Speaks* and Muhammad Ali: Intersections of the Nation of Islam and Sport in the 1960s', *International Sports Studies,* 21 (no.1, 2001), 54.

> It is dangerous to suggest that the Negro is nonviolent. There *must* be retribution. It is proclaimed. If retribution came to the Pharaoh for his enslavement of six hundred thousand, it will come to the White American who enslaved twenty million and robbed their minds. [42]

Malcolm's suggestion that John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963 was an example of white America's 'chickens coming home to roost' was seen as further evidence that the Nation of Islam disdained all whites – even the progressive ones. [43] Although Malcolm was excommunicated from the Nation of Islam in March 1964, he exerted a strong influence upon Ali during their short, intense friendship.[44] Ali, like his one-time mentor, also used provocative language to highlight his disapproval of what he saw as accommodationism by civil rights leaders: 'I'm a fighter. I believe I'm no cheek turner. The NAACP can say, 'Turn the other cheek,' but the NAACP is ignorant. You kill my dog, you better hide your cat'.[45]

Intimations of violence, along with the group's insular nature, ensured that the Nation of Islam was both feared and misunderstood by the white press. By comparison, the integration movement appeared peaceful and moderate. Integrationists promised to work with, rather than against, the white establishment. They sought lasting, legal change and therefore had to secure the cooperation of the white powerbrokers who controlled America's various legislative frameworks. Civil rights leaders, especially King, used this contrast to their advantage. By juxtaposing their pacifist credentials against the Nation of Islam's seemingly imminent threat of violence, integrationists positioned themselves as the reasonable alternative and 'strengthen[ed] their own case for equality' in the eyes of the white press.[46] The rejection of the name by white journalists can therefore be seen as symptomatic of their broader mistrust and fear of the Nation of Islam.

Consequently, rather than seeking to better understand the meanings that

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[42] George Plimpton, 'Miami Notebook: Cassius Clay and Malcolm X' in Gerald Early (ed) *I'm a Little Special: A Muhammad Ali Reader* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 1998), 35. Emphasis in original.

[43] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers,* 143–144.

[44] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers*, 222.

[45] Ezra, *The Making of an Icon*, 54.

[46] James Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 264. See also: August H. Nimtz, 'Violence and/or Nonviolence in the Success of the Civil Rights Movement: The Malcolm X – Martin Luther King, Jr. Nexus', *New Political Science* 38, no.1 (2016).

underpinned the name 'Ali', white journalists treated it with a measure of contempt. Their refusal to use the name revealed an unwillingness to engage with Ali or the Nation of Islam as a legitimate voice for black America. Refusing to acknowledge Ali's Muslim name meant they did not have to take him, or the Nation of Islam, seriously. They saw Ali's association with the group as outrageous, but hardly worthy of thoughtful critique. Consequently, the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post* dismissed rather than critiqued Ali.

Of these publications, the *Los Angeles Times* targeted Ali most aggressively. Jim Murray, who was the *Los Angeles Times'* most famous sportswriter at the time, turned his considerable talent toward eviscerating Ali at any chance he could. One of Murray's articles, titled 'The Sheik of Araby', is a particularly fine demonstration of his acid-tipped pen at work:

> Cassius is like the guy in the movie who has wandered into the haunted house to use the phone and hasn't noticed the butler is a werewolf, that's blood on the floor, and he thinks the suit of armor in the corner is empty…[47]

He continued, 'I think Cassius sees himself as Lawrence of Arabia or the Red Shadow rather than a guy licking stamps for hate literature'.[48]

To Murray, Ali was an athletically gifted stooge, rather than a young man actively seeking to engage his blackness through religion. In the same article, seemingly not content with merely questioning Ali's intelligence, Murray further marginalised Ali through unambiguous racial stereotypes.

> Cassius has always had a lively imagination and it was only a question of time before he'd wrap a towel around his head and begin to play Saladin the Saracen…next year, Cassius might be playing Pepe Le Moko.[49]

By contending that Ali's interest in the Nation of Islam might be a product of boredom, or a sudden interest in exoticism, Murray was doing more than simply ridiculing his beliefs. He was also casting broader aspersions upon the notion that

[47] Jim Murray, 'The Sheik of Araby', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 March 1964, B1, B3.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

young, black men like Ali might look to Africa for spiritual and cultural fulfillment.

Over the next few years, as Ali's fervour for the Nation of Islam refused to abate, writers at the *Los Angeles Times* tweaked their narrative. They posited that by remaining with the Nation, Ali might be more than merely stupid, naïve or bored – he might also be mentally unstable. John Hall questioned the boxer about his continued devotion to the Nation of Islam and wrote that, 'the pressure of being both Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali has finally caught up with and choked the heavyweight champion'.[50] The rest of the article did its best to portray Ali as unhinged when it came to matters of race and religion. Hall wrote: 'the dam broke' when Ali was pressed on his beliefs, and he 'cracked', becoming 'unnerving and hysterical'.[51] The irony here is that Ali was not trying to be 'both Clay and Ali' – he wanted only to be Ali but was denied that right by journalists like Hall.

Sid Ziff reinforced the 'crazy Clay' narrative in his column a month later. He recounted Ali's appearance on a CBS television program on which he discussed his religious beliefs. Ziff called him 'Clay the dreamer' and described him as having 'sailed clear into outer space'.[52] According to Ziff, Clay was 'living in a world of his own' or on a 'cloud of dreams' as he 'babbled mysterious predictions' and was 'spinning dizzily in a heady atmosphere full of contradictions'.[53] Jim Murray, who remained critical of Ali throughout the 1960s, also weighed in on the trope. In 1966 he wrote that Ali's theology was 'orbiting frantically around the upper reaches of Alice in Wonderland or alighting a time or two somewhere over the rainbow'. [54]

Although the *Los Angeles Times* was notably persistent in attacking the boxer's clarity of mind, articles from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* also frequently cast aspersions on Ali's mental state. Dave Brady, covering Ali's 1965 bout with Floyd Patterson for the *Washington Post*, wrote that Clay was 'confused mentally' about his Black Muslim beliefs.[55] Arthur Daley also subscribed to this perception of Ali. Daley followed 'Clay' on his 1966 trip to London, and wrote of a 'naturally delightful young man…warped by his own muddled thinking'. [56] According to Daley, the heavyweight champ was a 'troubled young man' whose 'logic was

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[50] John Hall, 'Assassin Rumors Unnerve Cassius', *Los Angeles Times*, 23 May 1965, C1.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ziff, 'Clay the Dreamer'.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Murray, 'Come on, Ali, I Want to Talk to Cassius Clay'.
[55] Brady, 'Ex-Handler Says Clay Confused'.
[56] Daley, 'Listening to Cassius'.

fuzzy' as he 'rambled along' about his Black Muslim beliefs.[57] Journalists like Daley, Brady, Ziff and Murray belonged to an aging cadre of white sportswriters that Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith call the 'crusty, cigar-chomping crowd of old school reporters'.[58] As talented as they were, when they wrote about Ali and the Nation of Islam they refused to consider what it was about the group that might appeal to a young, black American like 'Cassius'. They decided instead to dismiss his beliefs as naïve or a product of mental instability.[59]

This absence of critical engagement sent an implicit, but unmistakable, message about how the white press saw the Nation of Islam's place in the broader struggle for black equality. Ali biographer David Remnick describes the Nation of Islam as a 'symptom of continued oppression and as a warning that limited change in society would lead to a conflagration'.[60] White newspapers would not, or could not, relate to this idea. Jack Nelson notes that this attitude was not restricted to reporting on the Nation:

> most of the [White] press was content to cover civil rights simply as a breaking news story instead of exposing the underlying injustices and social problems Blacks faced.[61]

The white press chose instead to decontextualise Ali's racial and religious beliefs. This was an extension of the refusal of white newspapers to meaningfully engage with the racial politics of the Nation of Islam. By painting Ali as naïve at best, or a deranged zealot at worst, they sought to disarm the Nation of Islam as a legitimate voice for black America. Refusing to accept Ali's chosen name was symptomatic of the dismissive attitude that many white papers held toward him.

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers,* 224.

[59] There were exceptions, most notably Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times*, who published a number of editorial pieces that delivered balanced and insightful analyses of Ali's place in the American cultural landscape.

[60] David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero,* (London: Picador, 1998), 274.

[61] Jack Nelson, 'The Civil Rights Movement: A Press Perspective', *Human Rights* 28, no. 4 (2001): 5.

Reading deeper: black newspapers

Black newspapers also continued to reject Ali's chosen name and its associations with the Nation of Islam. Brad Pye of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* neatly encapsulated the way that many black journalists felt about the name. Pye was the *Sentinel*'s sports editor, a civil servant, and an ardent integrationist. He advocated tirelessly for racial equality through his column, his role as assistant deputy chief in the Los Angeles County Supervisor's office, and in his multiple roles as a sport administrator.[62] Pye pleaded with his readers to 'Pick Clay Not Ali' by writing a long reminiscence of 'The real Cassius Clay', who he believed had been usurped by the 'strange acting and talking' Muhammad Ali.[63] Like his colleagues at white newspapers, Pye saw Ali's association with the Nation as potentially dangerous. However, he and other black journalists perceived a different kind of danger. The Nation of Islam did not necessarily pose an existential threat to black journalists and their readers, but it did threaten the progress of the integration movement, to which most black publications were strongly connected.[64]

The black press was conceived early in the nineteenth century as 'a crusading press' and a forum for the issues facing African Americans.[65] As such, the push for integration fit neatly within its traditional role as an advocate for racial equality. The integration movement also catered to the middle-class sensibilities of the black press. The owners and senior staff of black publications were usually members of what sociologist E. Franklin Frazier called the 'black bourgeoisie'.[66] According to Frazier, the 'negro press' helped to perpetuate a bourgeois 'world of make believe' in which African Americans would be welcomed into white society by virtue of their increasing cultural, economic and intellectual sophistication.[67] These aspirations

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[62] Oviatt Library California State University Northridge, 'Peek in the Stacks: Brad Pye, Jr., Los Angeles Sports Journalist and Community Advocate', February 9, 2016, http://library.csun.edu/SCA/Peek-in-the-Stacks/brad-pye.

[63] Brad Pye, 'Pick Clay Not Ali', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 12 November 1964, B1.

[64] There were exceptions. Of the titles in included in this study, the *Atlanta Daily World* was the only paper that did not openly support the push for civil rights. Its editorial policy on racial matters was 'don't rock the boat'. This was partially driven by a desire not to alienate Atlanta's largely conservative white population. Other black newspapers in southern locales adopted similar editorial policies. See: Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 200.

[65] Henry G. La Brie III and William J. Zima, 'Directional Quandaries of the Black Press in the United States', *Journalism Quarterly* 48, no.4 (1971): 640.

[66] E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 146–161.

[67] Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 160. See also: Angela M. Nelson, 'Middle-Class Ideology in African American Postwar Comic Strips', in *From Bourgeois to Boojie: Black Middle Class Performances,*

meshed neatly with the integration movement's program for black uplift through scholastic, political, and economic enfranchisement.[68]

The support of the black press for the integration movement was also driven by a range of other factors.[69] Firstly, black newspaper editors and owners were usually older men, who had seen patient, legislative approaches to civil rights advocacy achieve some measure of success during the Second World War, and who believed this could work again. [70] Secondly, many younger journalists (who may have been receptive to more radical ideals) had been lured away from black newspapers by wealthier white publications that wished to cover the civil rights struggle more comprehensively.[71] Thirdly, declining readership forced black newspapers to bolster their income by securing advertising revenue from local businesses whose owners were unlikely to advertise in publications that advocated radicalism.[72] Consequently, the black press departed from its firebrand, revolutionary beginnings and, by the 1960s and 1970s, had adopted a far more moderate and 'respectable' disposition.[73]

The black press saw Ali's association with the Nation of Islam as a rejection of integration and bourgeois respectability. Their rejection of his name can therefore be seen as a protest against his refusal to engage with these ideals. According to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the Nation of Islam was anathema to the integrationist leanings of the black press: 'The things they (Black Muslims) preach, are just the opposite of what we believe'.[74] Black journalists did not clash with Ali and the Nation of Islam out of fear, but rather because they were diametrically opposed about the best way to achieve black uplift. As a result, there were subtle, but important, differences between black and white press perceptions of Ali between March 1964 and August 1967. During this period, black newspapers responded to Ali's racial and religious beliefs in significantly more complex ways than their white counterparts. The most notable difference was the willingness of black newspapers to disagree with Ali and the

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eds. Vershawn Ashanti Young and Bridget Harris Tsemo (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 176.

[68] Lois Benjamin, 'Black Bourgeoisie' in Richard T. Schaefer (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 152–154.

[69] Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press: With Special Reference to Four Newspapers, 1827 – 1965* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 1998), 1–7.

[70] Charles G. Spellman, 'The Black Press: Setting the Political Agenda During World War II, *Negro History Bulletin* 51, no. 1 (1993): 40–41.

[71] Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 196.

[72] Ronald E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A*. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971), 8.

[73] Henry Lewis Suggs, *The Black Press in the South: 1865 – 1979*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 1–10.

[74] 'Joe Feels Sonny Can Beat Clay', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 March 1964, 14.

Nation of Islam whilst still engaging with them critically on issues of race.

Jackie Robinson's syndicated column typified the complex relationship between the black press and Ali. Robinson, the first African American to breach Major League Baseball's colour line, was an integrationist icon. He wrote passionately and often about the boxer, drawing explicit links between Ali, the Nation of Islam, and the situation of black America more broadly:

> If Negroes ever turn to the Black Muslim movement, in any numbers, it will not be because of Cassius or even Malcolm X. It will be because White America has refused to recognize the responsible leadership of the Negro people and to grant to us the same rights that any other citizen enjoys in this land.[75]

Robinson's reference to the 'responsible leadership of the Negro people' positioned Ali and the Nation of Islam directly at odds with the mainstream civil rights movement. However, whilst Robinson clearly favoured the more 'responsible' integrationist movement, he also understood why the Nation of Islam might appeal to disenfranchised African Americans:

> Until White America gives full recognition to the just demands of the Negro as voiced by authentic leaders like Wilkins, King, Randolph, Young and the rest, there will be fertile ground for Black Muslimism…[76]

This became a recurring theme in Robinson's numerous articles about Ali. Robinson repeatedly promoted the integration movement as being the 'authentic' way forward for black Americans. However, he also recognised that the Nation of Islam was not necessarily a refuge for the naïve or mentally deranged (as the white press tended to argue), but rather a manifestation of black disenfranchisement.

Black newspapers were also forced to balance their distaste for the Nation of Islam's separatist doctrine with their admiration for the group's promotion of black pride. Charles Howard Sr., writing for the *Baltimore Afro-American,* penned the following:

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[75] Jackie Robinson, 'Cassius and the Muslims', *Norfolk/New Journal and Guide*, 14 March 1964, 8.
[76] Jackie Robinson, 'The Muslim Champion', *Norfolk/New Journal and Guide*, 4 April 1964, 8.

> ...they [the white establishment] are frightened and shocked at Muhammad Ali and his counterparts among young Afro-Americans for having the crust to break away from everything White and embrace everything Black…[77]

The *Philadelphia Tribune* took a similar stance: '…they [the Nation of Islam] have one positive aspect that we like. They are working toward the goal of making Negroes proud of being Black'. [78] Even the bourgeois moderation of the black press was unable to completely extinguish their respect for Ali's racial pride. However, although some journalists as saw Ali's Muslim name as being emblematic of his autonomy, it remained predominantly a symbol of his opposition to established notions of African American respectability.

The battle over Ali's chosen name continued unabated for a number of years, as indicated by press coverage of his bouts with Floyd Patterson (1965) and Ernie Terrell (1967). Black newspapers reported enthusiastically on the lead-up to both fights, and devoted significant column space to each man's refusal to call the heavyweight champion by his preferred name.[79] They were also on hand to witness Ali punish both men for their transgressions. He dispatched Patterson with ease, and unleashed a 'murderous beating' upon Terrell – grunting *what's my name* as his punches landed.[80]

Whilst Ali's name remained contentious, toward the end of 1966 and into 1967 the black press did begin to adjust their attitude. This was largely the result of Ali's battle with the United States Army Selective Service. For almost the entirety of his public life, Ali had faced the possibility of being conscripted into the Army. He

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[77] Charles Howard Sr., 'Muhammad Ali (Cassius) Serious Young Man in Ghana', *Baltimore Afro-American*, 6 June 1964, 20.

[78] 'Cassius Clay's Name Change Stoutly Defended', *Philadelphia Tribune*, 21 February 1967, 5.

[79] For pre-fight coverage of the Patterson bout, see: 'Ali to Demand Apology From Patterson Before Bout in N.Y. on Sept. 20', *Philadelphia Tribune*, 9 September 1965, 20; 'Clay Intends To Feed Lettuce To 'Rabbit' Patterson, *Chicago Daily Defender*, 21 January 1965, 38; For pre-fight coverage of Terrell bout, see: Lawrence Casey, 'Sports Ledger', *Chicago Daily Defender*, 9 January 1967, 25; Dick Edwards, 'Ern Burns at 'Tom' Tag Says Clay Will Pay', *New York Amsterdam News*, 21 January 1967, 33; Harrison Claude Jr., 'Muhammad Ali Will Always Be Cassius Clay to E. Terrell', *Philadelphia Tribune*, 21 January 1967, 15.

[80] For post-fight coverage of the Patterson bout, see: A.S. 'Doc' Young, 'Clay Might Be Champ 10 Years: The Big Fight', *New York Amsterdam News*, 27 November 1965, 1; Sam Lacey, 'Cassius, Er Ali, Is the Greatest', *Baltimore Afro American*, 25 December 1965, 9. For post fight reporting of Terrell bout, see: Patterson fight Marion Jackson, 'Humiliates Terrell: Now Ali is Undisputed Champ', *Cleveland Call and Post*, 11 February 1967, 1A. See also: Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, 161-166.

had failed an aptitude test in 1964 and assumed that he would not have to serve. In 1966, however, the Army lowered its conscription standards in order to recruit more troops for the escalating conflict in Vietnam. Ali's test score became a passing one, and he was called to serve. In response, Ali (who had not previously commented on Vietnam) began to openly criticise the war and hinted that he would resist the draft.[81] He was accused of cowardice and draft dodging by many black columnists, but some others admired his stance. Prominent integrationist Bayard Rustin wrote in the *New York Amsterdam News* that Ali's 'courage is more to be admired than vilified – particularly in a period when there is so little consistency between belief and action'. [82] As his draft resistance continued, more black commentators began to 'grant [the] young champion his dues'. [83]

The black press also began to recognise the parallels that Ali was drawing between the anti-war movement and the push for racial equality. His request for exemption from service was officially based upon his status as a Muslim minister, but Ali also asserted that he would not 'go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights…'[84] When mainstream integrationist leaders began to echo these sentiments, the black press followed suit.[85] When Ali was handed a five-year sentence for draft evasion in June 1967, the front pages of some black newspapers leapt to his defence and raised doubts about the impartiality of the 'all white' jury that convicted him.[86] The black press still abhorred Ali's separatist beliefs but they also began to recognise that he was fighting his own battle against a seemingly malevolent white bureaucracy.

Ali's draft resistance prompted black journalists to adopt a more sympathetic attitude toward him, and to begin using 'Cassius Clay' less frequently. Between June 1966 and August 1967, the number of black press articles that referred to Ali

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[81] Ezra, *Making of an Icon*, 120–134.

[82] Bayard Rustin, 'In Defense of Muhammad Ali', *New York Amsterdam News*, 3 June 1967, 14.

[83] Jackie Robinson, 'In Defense of Cassius Clay', *New York Amsterdam News*, 11 March 1967, 17.

[84] Mike Marqusee, *Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1999), 214.

[85] Foremost amongst these leaders was the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, whose 'Beyond Vietnam' speech in April 1967 helped to connect the anti-war and civil rights movements. A month after 'Beyond Vietnam', King specifically commended Ali in one of his sermons: 'no matter what you may think of Mr. Muhammad Ali's religion, you certainly have to admire his courage'.

[86] 'Found Guilty: Clay Gets Five Year Sentence', *Cleveland Call and Post*, 24 June 1967, 1A; 'Ali (Clay) Guilt 'Foregone Conclusion', Says Trial Judge' *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 June 1967, 1.

exclusively as 'Cassius Clay' dropped by more than fifty percent.[87] Black journalists did not necessarily embrace Ali's Muslim name at this point, but they did become less willing to insult him by using the name 'Cassius Clay'. This subtle change in the attitude of the black press is indicative of the complex discursive relationship they maintained with the boxer throughout this period. Like their white counterparts, black journalists disapproved of Ali's allegiance to the Nation of Islam and they refused to use his Muslim name in protest. However, they also exhibited a deeper understanding of the group's place within the broader racial landscape of the United States. As a result, the black press was first to react when the Ali's resistance to the Vietnam War caused a shift in his relationship with the mainstream integration movement.

Conclusion

Just after Ali's death, acclaimed essayist Gerald Early wrote that his long-held fears about the 'over esteeming' of Ali appeared to have been realised.[88] He argued that this situation had been created, at least in part, by an overly simplistic understanding of Ali's anti-establishment credentials.[89] Modern views of Ali as an anti-establishment hero are predominantly founded upon his resistance to white power structures.[90] His refusal to conform to white behavioural norms, his rejection of 'white' religion (Christianity), and his stand against a white government and military are all compelling evidence for this conclusion. Viewing Ali as a thorn in the side of white America is meaningful in many ways, but it also contributes to an incomplete understanding of the late boxer.

This reductive view of Ali also reflects homogenised social memories of the civil rights era. Contemporary remembrances of political activism in the 1960s and 1970s often portray black Americans as being united in the fight to gain freedom from white oppression. Whilst this is a powerful narrative, the reality was far more nuanced. and the complex range of attitudes that Ali elicited from the black and white

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[87] Between June 1966 and August 1967 there were 862 articles containing 'Cassius Clay' *not* 'Muhammad Ali' as compared with 2,131 articles between March 1964 and May 1966.

[88] Gerald Early, 'Muhammad Ali: The King of the Inauthentic', *The Black Scholar,* 21 June 2016, http://www.theblackscholar.org/muhammad-ali-king-inauthentic-gerald-early/. See also: Gerald Early, ed., *I'm a Little Special: The Muhammad Ali Reader*, (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 1998), vii.

[89] Early, "Muhammad Ali: The King of the Inauthentic".

[90] This was a common theme in obituaries of Ali from popular news outlets. See: Matthew Cooper: 'Float Like a Butterfly, Ali (1942-2016)', *Huffpost*, 4 June 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-cooper/float-like-a-butterfly-al_b_10292974.html; Frank Keating, 'Muhammad Ali obituary', *The Guardian*, 4 June 2016, online: https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jun/04/muhammad-ali-obituary.

press is representative of this. The rejection of Ali's name, and the beliefs associated with it, by the black press shows that African Americans were not always in agreement about the best way to pursue racial equality. Recapturing this largely forgotten aspect of civil rights era is vital to understanding not only Muhammad Ali, but also the history of race relations in the USA.

This paper, through a combination of distant and close reading, demonstrates that Ali *was* an anti-establishment figure, but not just for whites – he alienated black Americans too. Both the black and white press deliberately used Ali's non-preferred name, Cassius Clay, to protest the boxer's religious and political positions. White journalists used 'Clay' to mock, ridicule and demean Ali's beliefs, while their colleagues at black newspapers engaged in a more complex debate about his role in the struggle for racial equality. These findings indicate that Ali was as out of favour with black audiences as he was with sections of the white community. This does not mean that Ali alienated all blacks, or even all of those who supported the integration movement.[91] Nor does the dismissal of Ali in the white press mean that all white Americans were disengaged with matters of race. What these readings do show is that public attitudes toward Ali at the height of his career were complex and nuanced. Yet, when Ali died, his social memory was sanitised by a process of selective remembering and forgetting. Critical perspectives on his relationship with the black community were muted, and celebratory memories of his anti-establishment credentials were amplified. Acknowledging this unsettles an enduring and problematic aspect of the Ali myth: the notion that his legacy can be interpreted in a singular, reconcilable way.

