

# Nobody knows my name

*Whosoever flieth from his country for the sake of the true religion of Allah, shall find in the earth many forced to do the same, and plenty of provisions.—THE KORAN*

[A BRAVE RESPECT]

**T**HERE WAS ONCE a white man who beat the hell out of Muhammad Ali.

The present heavyweight champion of the world (no matter what any boxing commission says) was not yet champion, nor was he known by his chosen religious name. He was Cassius Marcellus Clay, and he still had not left Louisville, Kentucky, and he was, at the time, eight years old.

Clay's father rescued him that day in the Louisville slum where Muhammad Ali's father still