[91] See: Michael Ezra, 'How Muhammad Ali Influenced the Civil Rights Movement', *Aljazeera*, 5 June 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/06/muhammad-ali-influenced-civil-rights-movement-160605055700822.html.

Preface to Chapter Three

Chapter Three picks up where Chapter Two left off, by examining the next two turning points identified by the distant reading in Chapter One. This close reading focuses on changing press attitudes toward Ali as a result of his draft resistance. Distant reading indicates that in September 1967, American newspapers began to use Ali's two names more interchangeably. Whilst they were still not favouring Ali's Muslim name, they were also not rejecting it as comprehensively as they had for the previous three years. This period of nominal interchangeableness continued until March 1971, when these publications comprehensively embraced Ali's Muslim name. September 1967 and March 1971 closely correspond with the beginning and end of Ali's exile from professional boxing and his legal battles with the United States Government over his draft status. As was the case in Chapter Two, this chapter includes a brief quantitative outline of shifting newspaper attitudes toward Ali. Predominantly, however, this chapter focuses on the factors that led American newspapers, by March 1971, to soften and then abandon the practice of refusing to call Ali by his chosen name. Close reading reveals that press acceptance of Ali was driven by a unique combination of factors, which included changes to Ali's public persona, and a number of broader, nationwide cultural shifts.

This article was accepted for publication by *The International Journal of the History of Sport* in August 2018. It conforms to the journal's style requirements. It is written in accordance with British spelling and grammar conventions, but uses 'ize' instead of 'ise' endings. Unlike in the journal, however, endnotes have been converted to footnotes. Figure 1 has also been enlarged for improved readability.

Chapter Three

‘Where Cassius Clay Ends, Muhammad Ali Begins’: Sportspeople, Political Activism, and Methodology

Muhammad Ali’s refusal to be drafted into the United States Army in June 1967 led to a conviction for draft evasion, exile from boxing, and a complex response from the newspaper press. Although press reactions to Ali’s draft resistance were overwhelmingly negative, his refusal to fight in Vietnam sowed the seeds for journalists to celebrate him as a hero upon his return to the ring four years later. Press reactions to Ali’s two names (Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali) act as a lens for scrutinizing this attitudinal shift. This investigation involved macro and micro analyses of twelve United States newspapers. First, distant reading techniques were used to reveal distinct temporal patterns in the usage of both names. In September 1967, journalists from these publications began to use Ali’s two names far more interchangeably than they previously had. By March 1971, they had fully embraced Ali’s Muslim name over his birth name. Close reading then revealed how and why these patterns developed: changes to Ali’s persona, as well as broader cultural and political forces, prompted newspaper journalists to accept his chosen name and identity in early 1971.

Keywords: Muhammad Ali, Newspapers, Close Reading, Distant Reading, Politics.

In late 2016, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began kneeling during the pre-game national anthem to draw attention to police brutality and broader issues of oppression against African Americans. As his protest gained attention, commentators drew comparisons to activist athletes – most notably to Muhammad Ali. Dr Harry Edwards, architect of the 1968 revolt of the black athlete, labelled Kaepernick ‘this generation’s Ali.’ [1] The claim was echoed by other black public figures, including LeBron James (NBA athlete), Shannon Sharpe (National Football League [NFL] athlete/commentator), Spike Lee (director/producer), and Jay-Z

[1] Jarrett Bell, ‘Items from Ex-49ers QB Colin Kaepernick Expected to be Displayed by Smithsonian,’ *USA Today*, 22 May 2017, https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2017/05/17/colin-kaepernick-smithsonian-national-museum-african-american-history-culture/101805444/.

(rapper/producer).[2] The comparisons intensified in September 2017 following comments made by President Donald Trump at a Republican Party rally in Huntsville, Alabama. Trump called the kneeling protest 'a total disrespect of our heritage … of everything that we stand for' and called upon team owners to fire any athletes who partook.[3] Trump's comments enflamed public debate and refocused attention on Kaepernick, who was no longer playing in the NFL.

After the Huntsville rally, Ali's widow, Lonnie Ali, told ESPN's SportCenter that her late husband would have been proud of Kaepernick – a sentiment that was reiterated by his daughter Laila.[4] John Carlos, a hero of the Black Power salute at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, also sounded his approval in the wake of Trump's comments, stating that the quarterback's name should be 'spoken alongside the likes of Muhammad Ali.'[5] Kaepernick's connection to Ali was given an even greater air of authority when he received the 2017 *Sports Illustrated* Muhammad Ali Legacy Award.[6]

There are indeed striking parallels between Ali and Kaepernick – particularly in terms of public reaction to their respective protests. Both men were accused of being unpatriotic and disrespectful toward military tradition: Ali for his refusal to serve in the Army, and Kaepernick for failing to participate in a ceremony steeped in military symbolism. Both were subsequently exiled from their respective professions by image-conscious sporting organizations: Ali by various state athletic commissions,

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[2] Steven Ruiz, 'LeBron James Compared Colin Kaepernick to Martin Luther King Jr. and Muhammad Ali,' *USA Today*, 19 November 2017, http://ftw.usatoday.com/2017/11/nfl-nba-lebron-james-colin-kaepernick-blackballed-martin-luther-king-jr-muhammad-ali; Cameron DaSilva, 'Shannon Sharpe Agrees That Colin Kaepernick is this Generation's Muhammad Ali,' *Fox Sports*, 19 May 2017, https://www.foxsports.com/nfl/gallery/colin-kaepernick-shannon-sharpe-muhammad-ali-undisputed-generation-051917; Brennan Williams, 'Spike Lee Says Kaepernick's Protest is Similar to that of Ali,' *Huffington Post*, 2 September 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/spike-lee-colin-kaepernicks-national-anthem-ali-protest_us_57c7315ce4b0a22de093c6ab; Cody Benjamin, 'Jay-Z Says Colin Kaepernick "Put His Name Next to Muhammad Ali" with NFL Protests' *CBSSports*, 28 January, 2018, https://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/jay-z-says-colin-kaepernick-put-his-name-next-to-muhammad-ali-with-nfl-protests/.

[3] Bryan Armen Graham, 'Donald Trump Blasts NFL Anthem Protesters,' *Guardian*, 24 September 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/sep/22/donald-trump-nfl-national-anthem-protests.

[4] ESPN, 'Lonnie Ali: Muhammad Would be Proud of Kapernick,' *ESPN SportsCenter*, 24 October 2016, http://www.espn.com/video/clip?id=17876337; Zahara Hill, 'Laila Ali Commends Colin Kaepernick: "He Knows What He's Talking About,"' *Huffington Post*, 27 September 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/laila-ali-commends-colin-kaepernick-he-knows-what-hes-talking-about_us_57e5cf61e4b08d73b8318ae6.

[5] Alec Nathan, 'John Carlos Likens "Iconic Civil Rights Leader" Colin Kaepernick to Muhammad Ali,' *Bleacher Report*, 11 November 2017, http://bleacherreport.com/articles/2743590-john-carlos-likens-iconic-civil-rights-leader-colin-kaepernick-to-muhammad-ali.

[6] Michael Rosenberg, 'Colin Kaepernick is Recipient of 2017 Sports Illustrated Muhammad Ali Legacy Award,' *Sports Illustrated*, 30 November 2017, https://www.si.com/sportsperson/2017/11/30/colin-kaepernick-muhammad-ali-legacy-award.

and Kaepernick by NFL team owners. However, whilst Ali has come to be almost universally beloved (especially following his death in June 2016), Kaepernick remains a divisive figure.[7]

A number of commentators hypothesized that the American public's displeasure with Kaepernick might soften with time – noting that Ali, too, was once a divisive figure.[8] Ali's transformation from radical outcast to mainstream hero has occupied historians and biographers for decades. Historian Michael Ezra argues that in order for Ali to be accepted into the mainstream of American culture, the public was required to forget much of the controversial racial doctrine he promoted at the height of his career. According to Ezra, Ali was made to appear less dangerous as the result of a deliberate public relations campaign on his behalf, along with a number of broader changes to American society.[9] Fellow Ali biographer Jonathan Eig makes a similar claim: 'Ali had to be declawed to be beloved.'[10] He further hypothesized that the same theory might apply to Kaepernick: 'What happened to Muhammad Ali will happen to Colin Kaepernick and others like him.'[11] Although it is premature to predict how public attitudes toward Kaepernick might change in the future, Muhammad Ali serves as reminder that radical activist athletes can become mainstreamed.

The embrace of Ali by American newspapers was a key facet of his cultural acceptance. The complex array of factors behind this acceptance can be detected in newspaper writing about Ali during his draft resistance between 1967 and 1971. Although historians have written extensively about Ali's battle against the U.S. Army draft, a number of important questions remain regarding the nature and timing of

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[7] An ESPN survey conducted four days after Trump's comments in Huntsville found that 51% of respondents disapproved of Kaepernick's kneeling protest. ESPN states that the survey consulted both fans and non-fans of the NFL, and was demographically representative of gender, race, geographic location, and political affiliation. The survey results also indicate that black Americans were more likely to support the protests than white Americans. See: 'ESPN Survey Shows Americans Interested, Divided on NFL Protests During National Anthem,' *ESPN*, 30 September 2017, http://www.espn.com.au/nfl/story/_/id/20858557/espn-survey-shows-americans-interested-divided-nfl-protests-national-anthem.

[8] Sabrina Siddiqui, 'Trump v the NFL: the Latest Battle in a Long War Over Sports, Race, and Politics,' *Guardian*, 17 October 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/oct/17/trump-colin-kaepernick-nfl-sport-politics-race; Brennan Williams, 'Spike Lee Says'; DaSilva, 'Shannon Sharpe Agrees.'

[9] Michael Ezra, *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 167–193.

[10] Jonathan Eig, 'Black Athletes Are Only Loved When They Are Harmless,' *Slate,* 26 September 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/sports_nut/2017/09/black_athletes_like_ali_and_kaepernick_are_loved_when_harmless.html#lf_comment=738768602.

[11] Ibid.

press attitudes toward him during this period. How did journalists react to Ali's refusal to fight in Vietnam? What broader sociocultural factors shaped journalistic perceptions of Ali during his exile from the ring? When did press attitudes toward Ali's draft resistance change? What drove newspapers to embrace Ali upon his return to boxing? Despite the massive volume of Ali literature, these questions have not been addressed comprehensively.

This article aims to address this gap in analyses of press attitudes toward Ali. To do so, it will analyze articles written about Ali in 12 archived newspapers, digitally accessible via ProQuest Historical Newspapers. This collection includes nine black and three white newspapers, representing a diverse range of press opinions and viewpoints about Ali.[12] Newspapers constitute a body of evidence that can 'bring us close to the varied and changing readings of actual audiences.'[13] In this case, they are useful as publications that shaped and transmitted public discourse about Ali.

This analysis involves macro and micro examinations of two names, Cassius Clay and Muhammad Ali, as lenses for understanding press attitudes toward the boxer. Ali's names carried great racial, religious, and ideological significance, and many writers often chose one, or the other, or both, as a way to signpost their opinion of him. Here, distant reading (macro) and close reading (micro) are used to analyze how American newspaper usage and perceptions of these two names changed throughout the period of his draft resistance. Most readers will be familiar with close reading – its focus upon fine-grain analysis of individual texts is a staple methodology of historical practice.[14] Distant reading, a quantitative methodology that privileges broad perspectives, may be more foreign. Distant reading uses graphs and other visualizations to reveal patterns, trends, and themes across large bodies of literature.[15] For historians, this is a relatively new practice, but one that is garnering increased

[12] White newspapers (3): *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post.* Black newspapers (9): *Atlanta Daily World*, *Baltimore Afro-American*, *Cleveland Call and Post*, *Chicago Defender*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, and *Pittsburgh Courier*.

[13] Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 17. For further discussion on the role of newspapers in sport history and cultural history research see: Jeffrey Hill, 'Anecdotal Evidence: Sport, the Newspaper Press, and History', in Murray G. Phillips (ed.), *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Bob Nicholson, 'Counting Culture; or, How to Read Victorian Newspapers from a Distance,' *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17, no. 2 (2012), 238–246.

[14] Jeffrey Hill, *Sport and the Literary Imagination: Essays in History, Literature, and Sport* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006).

[15] For further discussion of distant reading methodologies see: Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).

attention from scholars who work with large repositories of digitized sources.[16] These methodologies will be used in concert with one another: distant reading will reveal broad, temporal patterns in newspaper usage of Ali's names throughout his draft resistance, while close reading will provide a contextualized and detailed analysis of how and why these patterns developed.

1967–1971: Distant Reading a Transformative Period

Muhammad Ali first announced his intentions to resist the United States Army draft in February 1966 – shortly following the news that he had been reclassified as a 1-A applicant and was eligible for active duty.[17] Initially, Ali appeared to have little knowledge of the conflict, having previously assumed that his double failure on the Selective Service intelligence test would ensure his non-involvement.[18] In the year between his reclassification and his draft date, however, he developed a sophisticated understanding of the war – particularly its connections to racial issues. In March 1967 he famously told a crowd in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky that he would not partake in a war to 'continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over,' and that he was willing to go to jail in defence of that position.[19] Two months later, he refused to take the ceremonial step forward at an Army induction centre in Houston, Texas. He was charged with draft evasion and was immediately stripped of his boxing titles and licences by pernicious athletic authorities. On 20 June, an all-white jury in the District Court for the Southern District of Texas found Ali guilty. Judge Joe Ingraham handed him the maximum sentence: five years in prison and a $10,000 fine.[20]

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[16] See: Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips (eds.), *Sport History in the Digital Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015) for examples of pioneering digital sport history research. See also: the summer 2017 issue of the *Journal of Sport History.* This special edition contains papers that were presented at the 'Doing Sport History in the Digital Present' workshop, which preceded the 2016 North American Society for Sport History (NASSH) conference: Jennifer Sterling, Murray G. Phillips, and Mary McDonald, 'Doing Sport History in the Digital Present,' *Journal of Sport History* 44, no. 2 (2017), 135-145.

[17] Ali's initial statement, given to a journalist during a press conference, was 'I don't have no personal quarrel with those Viet Congs.' It has been frequently misrepresented as either 'I ain't got no quarrel with the Vietcong' or 'No Vietcong ever called me nigger.' The latter of these phrases was in use by anti-war protesters months prior to Ali's draft troubles. See: Stefan Fatsis, 'Did Muhammad Ali Ever Really Say His Famous Quotes About the Viet Cong?' *Slate*, 8 June 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/sports_nut/2016/06/did_muhammad_ali_ever_say_no_viet_cong_ever_called_me_nigger.html.

[18] Jonathan Eig, *Ali: A Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 211.

[19] Ezra, *Making of an Icon*, 124–125

[20] Samuel O. Regalado, '*Clay, aka Ali v. United States* (1971): Muhammad Ali, Precedent, and the Burger Court,' *Journal of Sport History* 34, no. 2 (2007), 171.

Ali spent roughly four years unable to box and embroiled in a series of protracted legal battles before the saga came to a conclusion in mid-1971. Cleared to fight professionally again six months prior, he challenged Joe Frazier for the heavyweight title in March 1971 and had his conviction overturned by the Supreme Court in June the same year. This period between 1967 and 1971 is often referred to as Ali's time in exile. It has assumed central importance in Ali historiography: biographers and historians often position Ali's years in exile from the ring as a transformative period.

Africana Studies scholar Grant Farred, for example, repeatedly foregrounds the boxer's draft resistance as a catalyst for identity change. According to Farred, when Ali refused to be drafted in 1967, 'the name Muhammad Ali came fully into its ideological own: it enunciated its uniquely political resonance and it inscribed the oppressed athlete as a vernacular intellectual.'[21] Farred argues that Ali's draft resistance allowed his views on race and politics to gain increasing cachet outside the sporting arena. He further argues that the conclusion of this period heralded further changes for Ali's cultural identity. According to Farred, Ali's return to boxing in October 1970 and the overturning of his draft conviction in June 1971 prompted his 'slow but definite reintegration back into the mainstream of American cultural life.'[22]

Journalist Leigh Montville's recent book *Sting Like a Bee* focuses exclusively upon Ali's battle against the United States military draft.[23] According to Montville, Ali 'stumbled into his situation and came out the other end a hero.'[24] Ali's draft resistance years are also central to Jonathan Eig's expansive biography: *Ali: A Life*. Eig's book contains 15 chapters devoted to Ali's years in exile, and argues that when he 'refused the draft and [was] banned from boxing his position in society shifted …'[25] Ali emerged from exile, according to Eig, with 'fans who had once despised him' and 'more power than ever outside the ring.'[26] Likewise, Ali's official biographer Thomas Hauser also spent a significant portion of his book examining the boxer's draft resistance saga. Hauser concluded: 'during his exile, Muhammad Ali grew larger than sports. He became a political and social force.'[27] Farred, Eig, Hauser,

[21] Grant Farred, *What's My Name: Black Vernacular Intellectuals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 41.
[22] Ibid., 81.
[23] Leigh Montville, *Sting Like a Bee: Muhammad Ali vs. the United States of America, 1966–1971* (New York: Doubleday, 2017).
[24] Ibid., 9.
[25] Eig, *Ali: A Life*, 276
[26] Ibid., 309, 327.
[27] Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* (London: Pan Books, 1997), 203.

and Montville are certainly not the only authors to have written about Ali's time in exile. There is an expansive catalogue of mostly biographical literature on the late boxer and his draft evasion is a central narrative feature of this collection. They are, however, among a small number of authors who have examined this period of Ali's life from a cultural rather than a biographical perspective.[28]

Analyses of Ali's broader cultural significance often use contemporary media sources to assess how the American public perceived him. Although media sources cannot be expected to provide an exact reflection of their audience, they are nonetheless regularly used by historians and biographers to illustrate public attitudes toward Ali at various stages of his career.[29] Analyzing Ali's representation in the media is, according to historian Michael Oriard, integral to understanding the late boxer's place in the American cultural landscape of the 1960s and 1970s.[30] Oriard argues that public perceptions of Ali were constructed and transmitted 'through television, radio, newspapers, magazines such as *Sports Illustrated,* and closed circuit screenings of his fights.'[31] Of these, content from newspapers constitutes the bulk of contemporary media sources used in biographies or histories of Ali. Despite the importance of media, and the centrality of media reports in Ali historiography, there is a limited body of scholarship that critically assesses the factors that shaped press attitudes toward him.

Newspapers are a much-used primary source by historians, especially sport historians.[32] Not only can these sources provide historians with rich and diverse accounts of past events, they are also easily accessible (especially in the digital age) and are easily transcribed into written histories. More importantly, however, newspapers are also influential cultural texts. Even in the 1960s and 1970s, as television surpassed the printed press as the most popular medium for news broadcasts, newspapers maintained an influential social role as both transmitters and shapers of public opinion.[33] In order to maintain this measure of influence over their

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[28] *Blood Brothers* by Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith, *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon* by Michael Ezra, and *King of the World* by David Remnick also include analyses of Ali's shifting cultural persona. However, these texts focus solely on Ali's life before 1967.

[29] Hill, 'Anecdotal Evidence,' 118.

[30] Michael Oriard, 'Muhammad Ali: The Hero in the Age of Mass Media,' in Elliot Gorn (ed.), *Muhammad Ali: The People's Champion* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 5.

[31] Ibid., 8.

[32] Hill, 'Anecdotal Evidence,' 118.

[33] Leo Bogart, *Press and Public: Who Reads What, When, Where, and Why in American Newspapers* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 1989), 2–6.

readership, many publications moved further away from objective reporting and into more opinionative territory.[34] Many publications applied this tactic to reporting the social issues of the day, in particular race, which 'became the main story for newspapers throughout the country.'[35] There were few bigger race stories during the late 1960s and early 1970s than Ali's refusal to enlist in what he perceived to be a white man's war. The opinionative and comprehensive reporting of American newspapers helped to transmit and shape public perceptions of his opposition to the conflict. Analyzing contemporary press discourse is a vital part of understanding the broader cultural context of Ali's draft resistance.

Despite this, historians have not comprehensively analyzed newspaper attitudes toward Ali during his draft resistance: none of the Ali historians or biographers cited above do so, for example. There is a limited body of historical scholarship on newspaper representations of Ali; however, much of this focuses predominantly on individual publications. Papers written by Maureen Smith, Michael Oriard, and Stephen Townsend analyzed perceptions of Ali in *Muhammad Speaks*, *Sports Illustrated*, and the *Louisville Defender*, respectively.[36] Two Masters theses have also addressed newspaper representations of Ali. Thomas S. Newman's 1981 dissertation focused upon articles written about Ali in the *New York Times* between 1960 and 1967.[37] Daniel Bennett Coy's 2004 thesis also scrutinized the *New York Times*, along with the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*.[38] Each of these works is an important contribution to our understanding of press perceptions of Ali but there are still critical gaps – most notably the absence of black publications. Indeed, historians have largely ignored black press perceptions of Ali.[39] By analyzing 12 publications, including nine black

[34] Aurora Wallace, *Newspapers and the Making of Modern America: A History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 156.

[35] James Brian McPherson, *Journalism at the End of the American Century: 1965–Present* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 8.

[36] Maureen Smith, '*Muhammad Speaks* and Muhammad Ali: Intersections of Sport and the Nation of Islam in the 1960s,' in Timothy Chandler and Tara Magdalinski (eds.), *With God on their Side: Sport in Service of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002); Oriard, 'Muhammad Ali'; Stephen Townsend, 'From "Pitifully Ignorant" to "People's Champion": Shifting Perceptions of Muhammad Ali in the *Louisville Defender* 1964-1971, *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 115, no. 4 (2017).

[37] T.S. Newman, 'Muhammad Ali nee Cassius Clay: The *New York Times*' coverage of Muhammad Ali from September 6 1960 to April 30 1967,' (MA diss., School of Journalism, University of Montana, 1981).

[38] D.B. Coy, 'Imagining Dissent: Muhammad Ali, Daily Newspapers, and the State, 1966–1971' (MA diss., Department of History, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2004).

[39] Black newspapers are defined here as publications that identify with the traditions and aims of the black press. The black press is a diverse group of publications, and each newspaper is/was shaped

newspapers, this study seeks to build a more comprehensive understanding of how the printed press shaped and transmitted attitudes toward Ali during his draft resistance.

Articles written about Ali between September 1967 and March 1971 will be analyzed. These temporal boundaries were determined by an initial distant reading of 37,911 newspaper articles which compared the frequency with which Ali's two names, Muhammad Ali and Cassius Clay, appeared in 12 newspapers over a 15-year period.[40] This analysis, using quantitative analysis techniques (distant reading), reveals that journalists embraced 'Muhammad Ali' over 'Cassius Clay' in March 1971, nearly seven years after the boxer's very public name change. As shown in Figure 1, after March 1971 the usage of Cassius Clay declined dramatically, whilst Muhammad Ali rose in an equally rapid fashion. This graph also shows a distinct period (shaded) leading up to the point of acceptance, during which journalists appeared to use the two names far more interchangeably than they had previously.

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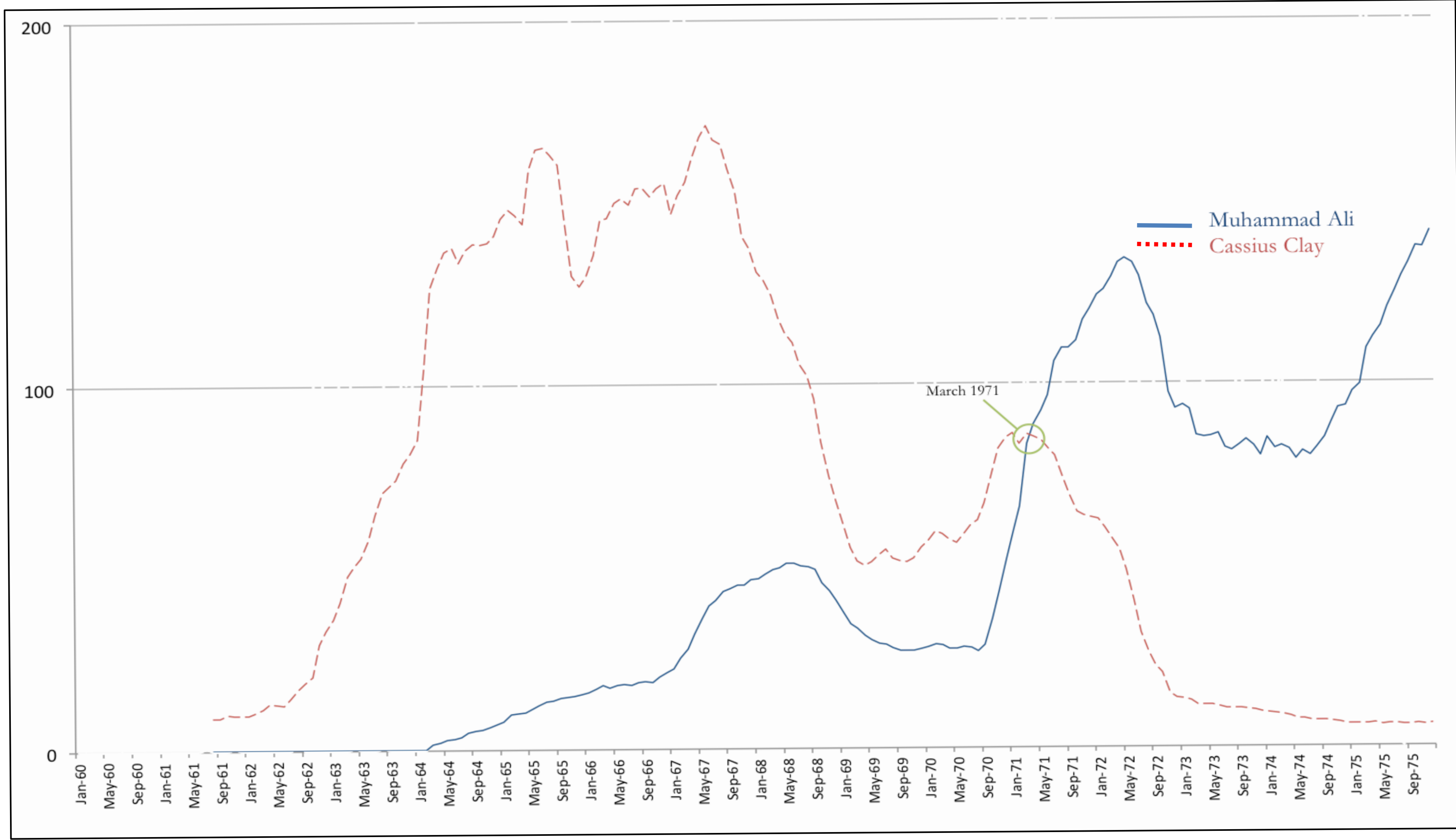
by a variety of ideological and institutional factors. However, during the period dealt with in this article, there were some important commonalities between all black publications that should be noted. A black newspaper might broadly be defined as a newspaper written by black journalists, for black readers. Black journalists, particularly during and after the civil rights era, often wrote for white publications but white journalists rarely, if ever, wrote for black newspapers. The white press cannot be so neatly defined, mainly because white newspapers did not self-identify as *white* newspapers (they did not have to). In this context, white newspapers might also be called 'mainstream' newspapers. Michael Huspek argues that the relationship between the black and white presses was 'oppositional' – whereby the white press was seen as 'A' and the black press positioned itself in opposition as 'not-A.' See: Michael Huspek, 'Black Press, White Press, and Their Opposition: The Case of the Police Killing of Tyisha Miller,' *Social Justice* 31, no.1/2 (2004), 218.

[40] This data presented in this visualization was gathered by using the Optical Character Recognition (OCR) search features on ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Using this feature the authors were able to search separately for each name in all 12 newspapers in order to identify every article that contained either name between January 1960 and December 1975. By counting the number of articles month-by-month the authors were able to construct a line graph that compared the relative frequency with which each name appeared in these publications. For a more detailed discussion of distant reading methodologies, see: Murray G. Phillips, Gary Osmond and Stephen Townsend, 'A Bird's-eye View of the Past: Digital History, Distant Reading and Sport History,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015), 1725–1740.

Figure 1: Number of articles containing “Muhammad Ali” vs. “Cassius Clay” (moving-average-trend-line): 1960 - 1975



Cassius Clay was still the preferred name from September 1967 to February 1971, but journalists used Muhammad Ali more than twice as often as they had in the three preceding years.[41] This period of relative fluidity in the usage of Ali's two names warrants further scrutiny because it appears that, during this time, newspaper journalists were reassessing their attitudes toward Ali's chosen name and its associated identity.

The significance of this distant reading and its findings is predicated upon the symbolic power of Ali's two names. The connection between Ali's two names and his public identity has been a recurring motif in previous literature on the boxer. Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. changed his name to Muhammad Ali on 6 March 1964 – affirming his allegiance to Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam.[42] Farred argues that whilst this act of renaming had personal significance for Ali, it was also a 'political event':

> … what Ali demands is not only the right to name himself, but the right to be recognized by that name. He wants his new name, and the reconstructed identity it signals, to be the name used.[43]

Both Ali's name and his reconstructed identity were fundamentally linked to the Nation of Islam – a group that promoted black nationalism and racial separatism. Many Americans refused to call Ali by his Muslim name as a way of protesting his belonging to the group and the beliefs it espoused. Ali's two names were thus sites of ideological conflict, with the rejection or acceptance of his Muslim name becoming a litmus test for attitudes toward the integration movement, black respectability, religion, and military service.

This ideological conflict played out in many different ways and occasionally manifested as physical violence. Floyd Patterson, an avowed integrationist and Christian, fought Ali in November 1965 with the promise of removing the

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[41] Between March 1964 and August 1967, Muhammad Ali was used 16% of the time compared to 41% between September 1967 and February 1971. Between March 1964 and August 1967, Cassius Clay was used 84% of the time compared to 59% between September 1967 and February 1971.

[42] Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith, *Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship Between Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X* (New York: Basic Books, 2016) 216-220. It is worthwhile noting that Ali did not legally change his name – Kentucky law did not require it at the time.

[43] Farred, *What's My Name*, 28–29.

heavyweight title from the 'Black Muslim influence.'[44] Patterson pointedly refused to use Ali's Muslim name in the lead up to the fight and positioned himself as the champion of moderate black America. Ali seethed, and called Patterson an 'Uncle Tom' and 'white American' as he demolished him over 12 rounds.[45] This radical versus moderate narrative assumed even greater vehemence in February 1967 when Ernie Terrell challenged Ali for the title. Terrell was even more explicit than Patterson in his refusal to acknowledge Ali's Muslim name. After nearly three years of battling with the press, public, and his peers over his name, and a looming induction into the Army, Ali was in no mood to mince words with Terrell:

> My name is Muhammad Ali and you will announce it right there in the center of that ring after the fight if you don't do it now … you just acting just like an old Uncle Tom, another Floyd Patterson.[46]

Ali pummelled Terrell and, as if the physical beating was insufficient to make his point, he grunted 'what's my name?' while raining punches upon the challenger.[47]

The conflict over Ali's names also manifested in newspaper columns across the nation. This battleground may have lacked the explosive action of the ring but newspaper rejection of Ali's name was public, persistent, and pervasive. Like Patterson and Terrell, many American print journalists referred to Ali by his birth name, calling him Cassius Clay, Clay, Cassius, Cash, or a myriad of other combinations. Distant reading (Figure 1) indicates that this practice was at its height in the years directly following the announcement of Ali's name change in 1964 before undergoing a dramatic shift in September 1967.[48] According to Figure 1, the years between September 1967 and March 1971 were a particularly complex stage in the ideological conflict over Ali's two names. Newspaper journalists appear to have spent roughly three and a half years re-evaluating their attitudes toward the boxer's Muslim name before dramatically shifting toward an acceptance of the name in March 1971.

[44] Eig, *Ali: A Life*, 204.
[45] Ibid.
[46] 'Alì [sic] – What's My Name? Original audio – Rare,' YouTube [00:54 – 01:01], accessed 4 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu2bW70K6JE.
[47] Farred, *What's My Name*, 63.
[48] See for further reading: Stephen Townsend, Murray G. Phillips, and Gary Osmond, 'Remembering the Rejection of Muhammad Ali: Identity, Civil Rights and Social Memory,' *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018), 267–288.

Importantly, these dates correspond closely with events that bookended Ali's draft resistance: his official refusal to be drafted in April 1967 and conviction for draft evasion in June; his return to boxing in late 1970 and his March 1971 bout against Joe Frazier; and the overturn of his draft evasion conviction in June 1971. Although distant reading indicates that these events affected press perceptions of Ali, a deeper analysis is needed to interrogate how and why these discursive changes occurred. A close reading of individual articles focuses on the cultural and political factors that prompted American print journalists to reassess their rejection of Ali's Muslim name in 1967, and to embrace the name and its associated identity in March 1971.

This close reading analyzes press perceptions of Ali at a personal and social level. It will first interrogate how and why Ali's draft resistance prompted journalists to see him as a more courageous and sympathetic figure. This is followed by an analysis of key geopolitical and cultural changes that occurred during this period, which reframed press perceptions of Ali's racial and political beliefs. This twofold analysis does not suggest that Ali's personal identity can be separated from its broader cultural context. Rather, it is designed to emphasize that the mainstream embrace of Ali was driven not only by modifications to the ways that the press saw Ali himself but also by changes to American society more broadly. Ali's principled stand against the war coalesced with cultural and political transformations in the USA – most notably a decline in public support for the Vietnam War and the rise of black power. The combination of these personal and cultural factors enabled American newspapers to see Ali in a different light, and eventually led to them embracing his chosen name and identity in March 1971.

Close Reading Newspaper Attitudes

In March 1966, just a month after famously stating his intention to resist the draft, Ali made note of his changing relationship with the printed press. He told reporters in Toronto (he was there to fight George Chuvalo) about his two-part scrapbook of news clippings:

on one side is the sporting write-ups. On the other side is the controversial write-ups. Those controversial write-ups are getting bigger than the sporting write-ups all the time.[49]

One year later, it appeared to Ali that press interest in his life outside the ring had intensified even further: ''I've left the sports pages. I've gone onto the front pages.'[50] Ali was at the epicentre of a seismic shift for relationships between athletes and the press; according to Gerald Early, 'he changed the way both the public and the press related to black athletes.'[51] Figures like Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, Arthur Ashe, and Althea Gibson had paved the way for black athletes to become public voices on social issues. Ali and his contemporaries in the 'revolt of the black athlete,' however, heralded a new wave of sportspeople that were just as newsworthy for their social views as their physical achievements.[52]

A clear sign of growing press discussion of Ali's social views was the increased frequency with which his Muslim name appeared in newspapers between September 1967 and March 1971. Journalists for black publications were slightly more amenable to the Muslim name than their white colleagues. Throughout this period, they began to use the two names almost interchangeably: 56% of articles contained 'Cassius Clay' and 44% of articles used 'Muhammad Ali.' In many black press articles, Ali's Islamic name appeared alongside his birth name, and even took precedence in some cases. He was 'Muhammad Ali, the former Cassius Clay' in the *Philadelphia Tribune*; 'Cassius Clay now Muhammad Ali' in the *New York Amsterdam News*; 'Cassius Clay now known as Muhammad Ali' in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*; and 'Muhammad Ali who has a slave name of Cassius Clay' in the *Atlanta Daily World*.[53]

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[49] Montville, *Sting Like a Bee*, 122.

[50] Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, 167.

[51] Gerald Early, 'Muhammad Ali: Flawed Rebel with a Cause,' in David K. Wiggins (ed.), *Out of the Shadows: a Biographical History of African American Athletes* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008), 276.

[52] See for further reading on the growth of athlete activism in 1968: David K. Wiggins, '"The Year of Awakening": Black Athletes, Racial Unrest and the Civil Rights Movement of 1968,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 9, no. 2 (1992), 188–208.

[53] Lawrence Geller, 'Muhammad Ali, nee Cassius Clay Says Non-Violence is Right Way,' *Philadelphia Tribune*, 12 September 1967, 1; Leslie Matthews, 'The Sports Whirl,' *New York Amsterdam News*, 9 November 1968, 34; 'Brother Ali in Brand New Bag as Stage Actor,' *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 30 October 1969, E3; Marion Jackson, 'The Truth Shall Make You Free,' *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 March 1970, 7.

In comparison, white newspapers preferred Ali's chosen name over his birth name 33% of time, as compared with 10% in the preceding three years. White publications also began to use his names in conjunction with one another, albeit to a lesser extent than their black counterparts. The *Los Angeles Times* called him 'Muhammad Ali (nee Cassius Clay);' the *Washington Post* introduced him as 'Cassius Clay, known as Muhammad Ali to his Muslim brothers;' and the *New York Times*, whose longstanding editorial policy was to reject the Muslim name until Ali legally changed it, referred to him as 'Muhammad Ali, also known as Cassius Clay.'[54]

This period of appellative fluidity was a precursor to the total acceptance of Ali by the press. Between September 1967 and March 1971, a number of discursive factors coalesced, which led to the press fully embracing Ali's name and associated identity. Some of these factors were of Ali's own making and others were not. Ali's steadfast resistance to the Army draft and his treatment by the government, boxing authorities, and the Nation of Islam made him a more sympathetic figure in the eyes of the press. There were also broader geopolitical and cultural factors at play. Declining support for the Vietnam War and the rise of black power ideology helped to normalize some of Ali's radical beliefs, which made him a more palatable figure. The following close reading will examine how press perceptions of Ali changed as a result of these personal and sociocultural factors.

Personal Factors: Ali, the Martyr

The seeds of increased press acceptance of Ali emerged in the aftermath of his June 1967 conviction for draft evasion. Apart from a few articles in the black press that raised doubts about the impartiality of the all-white jury, the immediate reaction to the conviction was very subdued.[55] Most writers accepted it as an inevitable outcome – after all, Ali himself had openly admitted that he had broken the 'laws of the land.'[56] However, as the seriousness of Ali's situation became more apparent, an attitudinal shift took place. He was jail-bound, unemployed, but remained committed to his

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[54] Frank Finch, 'Fighters are Nice Guys: There's no Hate in Patterson,' *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October 1967, B1; 'Before He Goes to Jail: Clay Proposes Title Fight-Off,' *Washington Post*, 19 May 1968, C7; 'Silent Majority Grows by Two in Clay Family,' *New York Times*, 23 August 1970, S15.

[55] Darrell Mack, 'Ali Trial Opens Today,' *Chicago Daily Defender*, 19 June 1967, 26; 'Found Guilty: Clay Gets Five Year Sentence,' *Cleveland Call and Post*, 24 June 1967, 1A.

[56] Red Smith, 'Clay Violated Law, Verdict Inevitable,' *Washington Post*, 23 June 1967, D5; 'Ali (Clay) Guilt "Foregone Conclusion", Says Trial Judge,' *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 June 1967, 1.

beliefs. As a result, columnists from both black and white publications began to tweak their narrative.

Exile

In this revised narrative, Ali's conviction for draft evasion, combined with the revocation of his state boxing licenses and the confiscation of his passport, made him an exile in his own country. Most writers maintained their opposition to the racial and religious principles that had landed him in this situation, but some began to admit that his steadfast adherence to these principles entitled him to a measure of respect. Red Smith, whose critiques of Ali were frequently printed in the *Washington Post*, conceded that he was 'entitled to ungrudging respect, even though legally he may be liable to severe penalties.'[57] Jackie Robinson, who had been one of Ali's most ardent critics in the black press, wrote: 'In my view, the deposed champion has demonstrated that he is fighting for a principle. While I cannot agree with it, I respect him sincerely.'[58] Even the *Los Angeles Times* was willing to grant Ali a modicum of respect. Over the previous three years, the newspaper's two most prominent sportswriters, Sid Ziff and Jim Murray, had used their respective columns to savage 'Clay' or 'Cassius' at every opportunity.[59] An article written by Ziff two days after Ali's conviction suggests a subtle change in demeanour. Buried within an opinion piece that was still mostly critical of Ali, Ziff conceded for the first time the legitimacy of the boxer's 'desire to be called Muhammad Ali, *which is his right.*'[60] Ali's willingness to sacrifice his freedom and earning potential for his religious beliefs allowed journalists to re-cast him in a more courageous light. This enabled him to develop what Michael Ezra calls an aura of 'moral authority' and was an important step toward press acceptance of his name and identity.[61]

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[57] Smith, 'Clay Violated Law,' D5.

[58] Jackie Robinson, 'Heroism and Tragedy of Muhammad Ali,' *New York Amsterdam News*, 14 October 1967, 15.

[59] See the following for selected examples of the critiques offered by *Los Angeles Times* journalists between 1964 and 1967: Jim Murray, 'The Sheik of Araby,' *Los Angeles Times*, 12 March 1964, B1, B3; Sid Ziff, 'Clay the Dreamer', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1965, B3.

[60] Sid Ziff, 'Slave Name?' *Los Angeles Times*, 22 June 1967, B3 (our emphasis).

[61] Ezra, *The Making of an Icon*, 120–134.

Excommunication from the Nation of Islam

This sympathetic visage was enhanced in April 1969 when Elijah Muhammad excommunicated Ali from the Nation of Islam after he suggested to Howard Cosell that he would consider stepping back into the ring in order to recoup some significant financial losses. Officially, Elijah Muhammad decried sport as an immoral pursuit but had made an exception for the young Clay, as he had hoped to use the boxer's fame to promote the Nation of Islam.[62] When Ali was forced out of the fight game, Elijah Muhammad encouraged him to focus on his role as a Muslim minister. He therefore saw Ali's hypothetical return to the ring as a personal betrayal, as well as an ideological one. Elijah Muhammad sent his followers a clear message through the sect's newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*:

> THIS STATEMENT IS TO TELL THE WORLD THAT WE THE MUSLIMS ARE NOT WITH MR. MUHAMMAD ALI …[63]

In the bulletin, Elijah Muhammad announced that Ali was relegated to 'Class F' status and, as such, would not be able to see or speak with other members for one year.[64] One week later, he also stripped Ali of his Muslim name.[65]

The press received the forced removal of Ali's Muslim name enthusiastically. In April and May 1969, both black and white journalists increased their usage of Cassius Clay by around 10%.[66] However, unlike in previous years, journalists did not use the name to belittle or provoke Ali. The loss of the name he prized so highly was the most visible symbol of his expulsion from the Nation of Islam, and was seen by many journalists as further evidence that the young boxer was being treated harshly not only by the government, but by those he considered his closest allies. Furthermore, Ali's expulsion from the Nation of Islam did not mean that he had

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[62] Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers,* 21, 89, 234.

[63] Dave Potter, 'Clamp New Lid on Ali Clash with Muslims: Officials Won't Explain Why He Was Ousted,' *Chicago Daily Defender,* 1 April 1969, 3. Emphasis in the original.

[64] 'Cassius Clay Stripped of "Ali" for One Year,' *Los Angeles Times*, 6 April 1969, 8.

[65] Thomas A. Johnson, 'Muhammad Ali Loses His Title to the Muslims,' *New York Times*, 20 April 1969, E8.

[66] Usage of Cassius Clay rose to 75% in white newspapers (compared to an average of 67% throughout the period) and to 67% in black newspapers (compared to an average of 56% throughout the period).

abandoned its controversial beliefs. Ali still believed in racial separatism and constantly told the press of his desire to be re-instated.[67]

Newspaper journalists could have been forgiven for indulging their sense of *schadenfreude* when they wrote about Ali's excommunication. Instead, the overwhelming motif that emerged from their coverage of the event was that of injustice. Ali had sacrificed his freedom and earning potential to stand by the Nation of Islam, and it appeared now that they were casting him out in his hour of need. Newspapers covered the events in a relatively subdued fashion but many writers noted it was Ali's commitment to the Nation of Islam that resulted in his ban from boxing in the first place.[68] The *Philadelphia Tribune*'s censure of the group was more direct: 'he rejected war because he is a sincere Muslim, he is not being treated fairly by Elijah Muhammad.'[69] The *Chicago Defender* also noted, rather pointedly, that Elijah Muhammad issued the notice of Ali's expulsion from his 'mansion' in 'affluent Kenwood.'[70] Ali, on the other hand, received the news at his modest home in the far less luxurious suburb of Avalon Park, on Chicago's south side.

Even Jim Murray of the *Los Angeles Times* seemed willing to see Ali as a victim in this situation. As noted previously, Murray provided arguably the most caustic and sustained criticism of Ali throughout the early years of his career, but following the boxer's excommunication he wrote admiringly:

> They took away his prayer rug, the government has him in a corner where he can't apparently jab his way out, but life still can't lay a glove on him. He keeps surfacing in another corner of the ring as usual, jeering, 'Yah! Missed me again!'[71]

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[67] See for selected examples of Ali's continued advocacy of Nation of Islam doctrine following his excommunication: Cragg Hines, 'Muhammad Ali Praises Wallace and Separatism,' *Chicago Daily Defender,* 15 March 1969, 2; 'Ali Repents, Will Forget Comeback,' *Washington Post*, 1 April 1969, B1; Les Matthews, 'Ali Cools Boxing Aims After Elijah Crack Down,' *New York Amsterdam News*, 5 April 1969, 50.

[68] 'Clay Suspended By Black Muslims,' *Washington Post,* 6 April 1969 53; Johnson, 'Muhammad Ali Loses His Title'; 'Muslims Deny Expulsion of Ali,' *Baltimore Afro-American*, 5 April 1969, 6; Chuck Porter, 'Cassius Wants to Fight: What L.A. Citizens Think,' *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 10 April 1969, A8; 'Muslims Suspend Clay, He's Cassius Clay Again,' *New York Amsterdam News*, 12 April 1969, 1; Les Matthews, 'Ali Cools Boxing Aims After Elijah Crackdown,' *New York Amsterdam News*, 5 April 1969, 50.

[69] 'Muhammad Ali's Dilemma,' *Philadelphia Tribune*, 1 April 1969, 7.

[70] Potter, 'Clamp New Lid On Ali Clash With Muslims.'

[71] Jim Murray, 'The Aka Clay Show,' *Los Angeles Times*, 13 November 1969, F1.

Ali appeared to be wrapped in a double fold of persecution and many journalists came to admire his ability to endure punishment not only at the hands of the government but also by those he considered his closest friends.

Sociocultural and Political Factors: A Changing Nation

Although Ali's martyrdom played an important role in shifting journalistic attitudes in his favour, this was not the only factor at play. A series of broader geopolitical and cultural developments also contributed to the press acceptance of Ali's Muslim name and the identity it represented. These changes helped to make Ali's radical beliefs appear more moderate in the eyes of the press. The majority of writers, from both black and white publications, remained averse to his Muslim name because of its relationship with a religious and racial doctrine they perceived to be extremist. For the press to embrace the name, one of two things needed to happen. Either Ali would have to change his radical beliefs, or these beliefs would somehow have to become more acceptable to mainstream sensibilities.

Ali did not become less radical between September 1967 and March 1971. He continued to promote racial separatism and black nationalism into the late 1970s, and it is unlikely that his acceptance by the press in March 1971 was due to any moderation on his behalf.[72] Rather, the United States experienced a range of broader geopolitical and cultural shifts that made Ali's beliefs appear more acceptable. Foremost among these were the decline in public support for the Vietnam War and the rise of black power ideology. These interrelated sociocultural and political factors helped to normalize some aspects of Ali's radical persona, and made him more palatable to moderate American newspapers. Newspaper coverage of Ali during this period also indicates a broader shift in sport journalism. Sportswriters were further pushed to contextualize Ali not merely in athletic terms but also within the cultural and political movements of the day. When Ali migrated from the sport pages to the front pages, he dragged many of America's sportswriters along with him.

[72] An interview that Ali gave to *Playboy* magazine in 1975 is particularly clear evidence of this. In it, he discusses the merits of racial segregation and also outlined his belief that African Americans who intermarry should be punishable by death. See: Alex Haley, 'Playboy Interview: Muhammad Ali,' in Gerald Early (ed.), *I'm a Little Special: A Muhammad Ali Reader* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 1998.)

An Unpopular War

When Ali first announced his opposition to the Vietnam War in 1966, public sentiment toward the conflict was generally positive. Gallup polling shows that in March 1966, 59% of Americans approved of sending troops to the region. As the war become bloodier and more complex, however, public support declined steadily.[73] By 1969, a majority of Americans believed that military involvement in Vietnam was a mistake, and by early 1971 only 31% of the population supported the war.[74] The anti-war movement gained momentum throughout the country and increasing numbers of young Americans evaded the draft.[75] Ali's anti-war stance was radical in 1967 but became increasingly commonplace by 1971.

There were also more nuanced factors involved. General disenchantment with the conflict undoubtedly helped to vindicate Ali's stand but it is clear that the racial elements of his draft resistance were also influential. From the outset, Ali attacked the government for forcing black Americans to fight on its behalf whilst still denying them full legal and cultural enfranchisement. Ali was by no means the only black public figure to draw attention to this hypocrisy, but he was one of the first.[76] He was soon joined by other, more mainstream, figures.[77] The most significant of these was the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr., who spoke out against the war just one week after Ali's famed Louisville anti-war speech on 28 March 1967.[78] When the most visible leader of the comparatively moderate integration movement also began to oppose the war, the radical edge was taken off Ali's draft resistance. Ali's refusal to fight in Vietnam still riled many journalists, but his actions were now in the vicinity of moderate social activism.[79]

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[73] According to Gallup polls, the percentage of Americans who 'believe it was a mistake to send troops to fight in Vietnam' grew steadily throughout the war; March 1966: 25%, January 1967: 32%, February 1968: 46%, January 1969: 52%, January 1970: 57%, January 1971: 59%. See: Mark Gillespie, 'Americans Look Back at Vietnam War,' *Gallup News*, 17 November 2000, http://news.gallup.com/poll/2299/americans-look-back-vietnam-war.aspx.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Simon Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement* (Routledge: New York, 2012), 37–47; Wallace Turner, 'Criticism and Evasion Grow With Unpopularity of the Vietnam War,' *New York Times*, 14 May, 1969, 20.

[76] Christine Knauer, *Let Us Fight As Free Men* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 1–12.

[77] Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 80–104.

[78] Ezra, *Making of an Icon*, 124; Eig, *Ali: A Life*, 238.

[79] The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's 'Beyond Vietnam' speech came just a few days after Ali's speech in Louisville (see note 41 and associated text). King's speech echoed many of the same themes and is widely seen as a watershed moment in the coalescence of the civil rights and anti-war movements.

Anger over the hypocrisy of the war was compounded by the toll that the war was exacting from black Americans. It had been common knowledge for some time that the Selective Service overwhelmingly targeted males from low-income families – a population that included a high percentage of young black men.[80] Although this situation had improved somewhat by 1967, black men still represented a disproportionate number of troops sent to Vietnam, and they were also overrepresented on the casualty lists.[81]

These issues resonated more strongly with black writers than with their white colleagues. Some white newspapers critiqued elements of the American involvement in Vietnam, but most steered clear of domestic racial issues. This is unsurprising given their long-running reluctance to meaningfully engage with race and civil rights stories.[82] The black press, on the other hand, could not ignore these issues. The same newspapers that had spent the past three years attacking Ali's racial beliefs now appeared to have found some common ground with him. They too began to criticize the moral inconsistency of sending black men overseas to die for their country whilst denying them freedom at home.[83] The *New York Amsterdam News* published the views of civil rights icon and syndicated columnist Bayard Rustin:

> I cannot ignore the overrepresentation of black people on the casualty lists of Vietnam in the midst of our continuing underrepresentation in the decision making processes at home.[84]

In the same vein, the *Philadelphia Tribune* printed a syndicated Jackie Robinson column that called for war on two fronts: 'We must defeat Communism in Vietnam. And fascistic bigotry at home.'[85] The *Chicago Defender* was less guarded, taking 'white America' to task for demanding 'unprecedented' sacrifices from black soldiers

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[80] Lawrence A. Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War: Civil Rights and Vietnam in the African-American Press* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 60-72.
[81] The figures through to June 1971 show that African Americans constituted nearly 13% of casualties in Vietnam despite only making up 10% of military personnel. See: Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War*, 62.
[82] Jack Nelson, 'The Civil Rights Movement: A Press Perspective,' *Human Rights* 28, no. 4 (2001): 5.
[83] Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War*, 156-185.
[84] Bayard Rustin, 'Vietnam: Where I Stand,' *New York Amsterdam News*, 20 May 1967.
[85] Jackie Robinson, 'Fascistic Bigotry at Home Drives Negroes into Army', *Philadelphia Tribune*, 3 June 1967.

whilst 'engag[ing] in the sordid business of denying the Negro his full citizenship rights.'[86]

These voices in the press vindicated Ali's position. When Ali first announced his opposition to the war, most American journalists were uncomfortable with both the act of draft resistance and the beliefs that Ali used to justify it. The press and public maintained their discomfort with Ali's racial and religious beliefs, but when moderate integrationist leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, and Jackie Robinson also began to criticize the war, they began to see his opposition to the conflict as more acceptable.

The Rise of Black Power

Another significant cultural shift was required for mainstream American journalists to become more comfortable with the racial beliefs that underpinned Ali's activism. Public perceptions of these beliefs moderated as black power ideology rose to prominence from the end of the 1960s. Lyndon Johnson's tenure as President closed with a number of civil rights promises unfulfilled and, despite positive early indications, Richard Nixon showed little genuine interest in carrying on the work of his predecessor.[87] For many black Americans, the Vietnam War not only appeared to be distracting politicians and legislators from civil rights issues but also served as a reminder of the apparent intractability of the struggle for racial equality. Even as blacks died for their country in disproportionate numbers, white America still appeared unwilling to fully embrace racial equality. Frustration with this state of affairs gave rise to more radical and militant forms of activism: collectively referred to as black power.

While black power ideologies have existed in some form since the 1850s, the 'classical era' of the movement came between 1966 and 1975.[88] Historian Peniel E. Joseph describes this period as being 'marked in the cultural imagination by race riots, gun-toting black militants, and the cultural flourishes of bold Afros, African dashikis, and militant poetry.'[89]Although Joseph notes that the movement was not homogenous, with different groups exhibiting ideological and organizational nuances,

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[86] 'The Black Soldier,' *Chicago Defender*, 19 January 1967, 20.

[87] Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War,* 156–185.

[88] Peniel E. Joseph, 'Rethinking the Black Power Era,' *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009), 711. See also: Stephen Tuck, 'We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left off,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 4 (2008), 637-654.

[89] Joseph, 'Rethinking the Black Power Era,' 708.

there was a prevailing characteristic that tied these groups together.[90] Black power organizations were unified by their membership of young black activists who were willfully more aggressive, and less accommodating, than their integrationist forebears. Many were attracted to black power's more assertive tactics because they believed that the process of integration was taking too long. Others questioned whether assimilation into white society was a desirable goal in the first place.[91]

Against this changing backdrop, compelled by the circumstances of his exile, Ali intensified his focus on black issues. When the *Chicago Defender* asked him in late 1967 if he would prefer to return to boxing, Ali replied: 'No sir … What's there to miss about it? I'm doing more important things.'[92] He spoke on college campuses, at rallies, and on television, in an effort to transform himself into a legitimate voice in the national conversation about racial issues. Ali had always considered himself a 'race-man' but most journalists had dismissed his beliefs as bizarre at best, and dangerous at worst.[93] The rise of black power organizations re-oriented these perceptions by providing journalists with a new yardstick against which to measure Ali.

Before the rise of black power, journalists used the integration movement as their main point of reference when assessing Ali's racial beliefs. Compared to the non-violent, Christian accommodationists who made up the integration movement, Ali and the Nation of Islam appeared extreme. The rise of black power forced journalists to re-evaluate these perceptions. As Coy argues: 'Ali's social message, although radical, appeared moderate compared to the calls to action of the Revolutionary Action Movement or the Black Panther Party.'[94] Much of the apprehensiveness felt by the press regarding black power was due to the willingness of some groups to employ violence as a political tool.[95] In contrast, Ali and the Nation of Islam appeared far less threatening. The Nation of Islam was not a pacifist organization – the existence of a fearsome paramilitary group known as the Fruit of Islam is evidence enough of that. However, the violent tendencies of the Nation of

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[90] Ibid.

[91] Peniel E. Joseph, 'Black Liberation Without Apology: Reconceptualizing the Black Power Movement,' *The Black Scholar* 31, no. 3-4 (2001): 2–10.

[92] 'Ali Too Busy Preaching to Miss Being Boxing Champ,' *Chicago Defender*, 16 December 1967, 17.

[93] Townsend et al., 'Remembering the Rejection of Muhammad Ali.'

[94] Coy, 'Imagining Dissent,' 6.

[95] Thomas L. Jeffers, 'When the Civil Rights Movement Was News,' *Commentary* 115, no. 5 (2003), 52-56.

Islam were relatively insulated: violence was more commonly meted out upon insubordinate members than upon those outside the sect.[96] By comparison, many other groups advocated armed revolution, obtained firearms, and organized destructive riots as part of their political program. Some even carried out acts of domestic terrorism.[97]

Ali condemned these acts, which played well in the press, particularly as black power violence became increasingly common. In September 1967 the *Washington Post* reported that Ali had likened rioting black militants to 'bulls running headlong into a locomotive.'[98] A few days later, the front page of the *Pittsburgh Courier* carried an even clearer rebuke from the deposed champion. When asked about Stokely Carmichael, who at the time was the nation's most prominent black power figure, Ali replied: 'I believe there is sincerity in his heart. However, I don't believe violence is the answer. Shooting, looting and burning are working against the Negro.'[99] The headline of this article referred to Ali as 'Muhammad Ali, Nee Cassius Clay' – implying that Ali's promotion of non-violence was so pleasing to the editors that they were willing to recognize the legitimacy of his Muslim name.

Newspapers further emphasized Ali's non-militant credentials by drawing attention to his conduct since his conviction for draft evasion. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* reminded its readers that the exiled champion did not advocate violence: 'I am not protesting the draft by jumping from windows, or leaving the country, or burning effigies of the President …'[100] The printed press positioned Ali's draft resistance as a comparatively peaceful act of black power, and encouraged the American public to see him as less extreme than the likes of Carmichael, Huey P. Newton, or H. Rap Brown. This was a significant shift in mentality for many journalists, who had previously portrayed Ali and the Nation of Islam as dangerous radicals.

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[96] It is also likely that the Fruit of Islam, under instruction from Elijah Muhammad, assassinated Malcolm X. See: Roberts and Smith, *Blood Brothers*, 281–301.

[97] Simon Wendt, 'The Roots of Black Power: Armed Resistance and the Radicalization of the Civil Rights Movement,' in Peniel E. Joseph (ed.), *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 145-166.

[98] 'Ali Declares Race Riots Are Foolish,' *Washington Post*, 7 September 1967, 23.

[99] Lawrence H. Geller, 'Muhammad Ali, Nee Cassius Clay, Says Non-Violence is Right Way,' *Philadelphia Tribune*, 12 September 1967, 1.

[100] 'Muhammad Ali Urges Black Separatism,' *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 8 February 1969, A3.

Buck White – Staging Identity

Although he explicitly chose not to identity himself as a black power figure, Ali still embodied many of the same ideals championed by the movement.[101] Black power promoted racial pride, autonomy, and the creation, maintenance, and protection of uniquely black communities and institutions.[102] In this respect, the tenets of black power resonated closely with Ali's own manifesto. In October 1967 the *Baltimore Afro-American* relayed Ali's vision of black power for its readers: 'I want to teach black people to unite and create for themselves, to make their own neighborhoods nice without waiting for the white man.'[103] These notions of self-reliance and racial pride had always formed a part of the doctrine he preached through the Nation of Islam but the press had often obfuscated these positive aspects behind depictions of the sect's more scandalous beliefs. By the late 1960s, newspapers were scrambling to portray Ali as a palatable alternative to black militancy and, in doing so, began to highlight some of the more reasonable parts of his belief system.

The perception of Ali as the palatable face of black power was further reinforced in late 1969 when he joined the Broadway musical *Buck White*. Ali played the eponymous lead: a dashiki-wearing black activist with an Afro and a penchant for show-tunes. The run was short-lived and received lukewarm reviews, but Ali was praised for possessing a natural stage presence despite clearly lacking theatrical experience.[104] It also attracted significant attention from the nation's newspapers – between October 1969 and January 1970 nearly 200 articles were written about Ali's appearance in *Buck White*.[105]

Still under suspension from the Nation of Islam, Ali was billed under his birth name. Journalists could have taken this opportunity to eschew his Muslim name

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[101] 'Muhammad Ali Tells What Black Power Means to Him,' *Baltimore Afro-American*, 14 October 1967, 14.

[102] The black power movement, like the civil rights movement, was not homogenous. There were a variety of goals and strategies under the 'black power' banner. It is impossible to discuss all of these here. For the purposes of this paper, black power refers broadly to the strain of activists and organizations that were reflexively more militant, and more focused on achieving black autonomy, than the integrationist leaders who preceded them. For a more thorough exploration of the nuances within the black power movement see: Joseph, 'Rethinking the Black Power Era.'

[103] 'Muhammad Ali Tells What Black Power Means to Him.'

[104] Robert Viagas, 'Muhammad Ali, Broadway Musical Star, Dies at 74,' *Playbill*, 4 June 2016, http://www.playbill.com/article/muhammad-ali-broadway-musical-star-dies-at-74.

[105] A search using ProQuest Historical Newspapers indicates that between 1 October 1969 and 1 January 1970, 195 newspaper articles were written about Ali's Broadway appearance. All 12 aforementioned publications were included in the search. The searched for terms were 'Muhammad Ali' or 'Cassius Clay' and 'Broadway.'

completely.[106] Instead, articles written about the musical used both names and increasingly preferred 'Muhammad Ali'. He was no longer: 'Cassius Clay … who prefers to be known by his Black Muslim name of Muhammad Ali,' or 'Clay. AKA Muhammad Ali.'[107] Instead he was called 'Ali, formerly known as Cassius Clay' or 'Muhammad Ali, the ex-heavyweight boxing champion who changed his name from Cassius Clay.'[108] *New York Times* film editor A.H. Wieler demanded that his readers 'Call him Muhammad Ali, not Cassius Clay' before launching into a generally positive review of the show.[109] Many journalists still used both names somewhat interchangeably but by late 1969 it was Muhammad Ali first, Cassius Clay second.

Ali's star-turn in *Buck White* further helped to push both himself and his Muslim name toward mainstream acceptability. In the eyes of the press, Ali was perfect for the role because he embodied a number of black power ideals but presented them in a less threatening package. According to the *Baltimore Afro-American* and the *Chicago Defender*: 'Although not tailored for him, Buck White is suited perfectly to Muhammad Ali's talents and public image.'[110] The *New York Times* came to a similar conclusion: 'Buck White had to be played by Ali.'[111] Ali was proud, autonomous, principled, and his battle with the government lent him anti-establishment cachet. He also represented an expression of black power that was safe enough for Broadway – wealthy theatregoers could revel in Ali's brand of activism between dinner, drinks, and a cab ride home.

Buck White marked the beginning of the end for Ali's time in exile. It was a precursor for his return to celebrity status and foreshadowed the heroic press narrative that awaited him upon his return to the ring roughly a year later. Peter Woods of the *New York Times* perhaps best captured the anticipation of Ali's return. Woods spent time with Ali and the cast during rehearsals and sensed that the 'Return of

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[106] Ali had not legally changed his name, as Kentucky law did not require him to at the time. As such, he could not rely upon a legal argument to force journalists into using his adopted name.

[107] Dave Anderson, 'Clay Prefers Jail to Army,' *New York Times*, 17 March 1967, 50; A.S. Doc Young, 'A Good Try Wasted,' *Los Angeles Sentinel,* 6 June 1967, 24.

[108] 'Ali Doing His Thing in Broadway Musical,' *Chicago Daily Defender*, 30 October 1969, 42; 'Ali Signed for Lead in "Buck White,"' *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1969, H13.

[109] A.H. Wieler, 'Muhammad Ali, Screen Star,' *New York Times*, 16 November 1969, D15.

[110] 'Clay to Make Acting Debut as Star of Broadway Play,' *Baltimore Afro-American*, 25 October 1969, 1; Earl Calloway, 'Cassius Clay Slated for Broadway Debut in Bufman's "Buck White,"' *Chicago Daily Defender*, 29 November 1969, 19.

[111] Peter Wood, 'Return of Muhammad Ali, a/k/a Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr.,' *New York Times*, 30 November 1969, SM32.

Muhammad Ali, a/k/a Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr.' was nigh.[112] Throughout the article, Woods explored the possibility that 'the ex-champion might fight again in the very near future.'[113] When asked about this, Ali responded: 'if they let me.'[114] Woods made sure to explain Ali's answer: 'he left little doubt that "they" referred to the white American establishment.'[115]

The Turning Point

Ali's life in early 1970 was quiet. He began work on his autobiography and was expecting a child with his second wife, Belinda. He was still suspended from the Nation of Islam and had few public engagements. Despite his absence from the headlines, a number of journalists now recognized that Ali had grown into a legitimate voice on race matters. This change in attitude is evident in an early 1970 editorial written by Marion Jackson of the *Atlanta Daily World*: 'A few years back his views were considered extremely militant and even crackpot by a good many whites and blacks. Today Ali is being heard seriously …'[116] The *Daily World* was regarded as the most conservative of all black newspapers.[117] It was perhaps the only black newspaper in the country that did not promote racial integration – it explicitly opposed movements or philosophies that might 'rock the boat.' [118] By 1970, however, even a staunchly conservative publication like the *Daily World* was willing to admit that Ali's ideas were 'being heard seriously.' Jackson, like many of his peers, recognized that America had changed during Ali's time in exile.

Equally as noteworthy is the timing of Jackson's column. In March 1970 Ali was an ex-fighter who might never fight again, yet sportswriters like Jackson continued to write about him. In the absence of athletic contests, Ali's racial, religious, and political views took precedence in newspaper sports columns. Sports journalism prior to this was certainly not completely divorced from its broader social context but the press coverage of Ali's draft resistance raised the stakes for the profession. It was no longer enough to narrate a boxing match or analyze a baseball

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Marion Jackson, 'Marion Jackson Views Sports of the World: The Truth Shall Make You Free,' *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 March 1970, 7.
[117] Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 200.
[118] Ibid.

game; sportswriters were now called upon to interrogate race, religion, politics or any number of other sociocultural issues *through* sport.

In August 1970, backchannel negotiations cleared a path for Ali to fight in Atlanta, which had no state boxing commission and could license a bout providing the Mayor and aldermen approved.[119] There was little opposition – even Georgia's notoriously conservative Governor Lester Maddox was agreeable.[120] Ali's opponent for his first fight in 3½ years was to be Jerry Quarry, a tough Irish-American heavyweight from California. A transformative narrative can be detected in some of the writing about Ali's return. There was a sense among many journalists that the man returning to the spotlight was different from the one who had departed it three years earlier. Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times* used the lead-up to the Quarry fight to herald Ali's second coming: 'The star is back, he is reborn.'[121] Many journalists also believed that Ali's time away from the spotlight had mellowed him. John Hall from the *Los Angeles Times,* for example, observed Ali as he prepared for Quarry, and noted that 'his words reveal a new maturity, an understanding, and he's at peace with himself.'[122]

Ali beat Quarry convincingly and sportswriters revelled in his return. Not only was the world's most exciting fighter back in the ring, but he also seemed more agreeable. The perception of a transformed Ali resurfaced when he fought Oscar Bonavena in New York just over a month later.[123] Shirley Povich, covering the fight for the *Washington Post,* observed: 'indeed, he was not the sharp, brash young fellow who as Cassius Clay used to unnerve and intimidate opponents before they entered the ring.'[124] Povich made an important distinction in his column. He identified this new, more amenable persona as Muhammad Ali and relegated Cassius Clay to an ignominious past. This was a significant departure from previous years, when sportswriters had begged him openly to cease being Ali, the inflammatory and controversial race-man, and return to the brash but harmless Cassius Clay.

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[119] Eig, *Ali: A Life*, 288.

[120] Ibid., 289.

[121] Robert Lipsyte, 'Sport of the Times: A Star is Reborn,' *New York Times*, 12 September 1970, 34.

[122] John Hall, 'Not Just Quarry, I've Got to Beat Critics, Too---Clay,' *Los Angeles Times*, 23 October 1970, C1.

[123] The New York State Athletic Commission (NYSAC), which had been the first athletic body to strip Ali of his licenses, was ruled to have acted unconstitutionally in doing so. Similar rulings were soon levelled against other athletic or boxing commissions around the country, and Ali was once more able to fight in most states.

[124] Shirley Povich, 'Ali Loses Favor in Las Vegas,' *Washington Post*, 9 December 1970, D1.

Ali's championship bout against Joe Frazier on 8 March 1971 was the final step in his acceptance by the mainstream press. As he had done in the past, Ali wove a racial narrative into his pre-fight rhetoric. Through the press, he used his accumulated black power capital to portray himself as a 'brother' and his opponent as a 'white hope': a tool of the establishment.[125] Historians regard Ali's mischaracterization of Frazier as perhaps his greatest misstep. Frazier, the son of impoverished sharecroppers, was no white hope. Still, Ali's self-proclamation as the hero of black America played well in the press.[126]

The consensus amongst both black and white publications was that Ali's success or failure against Frazier mattered less than the victory he was claiming by simply stepping back into the ring. This was yet another indication of the shifting expectations for sportswriters. Speculation about the athletic dimensions of the bout was intermingled with commentary about its cultural implications. Brad Pye Jr. of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* wrote:

> There is no way Smokin' Joe Frazier can win acceptance as black America's heavyweight idol – no matter if he wins by a decision or a first-round knockout. Muhammad Ali has captured the hearts and souls of black America and he will live in their bosoms until the end of time. [127]

Pye Jr., a fierce integrationist and a consistent critic of Ali throughout his career, now saw him as 'the darling of black America.'[128] Norman Unger of the *Chicago Daily Defender* also seemed to forget that his newspaper had spent years telling its readers to reject Ali and his beliefs. In his column, he claimed Ali 'has always been the "people's champion".'[129] The pre-fight coverage in the *New York Times* also portrayed Ali in heroic terms. Lipsyte's lengthy feature noted 'there are millions who

[125] Norman Unger, 'Is Muhammad Ali leaning the wrong way?' *Chicago Daily Defender,* 9 January 1971, 29.
[126] There were some isolated examples of journalists taking Ali to task for his treatment of Frazier. See: 'Frazier Calls Ali "Phony" and "a Clown,"' *Washington Post*, 1 March 1971, D6; Unger, 'Is Muhammad leaning the wrong way?'
[127] Brad Pye Jr., 'Smokin' Joe Can't Win in Black America,' *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 4 March 1971, B1.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Norman Unger, 'Will the "Real" Champ Please Stand Up?' *Chicago Daily Defender*, 27 February 1971, 1.

want Ali to win. Most of them have no feeling at all about the bright, decent Frazier; Ali is the only character on stage.'[130]

Even Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* admitted that he too would be cheering for Ali. Daley was arguably the most famous sportswriter of his time and one of Ali's most hardened critics. Yet it appears that the heroic trope of the Ali-Frazier fight affected even him: 'my muttering at ringside will undoubtedly contain the exhortation "Come on Cassius." But I'm picking Frazier to win by a knockout in the ninth round.'[131] Despite the fact that he still refused to use Ali's Muslim name, it would appear that in March 1971 even the man 'who never stopped hating Muhammad Ali' felt amenable toward him.[132]

Ali lost but the fight more than lived up to the hype. The result elicited an initial measure of shock from the press – not only had Ali been the sentimental favourite but most pundits had failed to recognize Frazier's immense talent. Still, a number of black newspapers managed to spin Ali's athletic failure into an ideological victory. The *Baltimore Afro-American* proclaimed 'Muhammad Ali, "Vindicated"' and printed a lengthy piece celebrating his return:

> … the fisticuffs in no way rivaled the significance of the fact that Ali was back in the ring on his own terms … even if he lost they [Ali's supporters] still understood what a great victory he had scored over Establishment traditions.[133]

This passage encapsulates a complex range of black attitudes following what became known as the Fight of the Century.[134] By March 1971, Ali was so engrained as an anti-establishment hero that even Joe Frazier became a 'white hope' when he fought Ali.

The celebration of Ali's anti-establishment credentials is an indication of just how far the goalposts had shifted. Like their white contemporaries, black newspapers

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[130] Robert Lipsyte, '"I Don't Have to be What You Want Me To Be," Says Muhammad Ali,' *New York Times*, 7 March 1971, SM24.
[131] Arthur Daley, 'The Fight,' *New York Times*, 7 March 1971, S2.
[132] Stefan Fatsis, 'The Sports Writer Who Hated Muhammad Ali,' *Slate*, 6 June 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/sports/sports_nut/2016/06/the_new_york_times_arthur_daley_never_stopped_hating_muhammad_ali.html.
[133] 'Muhammad Ali Vindicated,' *Baltimore Afro-American*, 13 March 1971, 1.
[134] Eig, *Ali: A Life*, 306.

were fixtures of the establishment and had spent years excoriating Ali for his refusal to adhere to codes of black middle-class respectability.[135] In 1971, the black press praised Ali for the same radical behaviour that earned him their ire during the 1960s. The difference in early 1971 was that he was no longer the *most* radical voice in black America, and was now acceptable to moderate institutions like the black press.

White newspapers did not explicitly focus on the racial narrative. Like their black colleagues, they portrayed the fight as a heroic defeat but chose instead to celebrate the character shown by Ali. Two of Ali's greatest detractors, Jim Murray and Arthur Daley, begrudgingly heaped praise upon him. Murray wrote: 'I never thought I would live to hear Ali described as a "fighter who can take it" … He came out and fought, like every broken nosed but great-hearted club fighter who ever lived, he was going out throwing his best shots.'[136] In a similar vein, Daley commented: 'Ali was still vertical at the end because he was simply too proud a man, too magnificent an athlete and too gutsy a warrior to let himself stay down.'[137] In previous years, Murray and Daley had vehemently refused to call Ali by his Muslim name. By March 1971, however, they were not only portraying him as a vanquished hero but were also using his Muslim name to do so.

After this point, the name Muhammad Ali assumed pre-eminence in the pages of both black and white publications. The *Baltimore Afro-American* neatly captured this shortly after the overturning of Ali's conviction for draft evasion:

> Cassius Clay, the lip, has gone, and Muhammad Ali the man has emerged. When he left Houston in 1967, he was known mostly as Cassius Clay, a loudmouth kid with a heavyweight championship and a draft conviction. He returned last week known mostly as Muhammad Ali …[138]

This was not the end of Ali's transformation – his cultural persona continued to evolve throughout his career, into retirement, and after his death.[139] However, when

[135] Townsend et al., 'Remembering the Rejection of Muhammad Ali,' 13.
[136] Jim Murray, 'Feet of Clay,' *Los Angeles Times*, 9 March 1971, C1.
[137] Arthur Daley, 'Epic Worth the Price,' *New York Times*, 9 March 1971, 29.
[138] Darrell Mack, 'Where Cassius Clay Ends, Muhammad Ali Begins,' *Baltimore Afro-American*, 24 July 1971, 8.
[139] Ali's journey toward mainstream acceptability continued throughout his career, into retirement, and up until his death in 2016. See Ezra, *Making of an Icon*, 137-197 for a detailed discussion of Ali's post-career public image.

the press accepted his adopted name in March 1971 it signalled that perceptions of Ali had undergone a seismic shift. Journalists no longer yearned for the return of the cocky yet harmless Cassius Clay. Instead, they embraced Muhammad Ali as a hero.

Becoming Muhammad Ali

Following a three-year period of flux in their usage of his chosen and birth names, newspaper journalists embraced the name Muhammad Ali in March 1971. A close reading of articles from this period reveals that a complex intermeshing of personal and broader cultural factors influenced this shift. At a personal level, Ali's stoic resistance to the draft and his exile from the boxing ring and the Nation of Islam prompted the press to see him in a more sympathetic light. This was compounded by nationwide cultural shifts. Increased mainstream opposition to the Vietnam War and the rise of black power recalibrated the standards of what was considered radical behaviour. This close reading shows that although changes to Ali's personal image influenced press attitudes toward him, newspapers only accepted him when political and cultural currents shifted in such a way as to reframe him as a less threatening figure.

The complex conditions that led to newspapers embracing Ali's name and identity constitute a vital and neglected aspect of his legacy. This phenomenon also raises important questions about how, when, and why other activist athletes might come to be accepted by mainstream press institutions. Ali is a unique case, not only because of his high profile, but also because the press embraced him when he was still very much in the public eye as an athlete and a protestor. In March 1971, Ali was still three months away from the legal conclusion of his battle against the draft, and more than 10 years from boxing retirement. By accepting Ali's name and identity at this point, the newspapers analyzed in this study committed a rare act: embracing an activist athlete at the height of their powers. Many other athletes, including Ali's contemporaries in the 'revolt of the black athlete,' waited decades before the establishment embraced them.

According to sociologist Peter Kaufman, 'activist athletes are treated like deviants' at the time of their protest and often face immediate backlash from

teammates, coaches, the media, and members of the public.[140] These reactions are not always permanent. Tommie Smith and John Carlos – who famously raised their black-gloved fists during the medal presentation for the 200m final at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics – are prime examples. In the direct aftermath of their protest, Smith and Carlos were suspended from the U.S. Olympic team, expelled from the Olympic village, and were 'attacked in the media, and harassed when they returned to the United States.'[141] Contemporary attitudes toward Smith and Carlos are very different. Despite the intensely negative public reactions they received at the time, the two sprinters are now widely revered as heroes. Their protest has become a celebrated fixture of not just athletic history but also popular culture more broadly – their act of defiance is memorialized in murals, songs, and movies around the world.[142] The time taken to rehabilitate their public image raises the question: why did it take nearly two decades for mainstream audiences to embrace Smith and Carlos, whilst Ali was welcomed into the establishment at the height of his career?[143]

This question is too complex and multifaceted to explore fully here, but a cursory explanation may provide some insight regarding the future for other activist athletes like Colin Kaepernick. Journalist Dave Zirin argues that Kaepernick, like Ali, Smith, and Carlos, is divisive because he 'took a side.'[144] Instead of attempting to play a conciliatory role, as a number of other modern activist athletes have done, Kaepernick positioned himself as a symbol of resistance.[145] In this sense, the comparisons between Kaepernick and Ali are accurate. However, Kaepernick may have more in common with Smith and Carlos than he does with Ali. Smith and Carlos were ushered from the public eye immediately following the Mexico City Olympics, which ensured that public memories of the pair were dominated by their radical act of

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[140] Peter Kaufman, 'Boos, Bans, and Other Backlash: The Consequences of Being an Activist Athlete,' *Humanity and Society* 32, no. 3 (2008), 218.

[141] Ibid., 230.

[142] David Leonard and C. King, 'Revolting Black Athletes,' *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education* 3, no. 2 (2009), 218.

[143] Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when mainstream audiences embraced Smith and Carlos, the co-opting of their protest by the promoters of the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics serves as a useful benchmark. See: Douglas Hartmann, 'The Politics of Race and Sport: Resistance and Domination in the 1968 African American Olympic Protest Movement,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, no. 3 (1996), 562–64. See also: Leonard and King, 'Revolting Black Athletes,' 218–19.

[144] Dave Zirin, 'The Media Are Totally Wrong About the Role of Black Athletes in Black Lives Matter,' *Nation*, 14 July 2016, https://www.thenation.com/article/the-media-is-totally-wrong-about-the-role-of-athletes-in-black-lives-matter/.

[145] Steve Marston, 'The Revival of Athlete Activism(s): Divergent Black Politics in the 2016 Presidential Election Engagements of LeBron James and Colin Kaepernick,' *FairPlay* 10, no. 1 (2017), 49.

protest. Kaepernick appears to be experiencing similar treatment. The quarterback left the NFL when his protest was attracting unprecedented public attention. Kaepernick's final scenes before he was pushed from centre-stage cemented his reputation as a genuine radical. Ali, on the other hand, remained in the spotlight long enough for cultural currents to carry him from the radical margins into the mainstream.

At present, there is no way of knowing if or when Kaepernick's brand of activism will become acceptable to moderate sensibilities. As was the case with Ali, a relatively rapid change in social conditions might be enough for mainstream audiences to embrace Kaepernick. Alternatively, like Smith and Carlos, such acceptance may elude him for decades to come. In the meantime, this close reading of changing press attitudes toward Muhammad Ali serves not as a blueprint for athletes like Kaepernick, but rather as a historical reminder that mainstream audiences can welcome radical athletes into the fold. It also serves as a warning about the potential price of this embrace – the establishment appears willing to accept activist athletes only once they have lost their radical edge.

Preface to Chapter Four

Chapter Four is a close reading of the *Louisville Defender*'s coverage of Muhammad Ali between 1964 and 1971. This close reading was conducted without the aid of distant reading and uses analogue (microfilm) rather than digital sources. The purpose behind this approach was twofold. I wished to see whether traditional close reading, using microfilm sources, would reveal the same or similar discursive patterns as those illuminated by distant reading. I also wished to investigate the factors that shaped attitudes toward Ali at a more granular level. Analysing a single publication from Ali's home city provided a chance to see how unique geographic, cultural, and even personal factors could influence journalistic discourses about the boxer. As the Louisville's only black newspaper, the *Defender*'s coverage of Ali was influenced by a range of interwoven factors, including racial pride, political ideologies, class factors, and hometown loyalty.

The results of this close reading revealed that the *Defender*'s attitudes toward Ali underwent the same patterns of change as the publications that were included in the distant reading analysis. Like its counterparts in other cities, the *Defender* rejected and rebuked Ali when he announced his belonging to the Nation of Islam, somewhat softened its stance during his draft resistance, and enthusiastically embraced him when he returned to boxing and beat his draft evasion conviction. In many ways, the paper was strongly influenced by the broader discursive leanings of the black press, as well as local factors, including the individual influences from its moderate, bourgeois staff.

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Chapter Four

From "Pitifully Ignorant" to the "People's Champion": Shifting Perceptions of Muhammad Ali in the *Louisville Defender*, 1964–1971

Muhammad Ali lived away from Louisville for most of his life. Upon his death in June 2016, however, the famed boxer's body was repatriated for a series of extraordinary funeral celebrations. Louisville's black population became a focal point of the mourning.[1] Under the hot Kentucky sun, thousands gathered on Grand Avenue in the West End to watch Ali's funeral procession pass his childhood home.[2] Black Louisville mourned, but they also celebrated. They waved banners, and shouted "Ali, Bomaye!" or "the champ is home!."[3] Dr. Kevin Cosby explained that Ali was a "tremendous source of pride…[b]ecause I'm from Louisville, and he looks like me."[4] The way black Louisville memorialized Ali was moving, and spoke to important racial issues in the city's past and present. However, in terms of remembering Louisville's attitudes toward Ali during his heyday, the city's post-death veneration of the great boxer was also problematic.

Ali was not always universally loved in Louisville. From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, black Louisvillians interpreted Ali's racial and religious beliefs, and his refusal to fight in the Vietnam War, in complex, heterogeneous ways. Following his death, some of Louisville's leading black citizens expressed concern that "the city was celebrating a simpler version of its hero…"[5] Black Louisville's historical relationship with Ali was anything but simple – particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. The city's African American community was comprised of a diverse range of people and institutions, with varying opinions on Ali. This paper will focus on one of those institutions: Louisville's black newspaper, the *Louisville Defender*. The *Defender* was owned, edited, and produced by a small group of middle-aged black

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[1] Adrianne Kelly, "Funeral procession to take Muhammad Ali through Louisville," *WLKY Louisville*, June 7, 2016, retrieved from: http://www.wlky.com/news/muhammad-alis-family-to-make-announcement-about-arrangements/39899050.

[2] Travis Waldron, "This is Muhammad Ali's Louisville," *The Huffington Post,* June 24, 2016, retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/muhammad-ali-death-louisville_us_57693df9e4b0fbbc8beba103?section=australia.

[3] Tracy Clayton, "Here's What Muhammad Ali Meant to Black Louisville Natives Like Me," *BuzzFeed News*, June 28, 2016, retrieved from: https://www.buzzfeed.com/tracyclayton/ali-loved-louisville-and-louisville-loves-ali?utm_term=.jxVbmrKbV#.gownG5Dnr.

[4] Waldron, "This is Muhammad Ali's Louisville."

[5] Ibid.

men who advocated a specific set of values, which included racial integration and notions of respectability associated with the southern black bourgeoisie. As a result, the *Defender*'s editorial direction was often at odds with Ali's more radical approach to racial matters.

Defender journalists who wrote about Ali at his prime were influenced by more than just hometown partisanship. Like their black press contemporaries in other cities, they engaged critically with Ali and wrote articles that contributed to a complex and dynamic discourse about his racial, religious, and anti-war ideologies. The *Defender*'s coverage of Ali changed dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s, and underwent distinct shifts in 1964, 1967, and 1970. When Cassius Clay announced his membership in the Nation of Islam in early 1964, the *Defender*'s reaction was overwhelmingly negative. When he resisted the draft in mid-1967, their displeasure with his religious affiliation remained, but this was tempered somewhat by their admiration of his stoicism before a seemingly malevolent white bureaucracy. By 1971, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in his favor in his draft evasion case, the *Defender*'s coverage of him was generally positive. Like many other newspapers, the *Defender*'s support for the war in the Vietnam had waned and the paper celebrated Ali's stand as a hero for black equality.

As Ali's hometown newspaper, the *Defender* has often provided source-material for histories of the famous Louisvillian. Despite this, there has been no attempt to analyze the *Defender*'s reactions to Ali, or to place these reactions within the broader context of black press journalism.[6] Some authors have left snippets and hints, but unfortunately these are inconclusive and contradictory. For example, according to historian Michael Ezra, "The *Louisville Defender* [was] stalwart in its backing of Ali."[7] Conversely, biographer David Remnick has asserted that the *Louisville Defender* wrote "rather delicately" about Ali, especially his affiliation with the Nation of Islam.[8] The *Defender's* writing about Ali was complex, and was influenced by a number of factors, Black press discourse from across the United

[6] Despite often being referenced in histories of Kentucky and Louisville, the *Defender* has generally escaped serious academic scrutiny. James Klotter, in his 2015 assessment of Kentucky historiography, argued that it was time for the *Defender's* story to be told: the "files of the *Louisville Leader* and the *Louisville Defender* cry out for historians to tell the story of the black press."[6] See James C. Klotter, "Charting the Path of Twentieth-Century Kentucky: Current Courses and Future Directions," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 113 (Summer 2015): 194–195.

[7] Ezra, *Muhammad Ali*, 117.

[8] David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero* (London, 2000,) 211.

States molded the Louisville paper's approach to Ali, the integration movement, and racial issues more broadly. Local factors, although less influential, were also at play.

Framing the *Louisville Defender*

Although racism in Louisville did not have the same sharp edges as in Montgomery, Birmingham, or Jackson, black citizens experienced subtler but no less pervasive forms of subjugation. In Louisville, the main instrument of racism was not physical violence, but rather a "veil" or a façade designed to keep African-Americans in their place. Historian George C. Wright has described race relations in Louisville as "racism in a polite form; it would remain polite as long as Afro-Americans willingly accepted "their place," which of course, was at the bottom."[9]

The façade separating white and black Louisville was held in place by an illusory vision of the city's racial progressiveness. White leaders in Louisville held up their city as an exemplar of southern race relations: black citizens were not constitutionally denied the vote, public accommodations were not officially segregated (although schools were), and its major (white-run) newspaper, the *Louisville Courier-Journal,* was known nationwide as a civil rights advocate whose owners were "leaders in reform causes."[10] Rather than serving as an impetus toward achieving real equality in Louisville, the city's reputation actually worked to stifle progress. When challenged on civil rights issues, particularly in regards to housing, public accommodations, and schools, the city's white elite often cited past advances "to quiet blacks complaints."[11] Louisville's lawmakers and legislators were thus able to portray the city as a bastion of good race relations while doing very little to tangibly improve the circumstances of the black community. This tactic continued, even as the façade began to crumble during the 1960s. As historian Luther Adams has noted, "many whites in the city [maintained] the decades-old illusion that Louisville was a leader in race relations despite its rapidly eroding progressive veneer."[12]

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[9] George C Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, 1865–1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 4.

[10] Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South: Louisville, Kentucky, 1945–1980* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009) 5-9; Harrison, Lowell H., and James C. Klotter. *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 319–320.

[11] *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, p1. See also: Tracey K'Meyer, "The Gateway to the South: Regional Identity and the Louisville Civil Rights Movement," *Ohio Valley History* 4, no. 1 (2004): 46–47.

[12]Luther Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville: African American Migration in the Urban South, 1930–1970*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 166.

Operating within this environment presented challenges for black institutions like the *Defender*. For decades, most "black leaders, though by no means all of them…accept[ed] racial indignities for fear that upsetting the status quo might result in a much harsher racial order."[13] The *Defender*'s editor, Frank L. Stanley, had to play a balancing act. He and his newspaper energetically advocated for black rights. However, there was a fear amongst moderate black leaders like Stanley that pushing too hard, or in the 'wrong' way, might trigger a backlash from the city's conservative whites.[14] As a result, the *Defender* generally walked the line between activism and accommodationism. They did so by using their newspaper to advocate aggressively for change but only within existing legal and social frameworks. Rather than attacking Louisville's white elite, the *Defender* "challenge[d] the city's white cultural hegemony" by working with them to change the city's discriminatory laws and practices, particularly those related to substandard housing and public accommodations. They also publicly supported the election of lawmakers who they believed were most likely to enact civil rights legislation, and urged black citizens to vote and become active participants in the democratic process.[15] The *Defender* pursued black equality tenaciously, though it did so via accommodationist tactics that did not gel with the more aggressive stance adopted by Ali, the Nation of Islam, and other radical groups.

Although this relatively moderate approach to civil rights activism was partially determined by the *Defender*'s immediate surroundings, the paper's support for integrationist tactics was chiefly informed by the broader directions of the black press in the United States. The 'black press' is an umbrella term that refers to newspapers and magazines managed, edited, and written by African Americans, for African Americans.[16] From its birth in the early nineteenth century, it was "a crusading press," which sought not only to inform black Americans but also to

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[13] Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*, 5.

[14] K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 200; Zack G. Hardin, "Black Power in River City: African American Community Activism in Louisville, Kentucky, 1967-1970," (MA dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2014): 8, 22–28, 45, 52, 71; Whitney M. Young, Jr., "To Be Equal: The Backlash Problem," *Louisville Defender*, October 27, 1966; Unattributed Author (NPI). "'Backlash' Losses Outweigh Gains," *Louisville Defender*, November 17, 1966; Nat Tillman, "1966 Was Shaped by 'Black Power', 'Backlash'," *Louisville Defender*, January 5, 1967.

[15] K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 25, 38, 99.

[16] Shirley E Thompson, 'The Black Press,' in *Companion to African American History*, ed. Alton Hornsby Jr., 332–45 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 332.

advocate for them.[17] From their advent, black newspapers, especially those in northern cities, attacked slavery and later railed against Jim Crow. In the twentieth century, they were in the vanguard of civil rights advocacy. The black press was a forum for emancipatory discourse, a rallying point for activists, and a key fixture in the social life of black communities at both the local and national levels.[18] Readers looked to black publications for guidance and leadership, as well as news.[19]

The heyday of the black press arguably came during in the 1940s, particularly during the Second World War.[20] Black newspapers initiated the 'Double V' campaign, which stressed the relationship between military service and full citizenship for African Americans.[21] Many black newspapers were at the height of their influence and popularity during this time. A poll conducted by the *Chicago Defender* in 1945 found that 81 percent of African Americans would not make a decision on significant political or social issues without first consulting a black newspaper. Founded in 1933, the *Louisville Defender*, reached its peak circulation during this period, in the late 1940s.[22]

Although the black press remained an important institution for many African Americans in the 1960s, its popularity was waning.[23] As the civil rights movement became national news, large white-run newspapers began to cover black issues, which they had previously ignored. With the resources to provide quick and comprehensive coverage, white newspapers began to attract large portions of the black press' readership.[24] As income from subscriptions and sales diminished, owners and editors of black newspapers moved to shore up revenue from their traditional advertising base: middle-class African American businesses.[25] Many of these businesses were run by respectable, conservative members of the black bourgeoisie, and the owners of black newspapers were wary of losing advertising dollars if they endorsed radical or inflammatory views. Groups such as the Nation of Islam, with their "intimations of

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[17] Henry G. La Brie III, William J. Zima. "Directional Quandaries of the Black Press in the United States." *Journalism Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1971): 640 - 51.

[18] Todd Vogel, *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 1-16.

[19] Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, Il., 2006),

[20] Thompson, *The Black Press*, 333.

[21] Charles G. Spellman, "The Black Press: Setting the Political Agenda During World War II, *Negro History Bulletin* 51, no. 1 (1993): 40-41.

[22] John E, Kleber, *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 544.

[23] Ronald E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A*. (Ames, Iowa: 1971), 8.

[24] Washburn, *Voice of Freedom*, 200.

[25] Washburn, *Voice of Freedom*, 189.

controversy and non-Christian affiliation," made many black editors "skittish."[26] Consequently, although the spirit of protest still underpinned black press journalism, it assumed a more sober, measured demeanour during the 1960s.[27] The tone of the black press was further moderated as white-run newspapers sought to improve their civil rights coverage by luring young, black journalists away from their older, more conservative colleagues at black-owned newspapers. The combined effect of these factors, coupled with the black press' support for established, integrationist leaders, fostered a more conservative brand of advocacy.

While each newspaper operated under unique cultural, financial, and editorial conditions, the moderation of black press journalism during the civil rights era was evident in publications across the country, including the *Louisville Defender*. The *Defender*, perhaps more than other regional newspapers, was intimately attuned to this shift because the paper's long-time editor and owner was heavily involved with black press' national publisher's guild: the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA). Frank L. Stanley was one of the NNPA's founders in 1940, and served as its president five times, including terms during 1960s.[28] The NNPA was formed with the aim of "harmonizing our energies in a common purpose," and, although individual publications were free to make their own editorial choices, there was a sense of unity in their response to significant issues.[29] Through his position at the NNPA, Stanley acted as a conduit for national black press attitudes, and ensured that his newspaper assumed moderate, integrationist positions on key issues.

Stanley was a powerful agent of influence over the *Defender*. Clarence Matthews, a senior writer at the *Defender* during the 1950s and 1960s, remembers that Stanley's control over the paper's editorial direction was absolute:

> his stand, so far as civil rights was concerned, was very strong from, from the beginning. And that was fine with me and everybody else that worked there. So there was not much said. It was understood.[30]

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[26] Lawrence A. Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War: Civil Rights and Vietnam in the African American Press* (Columbia, Mo., 2011): 56

[27] Washburn, *Voice of Freedom*, 200.

[28] Kleber, *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, 848.

[29] John Sengstacke's 1940 address to the NNPA as quoted in: Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1997), 186.

[30] Clarence Matthews interviewed by Ethel White for the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky Oral History Project, May 10, 2000. Transcript available at: http://www.kyhistory.com/cdm/ref/collection/Ohist/id/2737.

The strength of Stanley's beliefs, along with his impressive activist credentials, ensured that his staff "understood" that their writing should reflect his integrationist leanings. Born in Chicago, he moved to Louisville at age five and was educated at Central High School.[31] After tertiary education in Atlanta, and a brief stint as an English professor at Jackson College in Mississippi, he returned to Louisville to teach at his former high school. After two years at Central, Stanley took a job as a reporter for the fledgling *Louisville Defender*. By 1936, he was the *Defender*'s editor, general manager, and "set the tone of the paper."[32] Under his leadership the *Defender* advocated energetically for the integration of the military during the Second World War.[33] In 1949, he became the owner of the *Defender*, and under his leadership the newspaper became "widely known in the nation" as a tireless campaigner for black rights in Louisville.[34]

Stanley also became a noted civil rights activist in his own right. He was the driving force behind several of Kentucky's most important civil rights landmarks, including the integration of state colleges, and the founding of the Kentucky Human Rights Commission.[35] He also helped organize the March on Frankfort in 1964 and was an integral in convincing the legislature to enact the state's Civil Rights Act in 1966.[36] By the time Ali became a significant voice in the civil rights debate, Stanley was already a seasoned campaigner who had seen prudent and systematic tactics achieve significant gains for black Americans. Under his direction, the *Defender* had become an ardent supporter of the integrationist wing of the civil rights movement.[37] As historian Tracy K'Meyer has noted, the paper's stance on racial issues "reflected[ed] Frank Stanley Sr.'s alliance with moderate black leaders." As well as wielding editorial control, Stanley also wrote a popular, syndicated weekly column, "People, Places and Problems," which he used "to articulate the demands of the [civil rights] movement and advocate for political and legislative solutions to the problems

[31] Kleber, *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, 848.
[32] K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 25.
[33] K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 25; Kleber, *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, 848.
[34] Kleber, *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, 848; Ronald E. Wolseley, *The Black Press*, 68.
[35] Kleber, *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, 848.
[36] Catherine Fosl and Tracey E. K'Meyer. *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 110–115.
[37] K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 66.

of Jim Crow."[38]

Stanley's support of the mainstream civil rights movement reflected his bourgeois identity. Like many other black newspaper editors and owners, he was a member of the black middle class, and he valued the respectability this granted him. By the time Ali rose to fame, Stanley was in his late fifties and had occupied a respected position at the head of an important Louisville institution for nearly twenty-five years. He was no less passionate about creating a better world for black Americans than younger men like Ali, however he and others like him were also careful not jeopardize their relatively comfortable middle-class lifestyles. As educated, middle-class campaigners, Stanley and his contemporaries had a seat at the negotiating table with white powerbrokers. This allowed them to engineer legal, legislative solutions to civil rights issues, while simultaneously steering the movement away from radical courses of action that might threaten the social position of the middle class.

By contrast, Ali and the Nation of Islam would have preferred to flip the negotiating table over. The Nation's black nationalist doctrine was built upon the promotion of racial pride and autonomy; most of its followers resented the idea of having to *ask* the white establishment for basic human rights. Although both Stanley and Ali loomed large in Louisville's black liberation discourse, their views on how best to achieve equality were almost diametrically opposed. Ali was a brash, young fighter who wanted immediate, radical change. He and many other younger activists became frustrated by the seemingly slow progress on civil rights issues, and criticized older, moderate leaders like Stanley for not being aggressive enough. Given the ideological dissonance between these two men, it was not surprising that the *Defender* would not see eye-to-eye with Ali on civil rights matters – especially in light of Stanley's unfettered influence over his paper's editorial direction.

The black press' preference for moderate, integrationist solutions to racial inequality, as channeled by Frank L. Stanley, shaped the *Louisville Defender*'s reactions to key points in Muhammad Ali's career in complex and multifaceted ways. Studying how these broader influences coalesced with local factors in Louisville can enhance understandings of the heterogeneous ways that Ali was interpreted throughout the United States during the 1960s and 1970s.

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[38] K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 25.

Louisville's 'Black Muslim' Champion

Both African American and white newspapers across America took great interest in Cassius Clay's bout in Miami on February 25, 1964.[39] Few sportswriters gave him a chance against the formidable Sonny Liston. They said he was unorthodox and inexperienced, he kept his hands too low, he couldn't handle Liston's aggression, he couldn't punch, and he couldn't take a punch.[40] Moreover, many journalists *wanted* him to lose. Clay's braggadocio, combined with his purported beliefs, made him an even less palatable character than the brutish Sonny Liston. Perhaps surprisingly, the writers at the *Defender* were among those hoping for Clay's demise. Although Clay was Louisville's boxing hero, the *Defender* showed little interest in the athletic dimensions of the match and focused more upon his rumored association with Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. The *Defender* published only three articles during the lead-up to the bout. Two were short pieces, briefly summarizing Clay's slim chances of victory. Both were under 250 words and appeared in the paper's sport pages.[41]

The third was an eight-hundred-word polemic written by Stanley's right-hand man, managing editor Cecil Blye. Although he was younger than Stanley, the two men shared important similarities. Like Stanley, Blye was a well-educated member of the middle class: he had been an attorney before taking on a role at the *Defender* and returned to the profession after leaving the paper in the early 1970s.[42] Blye's editorial was the centerpiece of the *Defender*'s efforts to preview the fight:

> his most recent rantings on integration and the Black Muslims cause us to wonder what gives in the mental area of Cassius' beefy frame…if we had a choice of Clay's ridiculous ravings and Liston's newly acquired serenity, we would choose Liston by twice the margin…Win, lose, or draw, Cassius Clay

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[39] When discussing events before March 6, 1964 (the day he officially announced his name change to Muhammad Ali) this article will refer to Ali as Cassius Clay.

[40] Unattributed Author, "'Waste of Time' to Train for Clay, Nilon Says," *Washington Post*, February 19, 1964; A.S. Doc Young, "Liston Will Blow Clay out in Four." *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 20, 1964; Claude Harrison, "Liston Vs. Clay, Not Who, but What Round?" *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 25, 1964; Sid Ziff, "Liston 7-1 to Button the Lip Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1964; Robert Lipsyte, "Liston 7-1 Choice to Beat Clay Tonight and Keep Heavyweight Title," *New York Times*, February 25, 1964.

[41] Unattributed Author, "Liston Gives Odds of 10-1 That Clay Will Not Show for Fight," *Louisville Defender*, January 9, 1964; Cawood Ledford, "Cawood Ledford Says Clay Might Win over Sonny Liston," *Louisville Defender*, February 20, 1964.

[42] Kentucky State Legislature, "A Resolution Adjourning the Senate in Honor and Loving Memory of Cecil A. Blye," 2010; Unattributed Author, "People," *Jet*, May 17, 1973, 39.

> has had it. In his pitiful ignorance, he talked too loud, too long, about issues and people, which he knew too little.[43]

Older activists like Blye and Stanley had been at the forefront of civil rights advocacy for decades, and they believed they were due some measure of deference from younger activists. By associating himself with the Nation of Islam, Clay had failed to fall in line behind established civil rights leaders, and he had also failed to adhere to accepted middle-class notions of decorum and accommodation. In this context, Blye's portrayal of Clay as a 'pitifully ignorant' buffoon becomes more understandable.

Clay's flirtations with the Nation of Islam were more than just an exercise in religious freedom. He was a young, influential public figure who rejected established race leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Frank Stanley Sr. at a time when American race relations were under special scrutiny. Stanley perceived this as potentially damaging to his vision of civil rights progress. Along with other members of the educated black elite, Stanley and his staff believed it was their responsibility to "set the stage for racial advancement."[44] Their strategy was based upon reinforcing middle-class notions of black respectability, and they sought "the elevation of the masses of black people via education and proper training."[45] The Nation of Islam's black-nationalist doctrine and predominantly working-class membership threatened the middle-class' plan for black uplift through 'respectable' methods. As a result, the *Defender* cared little that Clay had the chance to bring the heavyweight championship home to Louisville. His rumored allegiance to the Nation of Islam led Blye, Stanley, and others members of the black middle class to hope Clay would lose the fight.

He did not lose. Sonny Liston withdrew from the fight in the seventh round, and at 10:30pm on February 25, 1964, Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. became the new heavyweight champion of the world. Being a weekly paper, the *Defender* could not report on the victory until their next scheduled issue, two days after the bout. Surprisingly, the issue released on February 27 carried only a single article about the fight: a 250-word, matter-of-fact piece announcing that "Louisville's own" had won

[43] Cecil Blye, "Writer Calls Cassius' Black Muslim Antics Phony," *Louisville Defender*, February 6, 1964.
[44] Kim T. Gallon, "Between Respectability and Modernity: Black Newspapers and Sexuality, 1925-1940," (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2009): 16.
[45] Ibid.

the heavyweight title.[46] Mary Blake's recipe for curried chicken and almonds on page eight was longer and written with more enthusiasm. By comparison, the city's white-run daily, the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, was full-to-bursting with coverage of the victory. The *Courier-Journal*'s front page on both February 26 and 27 was dominated by articles, editorials, first-hand accounts, analyses, and photographs of Clay's win – many of which were so lengthy that they overflowed into the rest of the issue. In contrast with the *Courier-Journal*'s energetic coverage, the *Defender* seemed uninterested in the fight itself. Stanley did not send a correspondent to Miami. This was likely due to the fact that the *Defender* did not have the resources to cover the fight to the same extent as the *Courier-Journal*. The *Courier-Journal'*s greater interest in the bout may also have been intensified by the personal connection that its editor had with Clay – Worth Bingham was one of Clay's benefactors and thus had a vested interest in his success.[47]

Another explanation is that the *Defender*, being a smaller publication, had to be more selective about what it covered. Being a black newspaper, it was within their remit to interpret the extraordinary events in Miami through the lens of race, rather than simply publishing a narrow analysis of Clay's athletic abilities. Clay did not give the *Defender* a clear opportunity to do so until the day after his victory, which was too late for the paper to include in its February 27 edition. At a press conference on February 26, the young boxer confirmed his allegiance to the Nation of Islam and stepped up his criticism of integration and the civil rights movement. Because the *Defender* did not have a correspondent in Miami, Stanley and his writers had neither enough information, nor enough time, to compose a meaningful response to Clay's comments before their weekly edition went to print that night. However, this also meant they had another week to compose a response.

On March 5, the *Defender*'s editorial page was dominated by a piece titled "Our Differences with Cassius Clay."[48] The thrust of the article was similar to the derisive article that Cecil Blye had penned in the lead-up to the fight. However, this time it was Frank L. Stanley on the attack. "We are dismayed at the Louisville youth's disassociation with the desegregation movement," he wrote.[49] Stanley believed that as a high-profile black champion, Clay had a duty to align himself with the

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[46] Unattributed Author, "Clay Grabs 'Heavy Crown'," *Louisville Defender*, February 27, 1964.
[47] Ezra, *Muhammad Ali,* 67.
[48] Frank L. Stanley, "Our Differences with Cassius Clay," *Louisville Defender*, March 5, 1964.
[49] Ibid.

'desegregationist' civil rights movement – and that by joining the Nation of Islam he was abandoning that duty. Stanley continued, "we are afraid he won't take care of the millions of U.S. Negro youth who want to enter the mainstream of American life," again implying that Ali had an obligation to help young African Americans integrate with, rather than separate from, white society.[50] Another article, printed in the same issue, echoed this sentiment: "His statement that he doesn't believe it right, 'to force white people on colored people or the colored on the whites' should gain him support among the Southern whites"[51] The effect of these articles was to paint Clay as an enemy of the integration movement, which the *Defender* and many other black press outlets supported wholeheartedly.

Stanley's disappointment with Clay was likely intensified by the escalation of civil rights activity in Kentucky at the time. On March 5, 1964, the same day as Stanley's impassioned denouncement of Clay in the *Defender*, ten thousand protestors marched to the state capitol to demand the passing of a statewide civil rights act.[52] The March on Frankfort was attended by some of the civil rights movement's most important national figures, including Dr. Martin Luther King and Jackie Robinson.[53] Stanley had a strong personal and ideological connection to the march. He was a key organizer and promoter, and his son, Frank Stanley Jr., had conceived the idea and was the primary local speaker on the day.[54] Stanley Sr., along with many of his comrades, was no doubt dismayed that Clay, the state's most famous black icon, was not only unwilling to support this watershed moment in the Kentucky civil rights movement but seemed actively opposed to the principles it fought for.

The *Defender*'s admonishment of Clay was also a reflection of the ideological conflict between the Nation of Islam and the integration movement throughout the rest of the nation. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, the Nation of Islam's charismatic second in charge, Malcolm X, waged a war of words with the leaders of the civil rights movement.[55] In addition to positioning the Nation's black nationalist ideals as an alternative to integration, he also broadcast scathing criticisms of

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[50] Ibid.

[51] "Clay Admits Muslim Sympathy after Fight," *Louisville Defender*, March 5, 1964.

[52] Amy Purcell and Robin Harris, 'Remembering the 1964 March on Frankfort,' *The Owl* 20, no. 1 (2005): 1. Accessed 15 September 2016. http://owl.library.louisville.edu/2005/Owl0205.pdf.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Robin D. G. Kelley, "House Negroes on the Loose: Malcolm X and the Black Bourgeoisie," *Callaloo* 21, no. 2 (1998): 422–23.

moderate black leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King and Roy Wilkins of the NAACP. [56] Malcolm X portrayed them as bourgeois 'Uncle Toms' who had more interest in preserving their comfortable middle-class lifestyles than enacting revolutionary racial change.[57] He also attacked the theological underpinnings of the integration movement, arguing that Christianity was a white man's tool of oppression and that Islam was the true black religion.[58]

Conversely, moderate civil rights leaders perceived Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam as an aggressive rabble, populated by criminals and lead by a mystic charlatan.[59] The *Defender*'s censure of Ali was, therefore, an extension of the long-running war of words between the Nation of Islam and more "mainstream" civil rights advocates. Ali's close relationship with Malcolm X, who was widely seen as the man who recruited young Cassius Clay, exacerbated integrationists' displeasure with him.[60] Shortly after his victory over Liston, the *Defender* printed a column written by Alfred Duckett that compared Ali unfavorably to former heavyweight champ Floyd Patterson. Well-spoken and devoutly Christian, Patterson was an exemplary representative for the integrationist movement.[61] Duckett concluded that Ali, because he was not like Patterson, did not deserve to wear the crown, "although they tell me that Cassius is now King of the Hill, he is not my champion."[62] Ali might have been brash, arrogant, and wild, but his true crime in the eyes of civil rights advocates like the *Defender* staff was choosing the wrong side in the battle for black equality.

In 1964, the *Defender's* support for the integration movement was a central feature of each weekly issue. Like many other black newspapers, its editorial page included weekly correspondences from the movement's most visible leader, Dr. King.[63] The paper was also vicious in its criticism of white segregationists like Alabama governor George Wallace. On May 28, the *Defender* printed a large cartoon of Governor Wallace that likened him to Adolf Hitler.[64] The paper also published a

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[56] James H. Cone, *Malcolm and Martin and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 89–119; Kelley, "House Negroes on the Loose," 429.

[57] Kelley, "House Negroes on the Loose", 419–23.

[58] Cone, *Malcolm and Martin and America*, 91–100.

[59] Kelley, "House Negroes on the Loose," 424.

[60] Ezra, *Muhammad Ali*, 65. Ali ended their friendship after Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam in 1964.

[61] Remnick, *King of the World*, 163-173.

[62] Alfred Duckett, "Patterson Was Ideal Champion," *Louisville Defender*, March 19, 1964.

[63] Until his assassination in 1968.

[64] Clint C. Wilson, "Untitled Cartoon," *Louisville Defender* (originally published in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*), May 28, 1964.

constant stream of editorial and feature articles articulating the need for black Americans to join more fully with white society.[65] Regardless of his success in the boxing ring, native son Clay earned the ire of the *Defender* because he and his 'Black Muslim' colleagues challenged their clearly stated belief in racial integration.

Stanley's black press colleagues in other cities around the nation agreed. For example, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reminded its readers that "the nation's more responsible Negro citizens" should oppose Clay and the 'Black Muslims.' Likewise, Jackie Robinson's syndicated column urged his followers to turn to "the responsible leadership of the Negro people" and "authentic leaders like [Roy] Wilkins, King, [A. Phillip] Randolph, [Andrew] Young and the rest."[66] By criticizing Clay and the Nation of Islam, the *Defender* was broadcasting its loyalty to 'responsible', integrationist black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. Doing so enabled the paper to identify itself within a broader black press discourse that advocated careful, considered approaches to black equality, rather than the perceived extremism of groups like the Nation of Islam.

Furthermore, the *Defender*'s support for the integration movement and its admonishment of Clay and the NOI also makes sense from a local perspective. The mainstream civil rights movement advocated a non-violent pursuit of equality. In 1964, this was an approach that appeared to be working – sit-ins, demonstrations and peaceful protests, along with political and legal maneuvering, had gained some, albeit limited, concessions for black citizens in many locations across the South. Importantly for the *Defender* and its Louisville readership, the movement's dedication to lawful, peaceful protest was unlikely to attract a violent "backlash" from Louisville's white civic leaders – certainly less likely than the confrontational, black-nationalist vitriol that many Americans associated with Clay and the Nation of Islam.

The *Defender*'s attacks on Ali in 1964 were primarily a reflection the black press' support for the careful, legislative tactics of the integrationist movement. However, there were also local factors at play. By aligning with this movement, rather than radical ideologies of groups like the Nation of Islam, Stanley and the *Defender* were less likely to alienate Louisville's white elite – who they needed to work with in

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[65] See, for example, Frank L. Stanley, "Integration - Still Our Most Urgent Need," *Louisville Defender*, Feb 13, 1964.

[66] "Ex-Bomber, Sugar Ray Expound as Clay Becomes Muhammad Ali," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 28, 1964; Jackie Robinson, "Cassius and the Muslims," *Norfolk* (Va.) *Journal and Guide*, March 14, 1964; Jackie Robinson, "The Muslim Champion," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, April 4, 1964.

order to find legislative solutions to civil rights issues. The integrationist movement also gave moderates like Stanley and Blye a privileged voice in the black liberation debate – which allowed them to steer their readers toward their middle class vision for achieving black equality.

Ali and the Army

Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali in March 1964. Many newspapers—including the *Defender*—refused to refer to him by his Islamic name for several years after. In 1966 and 1967 Muhammad Ali jolted America's newspapers into once again recalibrating their attitudes toward him when he refused to join the United States Army. Ali had been under the scrutiny of the U.S. Army Selective Services since 1964. He performed abysmally on the army's mental aptitude test and was categorized a 1-Y applicant: the lowest eligible classification and unlikely to be called into service. By mid-1966 however, the war in Southeast Asia was rapidly becoming bloodier and more costly. In need of more manpower, the Department of Defense lowered its intelligence standards for draftees. Ali was reclassified 1-A and was drafted into the army.[67] When he applied for conscientious objector status on religious grounds, Stanley and his staff presented Ali's association with the Nation of Islam in a new, more nuanced light. The *Defender* shifted its attitude toward Ali when he refused the draft because his religion was no longer just the source of his controversial views on racial integration – it was also the cornerstone of his resistance to a conflict that was becoming increasingly unpopular.

As was the case in 1964, the *Defender*'s articles about Ali during 1966 and 1967 (as he fought for conscientious objector status and lost) were shaped by the broader discursive leanings of the black press, as well as local influences. However, when Ali refused to fight in Vietnam, it became far more difficult for the *Defender* to reconcile these factors. In 1966 and 1967, Stanley and his writers had to weigh their continued disapproval of Ali's religious beliefs against the fact that these same beliefs were compelling him to stand against a war that was exacting a horrific toll upon black Americans. Ali's refusal to join the army, especially at a time of war, was also made complicated by the array of American attitudes toward military service. Ali's draft resistance placed him at odds with the nation's patriotic tendencies in times of

[67] Joseph A. Fry, *The American South and the Vietnam War: Belligerence, Protest, and Agony in Dixie* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015): 212–13.

war.[68] It also raised a host of issues regarding black military service throughout the United States. African Americans had a proud history of military service and many viewed this as justification for demanding full citizenship rights.[69] However, black martial pride in the late 1960s was tempered by the knowledge that African Americans appeared to make up a disproportionate percentage of the causalities in Vietnam.

Although the threat of being drafted into the United States Army had lingered throughout much of Ali's professional career, he initially made no indication that he would refuse to serve. If anything, he was mildly embarrassed about his failure to meet the draft's required intelligence standards and was happy to avoid talking about the army or Vietnam at all.[70] However, when Ali was re-classified 1-A in February 1966 he was forced to respond. Rather than accepting a role behind the frontlines as an entertainer or liaison, as Joe Louis had done during the Second World War, Ali instead told reporters, "I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong" and applied for conscientious objector status.[71]

The *Defender* immediately questioned the legitimacy of his claim. Frank Stanley's editorial on February 24, 1966, asked "Is Religion A Last Resort?"[72] Once again, his column unequivocally laid out the *Defender*'s views on Ali's draft resistance: "all men, in all walks – on all levels – of all races and beliefs should meet their duty by responding to military calls…We deeply regret that Clay has chosen not to bear arms for his country."[73] Three years earlier, the *Defender* had argued that Ali had failed in his 'duty' by refusing to join the integration movement. By resisting the draft, Ali was again rejecting what many believed to be his duty as an American. It is also worthwhile noting that three years after Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. changed his name to Muhammad Ali, Stanley still refused to use the Islamic name. The *Defender,* like many other newspapers, seemed unwilling to accept the name and the identity that accompanied it.

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[68] John Ernst and Yvonne Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority: Louisville's Anti-War Movement, 1966-1975," *The Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 1 (2007): 105–6.

[69] Christine, Knauer, *Let Us Fight As Free Men: Black Soldiers and Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 1–12.

[70] Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* (London: Pan Books, 1991), 142–43.

[71] Remnick, *King of the World*, 287–88.

[72] Frank L. Stanley, "Is Religion a Last Resort?" *Louisville Defender*, Feb. 24, 1966.

[73] Ibid.

The *Defender*'s negative view of draft resistance was not restricted to Ali. Just a few weeks earlier Stanley had written a scathing editorial addressing comments made by Student Non-Violence Coordinating Committee chairman John Lewis that supported draft resisters.[74] Stanley labeled Lewis's statements "ill-conceived and ill-timed" and clearly stated the paper's disapproval of antiwar sentiment: "It is well known that we give little support to the present day draft card burners and the protestors against America's participation in the Vietnam conflict."[75] Although there was a small antiwar movement in Louisville, in 1966 and 1967 most of the city's citizens supported the war in Vietnam.[76] Like many other Americans, Ali's hometown initially viewed him as being little better than the "draft card burners" or "draft dodgers" who were accused of cowardice during the early years of the war.[77] Kentucky's politicians exemplified this sentiment by passing a State Senate resolution condemning Ali's perceived disloyalty: "His attitude brings discredit to all loyal Kentuckians and to the names of the thousands who gave their lives for this country during his lifetime."[78] Sympathizing with a draft resister was unlikely to win the *Defender* many friends in a city that had not yet turned against the Vietnam War.

Military service was also a key component of black masculine identity throughout the United States. Black Americans, from all classes, saw military service as a way of proving that they were not only full citizens but also worthy of a share in the masculine American tradition of waging war.[79] By the time of Ali's draft resistance, most of those who had been involved with, or witnessed, the campaign to desegregate the armed forces during the Second World War and the Korean War were middle aged or elderly. Among that number were the editors and owners of the nation's black press outlets. As a result, many black newspapermen saw Ali's refusal to be drafted as an insult toward an institution they valued dearly. Syndicated columnist Doc Young railed against Ali's "blatant disregard for national loyalty." Al Munroe from the *Chicago Defender* echoed this sentiment, "Clay, like all other young

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[74] Frank L. Stanley, "Lewis' Call to Avoid the Draft Damages Fellow Leader as Well as Negroes Generally," *Louisville Defender*, January 20, 1966.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ernst and Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority," 105–6, 141–42. Resistance to the war and the pacifist movement in Louisville grew as the war stretched into the 1970s.

[77] Ernst and Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority," 105-106, 141-142.

[78] Hauser, *Muhammad Ali*, 146–47.

[79] Knauer, *Let Us Fight as Free Men*, 7.

Americans must answer the Army's call when it comes."[80] By vilifying Ali, black newspapers were also affirming their own patriotic credentials. Many American press outlets were initially hesitant to question the war for fear of being labeled disloyal or unpatriotic. This was especially true for black newspapers. Black editors still remembered the backlash from the U.S. government during the Second World War when they were accused of being "dangerous to national cohesion" as they continued to campaign for domestic racial equality "in the face of foreign enemies."[81] The editorial staff at the *Defender* was evidently well attuned to this. Stanley's editorial about John Lewis asked black America not to foment antiwar sentiment because "[t]he patriotism of Negroes cannot be impugned."[82] The *Defender*'s attacks on Ali's draft resistance fit neatly within their desire to not only bolster the patriotic, masculine credentials of black men but also to establish their paper's loyalty during war time.

However, as Ali's draft resistance dragged on, the *Defender*'s approach to the war, and to Ali specifically, began to shift. By 1967 many black journalists began to acknowledge that the war was not only taking a disproportionate toll on black Americans but it was also distracting the Lyndon Johnson administration from its civil rights pledges.[83] The black press was ahead of the curve in this respect; it was not until late 1968 that a majority of Americans began to view involvement in the war as a mistake.[84] In May 1967, for example, prominent civil rights activist Bayard Rustin wrote in the *New York Amsterdam News*, "I cannot ignore the overrepresentation of black people on the casualty lists of Vietnam in the midst of our continuing underrepresentation in the decision making processes at home."[85] In early 1967 the civil rights community was abuzz with speculation that Dr. Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were also against the war. King publicly affirmed his antiwar stance in April with his "Beyond Vietnam" speech. Like Ali, he too was dismayed by the hypocrisy of sending black men to wage

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[80] A.S. Doc Young, "How Cassius Clay Talked His Way into a Military Hassle," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 26, 1966; Al Monroe, "So They Say," *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 21, 1966.

[81] Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War*, 5.

[82] Stanley, "Lewis' Call to Avoid the Draft."

[83] Eldridge, *Chronicles of a Two-Front War*, 4, 5, 140–43.

[84] Frank Newport and Joseph Carroll, 'Iraq Versus Vietnam: A Comparison of Public Opinion.' *Gallup,* 4 August 2005. Accessed February 10 2016. http://www.gallup.com/poll/18097/iraq-versus-vietnam-comparison-public-opinion.aspx.

[85] Bayard Rustin, "Vietnam: Where I Stand," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 20, 1967.

war for a government that would not grant them civil rights.[86] When major civil rights leaders like King began to publicly condemn the war, the black press could safely air their grievances too. In May, a poll conducted by the *Chicago Defender* found that a majority of the city's black citizens opposed the war, while the *Cleveland Call and Post* published alarming statistics on the percentage of black soldiers dying in Vietnam.[87]As more mainstream civil rights figures opposed the war, Ali began to look less radical. This change in perception became even more pronounced when King specifically endorsed Ali's courage in resisting the draft.[88]

Faced with this shift in sentiment from some of the nation's most revered civil rights figures, the *Defender* also adopted a more critical stance on the war and a correspondingly more sympathetic attitude toward Ali. In January, the *Defender* reprinted an editorial from the *Chicago Defender*: "While white America is engaged in the sordid business of denying the Negro his full citizenship rights…the war in Vietnam is taking an unprecedented toll of American black soldiers."[89] This new direction evidently resonated with readers in Louisville. A month later, a letter to the *Defender*'s editor emphatically stated "I shall not fight in Vietnam until I am accorded the same freedom as the white man in this country."[90] Predictably, the *Defender*'s movement away from de facto support for the war influenced its writing about Muhammad Ali, whose battle with the Army Selective Services was still being played out in the public eye.

This change in the *Defender*'s approach to Ali was most visible in its reactions to two events in 1967: the stripping of his boxing titles and licenses and his conviction for draft evasion by a Houston grand jury. In April at an Army induction center in Houston, Texas, Ali made his refusal to be drafted official.[91] The New York State Athletic Commission, followed by other athletic bodies throughout the country, immediately stripped Ali of his titles and his license to box. The *Defender* presented

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[86] Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence" (speech, Riverside Church, New York City, April 4, 1967), *American Rhetoric*, Accessed 5 November 2016, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm.

[87] Sam Washington, "Negro Opinion on Viet Is Shifting: Majority Favor Pull-Out," *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 22, 1967; "Negro Deaths Highest in South Vietnam," *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 18, 1967.

[88] Mike Marqusee, "Beyond the Confines of America," in *The Mammoth Book of Muhammad Ali*, ed. David West (London: Constable and Robinson, 2012): 156–58.

[89] "The Black Soldier," *Louisville Defender*, January 26, 1967.

[90] Roy T. Poorman (Letter to the Editor), "Freedom and Vietnam," *Louisville Defender*, February 25, 1967.

[91] Hauser, *Muhammad Ali*, 171–79.

this as an extension of the unreasonable treatment meted out to Ali by the white establishment: “If they were interested in fair play and justice, they would have waited until Muhammad went to prison, or at least, had been convicted.”[92] This was the first time the *Defender* called Ali by his chosen name, Muhammad – as if his stand against the white establishment had finally earned him the right to be who he wanted to be.[93] Intimations of racism and discrimination continued after Ali was eventually convicted of draft evasion. In an article published shortly after the verdict, the *Defender*’s Charles Lee wrote, “this Democratic legality is flowing on the liquid of racists…Black Man if we can’t physically defeat you, we’ll legally defeat you and yours.”[94] Articles such as these positioned Ali as a black martyr, a man being punished unfairly for the steadfastness of his beliefs and for daring to oppose a white man’s war.

The *Defender*’s writing about Ali in 1967 belies the first markers of the black press welcoming Ali into the mainstream of the black liberation movement – a process that was not complete until 1971. Ali’s views on the civil rights movement had not changed, but his draft resistance gave him a “moral authority” that was appealing to even his most ardent detractors.[95] When Ali made disparaging remarks about the open housing movement upon a visit home to Louisville in April 1967, rather than chastising him, the *Defender* came to his aid. Sports editor Clarence Matthews stepped in to “clear up some misconceptions” about Ali’s comments and to ensure that he was not pushed further away from the integration struggle.[96] Matthews’s efforts to clarify Ali’s comments came toward the end of his column, which he had dedicated to making the case for Ali retaining his World Boxing Association (WBA) heavyweight crown. This was a dramatic departure from the *Defender*’s vilification of Ali for exactly the same beliefs, less than a year previous.

The change in the *Defender*’s coverage of Ali in 1967 might have reflected disenchantment with the war amongst Louisville’s citizens. However, antiwar sentiment in the city was confined to a relatively small group of activists, and was not

[92] “Move with Indecent Haste," *Louisville Defender*, May 11, 1967.
[93] In reference to Ali’s famous line “I don’t have to be who you want me to be, I’m free to be who I want.” Ali said this as he announced his conversion to the Nation of Islam and a few days before he officially became Cassius X, and then Muhammad Ali.
[94] Charles Lee, "From Here on Sports," *Louisville Defender*, June 29, 1967.
[95] Ezra, *Muhammad Ali,* 120–34.
[96] Clarence Matthews, “Matter of Sports: Ali and Open Housing,” *Louisville Defender*, April 27, 1967; Ezra, *Muhammad Ali,* 127.

fully established in Louisville until the early 1970s.[97] As was the case in 1964, the *Defender*'s approach toward Ali reflected changes in the national black press discourse. Many of the nation's leading African American columnists softened their attitudes toward Ali in light of growing displeasure with the war in black press.[98] By also adopting this more nuanced outlook, Frank L. Stanley and his staff chose to align themselves with the national black press on Ali's draft resistance – contravening their previous efforts to avoid portraying the *Defender* as unpatriotic or disloyal during a time of war. It also laid the groundwork for the paper to celebrate Ali as a hero when his conviction was overturned four years later.

New Decade, New Ali

Following his 1967 conviction for draft evasion, Muhammad Ali was stripped of his passport and boxing licenses. He avoided prison by way of a protracted appeals process and tried to stay active both politically and financially. Ali gave lectures at college campuses, opened a hamburger chain called Champburgers, and even made a foray into the theatrical world with a role in the racially charged, off-Broadway production "Big Time Buck White."[99] However, without the media attention that his boxing matches generated, the deposed champion slipped from the public spotlight. Ali's hopes of a return to the ring (and a return to public life also) were kept alive by the prospect of a final showdown with the United States Supreme Court, set for mid-1971. As it turned out, Ali did not have to wait that long to recapture the country's attention. In late 1970, political maneuvering in Georgia and legal battles in New York restored Ali's boxing licenses, and he made his long awaited return to the ring.[100] Ali's well-publicized bouts with Jerry Quarry, Oscar Bonavena, and the 'Fight of the Century' against Joe Frazier, ensured that by the time he had his day in court, America was watching once more.[101]

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[97] Ernst and Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority," 105–6, 141–42, 138.

[98] Jackie Robinson, "Robinson Says Muhammad Ali's Criticism Stems from Prejudice," *Louisville Defender*, March 9, 1967; Brad Pye, "Will Clay Fight or Go to Jail?" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 23, 1967; Bayard Rustin, "In Defense of Muhammad Ali," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 3, 1967.

[99] Hans J. Massaquoi, 'The Unconquerable Muhammad Ali: *Ebony Magazine*, April 1969,' in *The Mammoth Book of Muhammad Ali*, ed. David West (London: Constable and Robinson, 2012), 172–73; Peter Wood, "Return of Muhammad Ali, a/k/a Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr.," *New York Times*, November 30, 1969.

[100] Ezra, *Muhammad Ali*, 148–151.

[101] Hauser, *Muhammad Ali*, 203–33.

On June 28, 1971, the Supreme Court reversed Ali's draft-evasion conviction. The decision prompted an intense reaction from the nation's media, especially the black press. Black journalists, whose disposition toward Ali throughout most of the 1960s could be described as cautious at best, and hostile at worst, celebrated Ali's exoneration as if they had been in his corner all along. In the days and weeks surrounding the court case, black journalists all but forgot about the critique and censure they had heaped upon Ali for nearly a decade. Instead, they wrote about a new Ali: a shining beacon of black autonomy and righteousness. Nowhere was this discursive about-face more evident than in the pages of the *Defender,* which claimed "Muhammad Ali has always been the 'people's champion.'"[102]

Once again, Frank L. Stanley set the tone for the *Defender*'s coverage of Ali's acquittal. He had been critical of Ali every time he wrote about him throughout the 1960s. However, in 1971 almost all traces of criticism vanished from Stanley's writing about Ali. He wrote two lengthy editorials exclusively about Ali in 1971: one in the lead-up to the appeal and one following the decision. Both were borderline hagiographies. The first of these articles was published in the aftermath of Ali's "gallant" loss to Joe Frazier.[103] In it, Stanley described Ali in heroic terms: "He was the little man's fighter, who even in draft evasion, talked back to the establishment."[104] Stanley also foregrounded his paper's response to Ali's impending court date, "regardless of the outcome…Muhammad Ali, nee Cassius Clay has been a credit to the sport by his example of clean living…and fidelity to religions [sic] beliefs of his choice."[105] These words must have come as something of a shock for dedicated readers of Stanley's column. The last time the editor of the *Defender* wrote about Ali he had criticized his anti-establishment streak and questioned the legitimacy of his religious beliefs. Yet, by 1971, these same qualities made Ali a hero in Stanley's eyes.

Stanley's enchantment with Ali only intensified after the Supreme Court's decision. He wrote, "Kentucky is famous for many things…but easily its greatest luminary is Muhammad Ali."[106] He went on to describe Ali as "the idol of millions,"

[102] "A Night to Remember," *Louisville Defender*, March 4, 1971.
[103] Frank L. Stanley, "Being Frank About People, Places and Problems," *Louisville Defender*, March 17, 1971.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Frank L. Stanley, "Being Frank About People, Places and Problems," *Louisville Defender*, July 15, 1971.

"a champion and an [sic] Disciple of black determination" and "truly the first *free* black champion to ever confront white America."[107] Apart from one unnamed writer who "accept[ed] the Court's decision with mixed emotion," the staff at the *Defender* followed their editor's lead.[108] The *Defender* began to refer to Ali as "the people's champion"; "our hometown hero"; a man of "loquacious charm and authority" and "[a] superstar" who "despite his success…has not once forgot where he came from."[109] It is particularly interesting to note the attempts made by Stanley and his writers to re-establish Louisville's ownership of Ali via phrases such as "hometown hero" or "Kentucky['s]…greatest luminary."[110] This was a remarkable change in tenor for the *Defender*. Stanley, Blye, and the other writers at the *Defender* were lavishing praise upon Ali, and proudly claiming him as their own, for exactly the same religiously motivated, anti-establishment actions that earned him their ire throughout almost the entire previous decade.

Although this newfound love for Ali is astonishing when contrasted with the *Defender*'s previous animosity toward him, this shift in attitude begins to make sense when examined in the context of broader discursive changes that occurred within the black press during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Throughout the 1960s, Ali had been seen as a radical, but when opposition to the Vietnam War became de rigueur amongst the "responsible negro leadership," he was dragged out of the margins and into the mainstream.[111] According to Michael Ezra, this served to "legitimize" Ali's stand against the war.[112] Consequently, the black press began to identify Ali as part of the broader struggle for racial equality, and his acquittal was seen as a victory for that movement.[113] The *Chicago Defender* neatly summarized the intersection between Ali's draft resistance and the broader black freedom narrative:

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[107] Ibid.

[108] "Muhammad Ali Should Have Served," *Louisville Defender*, July 1, 1971.

[109] "A Night to Remember"; Cecil Blye, "Ringside-----Closed Circuit TV Style," *Louisville Defender*, March 11, 1971,; "Frazier Ends Clay Era," *Louisville Defender*, March 11, 1971; "Muhammad Ali Honored at Alpha Convention: Ali Praises Fred Stoner," *Louisville Defender*, August 12, 1971.

[110] Frank L. Stanley, "Being Frank About People, Places and Problems," *Louisville Defender,* July 15, 1971; Blye, "Ringside."

[111] Robinson, "The Muslim Champion"; Ezra, *Muhammad Ali,* 124.

[112] Ezra, *Muhammad Ali*, 124.

[113] "Muhammad Ali Vindicated," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 3, 1971; "Free at Last: Hail Ali's Victory," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 3, 1971; Brad Pye, "Ali Proves It," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 1, 1971;"Freed by Supreme Court Ruling: Muhammad Ali Scores TKO over U.S. Army," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 2, 1971.

> The High Court's action is a healthy reaffirmation of a fundamental legal principle which needed to be articulated at this juncture of an undeclared and unpopular war in Southeast Asia. Ali lost the boxing championship to Joe Frazier as a consequence of an unjust decision…[but] he scored a haymaker against Uncle Sam.[114]

In this passage, the *Chicago Defender* argued that Ali was legally and morally justified in opposing an "undeclared and unpopular war." Furthermore, by describing Ali's acquittal as a "haymaker against Uncle Sam" the Chicago paper actually *celebrated* Ali's anti-establishmentarianism, rather than vilifying him for it as they and many other black newspapers had done in the past. The *Louisville Defender*'s response to Ali's exoneration echoed the celebratory discourse promoted by its contemporary in Chicago – and many other black press outlets. In fact, Stanley reprinted this passage, word-for-word, right next to his own editorial on Ali.[115] The celebration of Ali by the *Defender*, and other newspapers throughout the United States, can also be viewed within the context of black celebrity. Black entertainers and athletes gained increasing mainstream acceptance and popularity during the 1970s. Ali's established public profile, along with the high drama of his battle with the government, made him an engrossing figure for the American media at a time when black celebrities were very much in vogue.[116]

It is also likely that local changes in Louisville enabled the *Defender* to be confident that its support of Ali would not provoke a negative reaction from the city's conservative elite. Although many citizens were pro-war at the time of Ali's conviction, by the early 1970s support for the Vietnam had faded noticeably in Louisville.[117] Although they still saw military service as an honorable duty, many Louisvillians began to weigh their attachment to these traditions against perceptions of the Vietnam conflict as specifically distasteful.[118] In addition, the *Defender*'s presentation of Ali was likely also re-contextualized by racial unrest in Louisville during the final years of the 1960s. As the open-housing movement in Louisville continued to falter, frustrated civil rights activists began to identify with Black Power

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[114] "Ali's Great Victory," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 1, 1971.
[115] "Ali's Great Victory," *Louisville Defender*, July 15, 1971.
[116] See Michael Oriard, "Muhammad Ali: The Hero in the Age of Mass Media," in *Muhammad Ali: The People's Champ*, edited by Elliot Gorn, (Urbana, Ill., 1995): 11–12.
[117] Ernst and Baldwin, "The Not So Silent Minority," 138.
[118] Ibid.

philosophy.[119] White paranoia about the militant allusions of Black Power led to rising tensions between blacks and law enforcement, which in turn led to an increase in wrongful arrests and police brutality.[120] In late May 1968, the situation reached a flashpoint when a protest rally devolved into a riot. The riot lasted almost a week, caused significant damage to property, and resulted in two deaths. In the aftermath, the police and the FBI accused six Black Power activists of starting the riot and conspiring to commit more grievous acts. The charges appeared to be concocted and sparked outrage in the community.[121]

Although the *Defender* joined calls for the men to be released, the riot and the events surrounding it seemed to confirm their fears about the dangers of radicalism.[122] The newspaper remained an outspoken critic of radical Black Power groups and "continually criticized militants, associated them with youth violence and vandalism, and declared their leadership bad for the community."[123] By comparison, Ali's brand of activism seemed almost moderate. He was still a radical, but when placed against the backdrop of the 1968 race riot in Louisville, he just did not seem as dangerous anymore. He did not partake in, or advocate, violence and vandalism, and appeared to be bearing his exile from boxing with dignity. Furthermore, Ali's acquittal in 1971 legalized his stand against the war and officially brought him back into the fold of law-abiding citizens.

Even without these local changes in Louisville, it is likely that the *Defender* would still have imitated the more celebratory approach to Ali that was evident in the black press nationwide. The *Defender* had been closely attuned to the discursive changes of its black press colleagues throughout the 1960s, and it is unlikely that the paper would have broken this connection on an issue of such national significance as Ali's acquittal. However, growing disaffection with the war and the rise of Black Power groups in Louisville did enable Stanley and his writers to be far more confident in their celebration of Ali in 1971.

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[119] Tracey E. K'Meyer, "Empowerment, Consciousness, Defense: The Diverse Meanings of the Black Power Movement in Louisville, Kentucky," i ™n *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, edited by Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 151.
[120] K'Meyer, "Empowerment, Consciousness, Defense," 151-154.
[121] K'Meyer, "Empowerment, Consciousness, Defense," 155-158.
[122] K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 189–200.
[123] K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, 200.

Conclusion

Rather than being blinded by hometown parochialism, Frank Stanley and the writers at the *Defender* engaged with Ali in critical and complex ways. In the mid-late 1960s, they told their readers that his rejection of the civil rights movement made him an enemy of racial equality, and that his initial refusal to fight in Vietnam made him unpatriotic. It was not until Ali emerged victorious from an extended battle with the United States government and the country's various athletic commissions that the *Defender* began to present a more celebratory version of him. Although the *Defender* was the only black publication in the city, Stanley and his writers were not necessarily representative of black Louisville. They were representatives of the black middle class and many of their views on Ali aligned with those of their colleagues in other cities rather than with ordinary working-class black Louisvillians.

Although the Defender's attitudes toward Ali and many other important issues primarily reflected broader trends in the black press, local context was also important. Michael Oriard argues that this is part of the puzzle that made Ali such a fascinating subject for journalists across the United States. He could be interpreted in ways that were simultaneously universal and unique,

> Ali was a "text" that could be read in competing ways…because of our diversity we Americans do not read *any* of our important cultural texts in identical ways.[124]

The *Defender*'s attitudes toward Ali are indicative of the heterogeneous ways that people, communities, and cultures across the country "read" Ali as a "cultural text". Stanley and his writers viewed Ali through the prism of their own middle-class lives, their support for the integration movement, as well as their experiences of race relations in Louisville. They had to interpret him at both a macro and micro level because he was significant on the national (and international) stage, but also relevant to their understandings of race, discrimination, and black empowerment at a local level. Ali had a special significance to the *Defender* because he was from Louisville. However, other black newspapers from locations around the United States also had to consider what Ali meant to them from national, and local perspectives. Interrogating

[124] Oriard, "Muhammad Ali: The Hero in the Age of Mass Media," 11–12.

the ways these individual publications constructed meanings “brings us close” to a more nuanced understanding of Ali’s cultural significance.

Conclusion

March 1971 marked a dramatic shift in journalistic attitudes toward Muhammad Ali. For the first time in seven years, the majority of American newspaper journalists were calling Ali by his chosen name. This was not, however, the end of changes to his cultural identity. Some of the most significant moments in his public life occurred post-1971: the 'Rumble in the Jungle' (1974); the 'Thrilla in Manila' (1975); his electioneering for President Ronald Reagan (1984); lighting the torch at the Atlanta Summer Olympic Games Opening Ceremony (1996); and his death in 2016. The central character in each of these events was not 'Cassius Clay,' or 'Clay,' or 'Clay a.k.a. Ali,' or 'Cassius "Muhammad Ali" Clay,' or 'Muhammad Ali formerly known as Cassius Clay.' After March 1971, and for the rest of his public life, he was Muhammad Ali or, simply, Ali. Although the name 'Muhammad Ali' was now a fixture of the American lexicon, its meaning continued to shift. This name, which had once marked its owner as a dissident and a 'hard punching revolutionary,' came instead to symbolise a thoroughly more mainstream hero.[1]

After losing to Joe Frazier in 1971, it was not until October 1974 that Ali was given another shot at the heavyweight titles that had been stripped from him. His opponent was George Foreman, a six-foot, three-inch dynamo who had won the heavyweight crown from Frazier eighteen months earlier. The fight took place in Kinshasa, Zaire: a developing African nation ruled by the dictator Mobutu Sese Soko. Mobutu used the fight to legitimise his brutal regime in the eyes of the global community. For Ali, the 'Rumble in the Jungle' provided another form of legitimacy. In addition to reclaiming the heavyweight title after a 15-round ordeal, Ali also used the fight and its surrounding media engagements to further cement his credentials as a global advocate for the underprivileged.[2] It was an identity that he had been cultivating actively since his visits to Egypt, Ghana, and Nigeria in 1964. Leaning on his Nation of Islam teachings as well as growing pan-African sentiment within the United States, Ali's engagements with Africa exposed him to a wider audience and enhanced his image as an advocate for black people around the world – not just those

[1] Jonathan Eig, *Ali: A Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 527.
[2] Grant Farred, *What's My Name: Black Vernacular Intellectuals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 81–83.

in the United States of America.[3] His religion, physical prowess, and racial pride were all part of his appeal. So was his name. It resonated particularly strongly with the citizens of Zaire, who, recently having broken free from European colonialism, could appreciate Ali's desire to shed the nominal vestiges of white subjugation.[4] For his part, Ali spent much of his post-fight press conference praising the zeal with which the Zairians were overturning their colonial past. He told the gathered press that he especially admired their country's new name: Zaire had been the Belgian Congo until only a few years previous.[5]

The following year, Ali defended his title in Manila, the capital city of another developing nation under dictatorial rule. The characters were different this time around – his opponent was Joe Frazier and the dictator was Ferdinand Marcos – but the fight had a similar effect on his global brand. As in Zaire, he emerged with his heavyweight titles intact and an even wider appeal. Although Ali's visit to the Philippines was predominantly an economic exercise – he had been promised four million dollars for the fight – it was also an expression of his previously stated affinity for 'darker people the world over.'[6] In 1967, Ali refused to 'drop bombs and bullets on brown people' in Vietnam.[7] Eight years later, having been vindicated for that stance, he toured Vietnam's South East Asian neighbour and found that the Filipino people appreciated his earlier activism. According to Ronnie Nathanielsz (the Marcos government's liaison to Ali) Filipinos treated Ali 'like the pope [sic].'[8] His impact was such that the country's first shopping mall was constructed at the site of his victory and named in his honour.[9] Ali's time in Manila (and Zaire) expanded his activist purview. He was now not only an icon of domestic racial politics in the United States, but also a supporter of disadvantaged or oppressed peoples the world over. After the 'Rumble in the Jungle' and the 'Thrilla in Manila', Ali's identity as a political dissident began to morph into a more humanitarian persona.

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[3] Lewis A. Erenberg, '"Rumble in the Jungle": Muhammad Ali vs. George Foreman in the Age of Global Spectacle,' *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 1 (2012): 82.

[4] Farred, *What's My Name*, 56–57.

[5] Norman Mailer, *The Fight* (Melbourne, VIC: Penguin Books, 2011), 222.

[6] Michael Ezra, *Muhammad Ali: The Making of an Icon* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2009), 124–125.

[7] Ibid.

[8] 'Muhammad Ali was "like the Pope" in the Philippines,' *Aljazeera*, 7 June 2016. Accessed 27 July 2018. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/death-muhammad-ali-memories-thrilla-manila-160604130527805.html.

[9] Airnel Talatala Abarra and Danim R. Majerano, 'Re-imagining the Spectacular Ali: From the Battle Space into Mall Space,' Paper presented at the inaugural Ali in Un/Expected Places Symposium, University of Turku, Finland, 19 May 2017.

Ali could have, and perhaps should have, retired after beating Frazier in Manila. He was 33 years old and slowing down. He could not dance around the ring as he used to, and his crack-of-lightning jabs had become more like rolling thunder – constant, but predictable. He was also getting hit, a lot. By the late 1970s he was taking punches to the head four times more frequently than he had in his early career. [10] However, against the advice of his doctors, trainers, and family, he continued fighting until 1981. Perhaps he kept boxing because his ego would not let him quit, or because he felt an obligation to his now global network of admirers, or because he needed to recoup the money he had lost due to imprudent investments, reckless spending, and unscrupulous 'friends.'[11] Most likely, it was a combination of these factors and many more. Regardless of the reasons, it became clear to Ali's inner circle and some members of the press that his refusal to retire was devastating his health. Not only were his athletic performances becoming noticeably less proficient but his speech was increasingly slurred, he was constantly forgetting things, and he tired easily. He finally stopped fighting in December 1981 after an ignominious loss to Trevor Berbick, who could not have touched Ali in his prime.

Ali in Retirement

Even without the spectacle of his boxing matches, Ali's public profile continued to evolve throughout the early 1980s. The mainstream persona he had developed in March 1971 was especially visible when he supported Ronald Reagan in the 1984 Presidential election. After backing the Reverend Jesse Jackson in the Democratic primaries, Ali switched his endorsement to the Republican incumbent, President Ronald Reagan.[12] When asked why, he stated that Reagan was 'keeping God in schools and that's enough.'[13] Reagan also enjoyed the support of Ali's old nemeses Joe Frazier and Floyd Patterson – the same Floyd Patterson whom Ali had attacked in 1965 for his moderate sensibilities. Pictures of the three men appeared on a campaign billboard underneath a bold caption that read 'we're voting for the man.'[14] Although

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[10] Eig, *Ali*, 460.

[11] Ibid., 466–488.

[12] Leah Wright Rigueur, 'When Muhammad Ali Endorsed Ronald Reagan,' *Washington Post,* 10 June 2016. Accessed 31 July 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/10/when-muhammad-ali-endorsed-ronald-reagan/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f9a297da225e.

[13] 'Campaign Notes; Muhammad Ali Switches His Support to Reagan,' *New York Times,* 3 October 1984, 24.

[14] Wright Rigueur, 'When Muhammad Ali Endorsed Ronald Reagan.'

the notion of a radical like Ali campaigning for 'the man' may have seemed incongruous, it was not a surprise to those who knew him.[15] Many of the racial, religious, and gendered ideologies he adhered to as a Nation of Islam follower were highly conservative, bordering on fundamentalist. His backing of Reagan was also not the first time he had shown support for a conservative politician. In 1969, he had sung the praises of former Alabama Governor and Presidential candidate George Wallace – Ali particularly admired Wallace's ardent belief in racial segregation.[16] Ali's support for Reagan did not represent any significant change to his personal beliefs. It was, however, evidence of his ever-increasing cachet as a mainstream cultural figure. The Reagan campaign was banking on Ali, icon of the anti-establishment crowd, to convince Americans to vote for 'the man.' The moral authority Ali had earned as an opponent of the United States government was now being used to bolster his appeal as a spokesperson for the political establishment. By the 1980s, memories of Ali as a firebrand revolutionary may have persisted, but they were becoming increasingly entangled with his image as a statesman.

That same year, doctors confirmed what Ali's friends and family (as well as members of the press and public) already suspected: his brain had been damaged irreversibly, most likely during the latter part of his extended career.[17] Deteriorating health and financial difficulties prompted Ali to step further away from the spotlight. He still made public appearances at dinners and charity functions and occasional media interviews but his public presence diminished significantly.[18] He stepped back into the spotlight in 1996 at the Opening Ceremony of the Atlanta Summer Olympic Games – a poetic return to the city that had staged his comeback fight a quarter-century earlier.[19] In the final moments of the ceremony, Ali emerged from the shadows to take the torch from swimming champion Janet Evans. The organisers had kept Ali's involvement in the ceremony a secret and the stadium filled with a growing roar as the crowd realised who had been chosen to light the Olympic cauldron. His hands shook almost uncontrollably and he grimaced with effort as he lit the wick that carried the flame to the cauldron above him. When these images were beamed around

[15] Eig, *Ali*, 503.
[16] Cragg Hines, 'Muhammad Ali Praises Wallace and Separatism,' *Chicago Daily Defender,* 15 March 1969, 2.
[17] Eig, *Ali*, 499-504.
[18] Eig, *Ali*, 510–525.
[19] John Matthew Smith, 'The Resurrection: Atlanta, Racial Politics, and the Return of Muhammad Ali,' *Southern Cultures* 21, no. 2 (2015): 7.

the world, yet another element was added to Ali's mainstream appeal. Parkinson's syndrome may have robbed him of his physical vigour, but in the eyes of the estimated 3.5 billion people watching the ceremony, it also granted him a new quality: the strength to withstand an obviously debilitating condition.[20]

The ceremony rekindled the world's fascination with Ali. He began appearing more regularly in public and the media were there to document it. Instead of newspaper journalists, however, television was primarily responsible for transmitting and shaping Ali's identity in the 1990s. The printed press had competed with television for media supremacy throughout the 1960s and 1970s but, by the time Ali stepped back into the public eye in Atlanta, television unquestionably had assumed primacy.[21] Television had always suited the young Ali. His charisma, physical presence, and attractiveness endeared him to this visual and auditory medium, and he enjoyed fruitful relationships with a number of television personalities – especially with sportscaster Howard Cosell.[22] However, after Atlanta he was a very different figure on screen. He had lost much of his verbal ability and almost all of his physical dynamism. According to those close to him, beyond superficial impressions he was the same man he had always been: brash, confident, contradictory, and complex.[23] Outwardly though, the radical of the 1960s, hero of the 1970s, and statesman of the 1980s, appeared now as a 'shuffling, sweet-faced mystic, benevolent and wise.'[24]

Remembering 'The Greatest' in the Digital Age

Ali's death in 2016 forced media outlets in the United States and around the world to grapple with the multifaceted nature of his identity. Memorials focused on his athleticism, racial activism, magnetic personality, advocacy on behalf of Parkinson's sufferers and humanitarian causes, or all of the above. Although some media outlets paid lip-service to Ali as a controversial figure, few delved into the complex reactions

[20] Nancy J. Hajeski, *Ali: The Official Portrait of "The Greatest" of All Time* (San Diego, CA: Thunder Bay Press, 2012), 293.
[21] James Brian McPherson, *Journalism at the End of the American Century, 1965–Present* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 192.
[22] David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero* (London: Picador, 2000), 150.
[23] Davis Miller, 'My Dinner with Ali,' *The Stacks*, 7 June 2013. Accessed 3 August 2018. https://thestacks.deadspin.com/my-dinner-with-ali-511528500.
[24] Eig, *Ali*, 527.

that Ali elicited from the American press and public at the height of his career.[25] Historian Johnny Smith argues that Ali's ailing, peaceful persona of the 1990s and onwards may have contributed to more 'sanitized' memories of the late boxer.[26] According to Smith in 2017:

> In the silence, over the past two decades, Americans developed historical amnesia about who Ali was and what he believed … [C]onfusing the muted Muhammad Ali with the outspoken one of the 1960s and 1970s renders his past—and America's—unrecognizable.[27]

Smith's concerns echo those of African American Studies scholar Gerald Early, who warned in 1998 and again in 2016 'that, as a society, we were on the verge of "over esteeming" Muhammad Ali and thus grossly underestimating his significance.'[28] Early further argues that the over-esteemed and over-simplified memory of Ali has become a battle ground in the culture wars. According to Early, this is predominantly because commentators on both the left and right have failed to comprehend that Ali, at the height of his career, provoked complex and divisive reactions from liberal, moderate, and conservative Americans alike.

The tendency to over-simplify, over-esteem, or sanitise Ali's legacy also may have been exacerbated by new media forms. In the 21st century the work of shaping and disseminating memories of Ali has fallen, in large part, upon digital media. Digital platforms can memorialise Ali in a diverse range of ways, and also have the facility to host critical analyses of his legacy from a wide range of commentators. This, however, has not been the case. Representations of Ali on arguably the two most popular digital sources of information, Wikipedia and social media, overwhelmingly lack nuance and critical analysis. This contributes to an overly simplistic remembrance of not only Ali, but also his cultural milieu.

Social media has played a significant role in shaping and transmitting memories of Ali in the digital age. Social media is an umbrella term for websites and

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[25] Johnny Smith, 'Remembering Muhammad Ali: Myths, Memory, and History,' *Reviews in American History* 45, no. 1 (2017): 177.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Gerald Early, 'Muhammad Ali: The King of the Inauthentic,' *The Black Scholar*, 21 June 2016, Accessed 3 August 2018. http://www.theblackscholar.org/muhammad-ali-king-inauthentic-gerald-early/.

applications that facilitate communication and interaction amongst users via the sharing of textual or audio-visual content.[29] Ali has a significant presence on social media, as both a user and a theme. As of August 2018, his primary social media accounts on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (each of which have been managed by others since before his death) boast a combined total of over 15 million followers.[30] There are also 13.5 million videos posted on YouTube about 'Muhammad Ali.'[31] Of these films, the five most popular clips have been viewed a combined total of 180 million times.[32] Users of these sites do not merely consume information, they also have the opportunity to respond to and reframe the content presented to them. Social media sites therefore have the potential to engender a wide array of remembrances of Ali. Despite this potential for democratic historical discussions, historian Holly Thorpe argues that memories of public figures on social media often are steered toward dominant narratives by influential individuals or organisations.[33] Thorpe further argues that this tendency is particularly strong after the death of a celebrity.[34] Whilst there is evidence of debate about Ali's cultural meaning – particularly on Facebook and YouTube and especially with regards to the morality of his draft resistance – the dominant perception of him on social media is simplistic and celebratory.[35]

Whilst this is a reflection of the broader state of Ali's cultural memory, it may also belie the influence of the corporation that manages his social media accounts:

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[29] Claire Ross, 'Social Media for Digital Humanities and Community Engagement,' in *Digital Humanities in Practice,* eds Melissa Terras, Claire Warwick, and Julianne Nyhan (London: Facet Publishing, 2012) 23–25.

[30] See: https://twitter.com/MuhammadAli; https://www.facebook.com/MuhammadAliVerified/; https://www.instagram.com/muhammadali/. Accessed 4 August 2018.

[31] Searching for 'Muhammad Ali' on YouTube does not provide a count of the results returned. This number was attained by searching for "Muhammad Ali" on Google.com. I then limited the results first to 'videos' and then to videos from 'YouTube.com' only. These filters can be accessed via the 'Tools' tab on the Google search homepage.

[32] See: https://www.youtube.com/results?sp=CAMSAhABQgQIABIA&search_query=%22muhammad+ali%22. Accessed 5 August 2018.

[33] Holly Thorpe, 'Death, Mourning, and Cultural Memory on the Internet: The Virtual Memorialization of Fallen Sports Heroes,' in *Sport History in the Digital Era,* eds Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 186. For a discussion of this dynamic in other social media, see: Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips, 'Reading *Salute*: Filmic Representations of Sports History,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 10 (2011): 1463–1477.

[34] Ibid.

[35] See for selected examples of social media debate over Ali in the aftermath of his death: Javier E. David, 'Critics, Admirers Spar Over Muhammad Ali's Legacy,' *CNBC,* 4 June 2016, accessed 6 September 2018. https://www.cnbc.com/2016/06/04/muhammad-ali-legacy-on-social-media.html

Muhammad Ali LLC.[36] The company owns the late boxer's 'intellectual property,' 'publicity rights,' and 'identity' – which includes his name, signature, image, likeness and voice.[37] Ali's cultural memory is big business. In 2006, entertainment company CKX (which also controls the rights to Elvis Presley's identity) paid 50 million dollars for an 80 percent share in Muhammad Ali LLC. The revenue generated by merchandising and selling Ali's name, image, and likeness is unknown but is likely to have grown significantly following his death. The financial value of Ali's identity, which is augmented by the 80-million-dollar Muhammad Ali Center in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, gives the overseers of Ali's social media presence significant motivation to keep his cultural memory simple and celebratory.[38] Like many other modern media representations of Ali, his social media presence promotes his humanitarian credentials and obscures his complex and divisive past.

Wikipedia also may have shaped Ali's overly celebratory public image. According to digital humanities scholar Anne Burdick, Wikipedia is 'the most comprehensive, representative, and pervasive participatory platform for knowledge production ever created by humankind.'[39] It is a freely accessible, online encyclopaedia that relies upon members of the public rather than experts to write and manage its content.[40] It contains nearly six million articles, including an almost 30,000-word entry on Ali. As of August 2018, the page has been viewed nearly 27 million times. More than 11 million of these views were amassed in June 2016, the month of Ali's passing.[41] It is, without question, the most widely read account of Ali's life. The quality of the article, from the perspective of an academic historian, is more debatable. The bulk of the article chronicles Ali's athletic exploits, while discussion of his religious beliefs, draft resistance, and cultural impact constitutes less than 10 percent of the piece. Furthermore, these aspects of Ali's life, which most historians consider to be far more significant than his achievements as a fighter, are discussed in an uncritical and unreflective manner. This is unsurprising given that Wikipedia's

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[36] Ezra, *Making of an Icon*, 191–192.

[37] Darren Heitner, 'Muhammad Ali Enterprises Sues Fox for $30 Million,' *Forbes*, 11 October 2017. Accessed 4 August 2018. https://www.forbes.com/sites/darrenheitner/2017/10/11/muhammad-ali-enterprises-sues-fox-for-30-million/.

[38] Ezra, *Making of an Icon*, 186–190.

[39] Anne Burdick et al., *Digital_Humanities*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 85.

[40] Dan O'Sullivan, *Wikipedia: A New Community of Practice*. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 1-5.

[41] Wikipedia, 'Muhammad Ali,' Accessed 3 August 2018. https://tools.wmflabs.org/pageviews/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&start=2015-07&end=2018-07&pages=Muhammad_Ali.

core content policies discourage contributors from including analysis and interpretation in articles. According to sport historian Murray G. Phillips, this, along with the site's insistence that contributors write from an objective or 'neutral' point of view, ensures that articles on Wikipedia privilege 'hegemony [and] dominant discourses.'[42] As a result, the 27 million users who viewed the article were exposed to the over-simplified and over-esteemed narrative that Early and Smith argue has become the dominant way of remembering Ali.

Future historical analyses of Ali, particularly those addressing social memories of the late boxer, may consider engaging with these (and other) digital paradigms. This thesis ventured into a developing era of digital scholarship by consulting online newspaper archives. Online newspaper archives are, however, only one facet of a still-emerging landscape of scholarship in the digital era.[43] Scholars may reap substantial rewards from consulting other digital troves of source material. These collections may contain material that is digitised or born-digital. This thesis engaged with the former of these categories: digitised material. Digitisation involves making electronic copies of physical or analogue objects. A variety of historical material can now be digitised (photographs, official records, letters, diaries, sound and film recordings) and further studies of Ali could be conducted using these sources.

An emerging frontier for historians is working with born-digital material – which refers to texts and recordings that were created digitally rather than converted from physical or analogue forms. Digital devices are omnipresent, and a significant amount of textual, audiovisual, and even physical (3D printing) material that may once have been recorded in physical form is now born-digital. As we move further into the future, and recent events transform from news into history, these born-digital sources will become increasingly valuable to historians.[44] There is, however, a form of born-digital material that is of immediate interest to historians: social media content. According to sport historian Gary Osmond, social media sites are vast forums of public discourse, which historians might analyse to better understand the processes

[42] Murray G. Phillips, 'Wikipedia and History: a Worthwhile Partnership in the Digital Era?' *Rethinking History* 20, no. 4 (2016): 534.

[43] Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips, 'Introduction,' in *Sport History in the Digital Era,* eds. Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 13–17.

[44] See: Osmond and Phillips, 'Introduction,' 8–11, for a discussion of the relationship between 'recent history' and digital technologies.

of social memory construction.[45] Some sites, like Twitter, maintain vast archives of their users' messages and posts.[46] For Ali scholars, social media archives may provide further insight as to how, when, and why modern audiences remember the late boxer. This is a particularly important avenue of inquiry given the lack of nuance exhibited in social media reactions to Ali's passing.

Regardless of whether future analyses of Ali consult digitised or born-digital material (or both) – it is likely that such projects will have to consider innovative ways of dealing with an abundance of sources. The age of 'big data' (which has been called the 'infinite archive') poses a number of technical, logistical, and epistemological challenges for historians.[47] It also presents opportunities, particularly regarding the development of new methods for source analysis. Distant reading, as employed in this thesis, is one of these emerging methodologies. There is, however, an array of other approaches in use throughout the broader digital humanities. Digitised or born-digital source material about Ali could be analysed via data mining, geographic information systems (GIS), topic modelling, network analysis, or any of the new techniques that are sure to be developed over the coming years.[48]

This thesis does not claim to encompass all of the sources on Ali or all of the methodologies available to historians in the digital era. The online newspaper archive consulted for this thesis is but one of the digital collections of source material now available to historians. Likewise, the distant and close reading methodology used here is only one of many possible approaches to working with vast digital collections. Instead, the preceding chapters stand as an example of the benefits that can be gained from accessing digital collections and employing innovative methodologies. The wealth of sources available on ProQuest Historical Newspapers, when analysed through both distant and close readings, produced the most comprehensive and detailed study of press attitudes toward Muhammad Ali ever conducted. More

[45] Gary Osmond, 'Tweet Out? Twitter, Archived Data, and the Social Memory of Out LGBT Athletes,' *Journal of Sport History* 44, no. 2 (2017): 323.

[46] Other social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, or any number of blogging platforms might also be conceptualised as online records of public exchanges. Twitter, however, appears to be more conducive to academic purposes than these sites. Twitter restricts users to relatively short messages, arranges these messages chronologically, and (most importantly) has archived all of its content since 2006.

[47] Shawn Graham, Ian Milligan, and Scott Weingart, *Exploring Big Historical Data: The Historian's Macroscope* (London: Imperial College Press 2015), 195–234. See also: David M. Berry, 'Introduction: Understanding Digital Humanities,' in *Understanding Digital Humanities* ed. David M. Berry (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

[48] Ibid., xv–xxiii.

important than the attempt at comprehensiveness and detail in this research, however, is that it revealed new understandings of Ali's place within the American cultural landscape of the 1960s and 1970s.

Ali's two names were integral to revealing this new understanding. Using distant reading, I tracked the relative usage of 'Muhammad Ali' and 'Cassius Clay' by newspaper journalists. I then produced a graphical representation of how often each name was used, month-by-month, between 1960 and 1975. Given the racial, religious, and cultural significance of both names, this graph could be interpreted as a record of changing newspaper attitudes toward Ali over time. The distant reading graph introduced in Chapter One shows that journalistic attitudes toward Ali shifted dramatically in March 1964, September 1967, and March 1971. The bulk of the thesis then analysed the complex discursive forces that shaped attitudes toward Ali between 1964 and 1971, a period that, according to Grant Farred, 'stands as Ali's most radical.'[49] Specifically, each chapter has focused upon a close reading of the racial, religious, and cultural forces that prompted American newspaper journalists to change their perception of Ali at three critical junctures.

Chapter Two examined press attitudes in the period following the first of these junctures: Ali's announcement in March 1964 of his allegiance to the Nation of Islam and his subsequent name change. Close reading indicated that although journalists almost universally refused to use Ali's Muslim name, black and white newspapers had different reasons for rejecting the name. Journalists at white publications saw Ali's new name as symptomatic of his perceived naivety and dismissed his association with the Nation of Islam as a flight of fancy. Black journals also rejected the name but did so because they saw the Nation of Islam as a potential threat to their program of moderate, racial integration. Examining black newspaper rejection of Ali's Muslim name is a vital step toward re-complicating Ali's legacy. The perception of Ali as a hero of the civil rights movement was a key motif in media portrayals of the great boxer following his death. The close reading conducted in Chapter Two brings us closer to the historical reality: between 1964 and 1967, Ali was seen to be an opponent of the integration or civil rights movement rather than one of its heroes.

Chapter Three offered a close reading of newspaper discourse surrounding the next two shifts identified by distant reading: September 1967 and March 1971. These

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[49] Farred, *What's My Name*, 81.

turning points correspond closely with the beginning and end of Ali's draft resistance saga. In April 1967, Ali refused to be inducted into the United States Army during the war in Vietnam. In the months that followed he was found guilty of draft evasion, had his boxing licenses and titles stripped, and adopted a more explicitly activist persona. In September 1967, journalists from both black and white publications responded to these events and began to use Ali's two names interchangeably – a trend that continued relatively unchanged for three-and-a-half years. Following Ali's return from boxing exile, and in anticipation of his fate ultimately being decided by the Supreme Court, in March 1971 journalists dramatically shifted their attitude toward the two names and unequivocally began referring to him as Muhammad Ali instead of Cassius Clay. The close reading in Chapter Three indicates that the shift in September 1967 toward using Ali's names more interchangeably was prompted by increased journalistic sympathy for his legal and athletic situation. However, the dramatic acceptance of his name and identity in March 1971 should be attributed to a culmination of broader geopolitical and culture changes within the United States over the preceding four years.

Chapter Four was an even more focused analysis: a close reading of the *Louisville Defender*. This analysis was conducted in order to ascertain if the same discursive trends could be detected within a single publication, without the aid of distant reading. Furthermore, the *Defender* was also analysed so as to identify how specific local factors might have shaped press attitudes – it was anticipated that these factors would be particularly powerful in Ali's hometown black newspaper. Close reading revealed that local factors such as Louisville's unique racial culture, and individual personalities like editor Frank L. Stanley, exerted an important influence over the newspaper's attitudes toward Ali. The most powerful influence over the *Defender*'s coverage of Ali between 1964 and 1971, however, was discourse of other black newspapers around the United States. This chapter revealed important local nuances in attitudes toward Ali and also demonstrated the remarkable unity of black press attitudes toward Ali across the country.

By combining traditional close reading techniques with an exploration of digital archives and quantitative analysis, this thesis has attempted to construct a nuanced and critical understanding of newspaper attitudes toward Ali between 1964 and 1971. This marriage of traditional and digital methodologies is one that sport historians could benefit from embracing. I began work on this project in 2013, at a

point when the digital world was, according to digital humanist Steven E. Jones, 'everting.'[50] Jones' notion of eversion implied that the relationship between the digital and analogue was turning inside out.[51] The digital world would cease to be somewhere we could visit (or ignore) and was becoming wholly enmeshed in most aspects of modern life.[52] From a historical point of view, Jones' proclamation was a warning to practitioners that the day would soon come when we could no longer avoid engaging with digital technologies. As I type this in late 2018, that moment has passed. We live now in what David M. Berry and Anders Fagerjord call the 'postdigital age' – digital technologies and methodologies are the new, unavoidable reality.[53] When I began this project, engagement with the digital world was desirable for historians. As I bring this research to its completion, that desire has grown even stronger. As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, engagement with digital humanities is not only feasible for sport historians but also presents opportunities for sport historians to increase the breadth and depth of their analysis. This thesis stands as evidence that a marriage between sport history and the digital world can produce complex and meaningful understandings of the sporting past.

[50] Steven E. Jones, *The Emergence of the Digital Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1–10.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] David M. Berry and Anders Fagerjord, *Digital Humanities: Knowledge and Critique in a Digital Age* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017), 1.

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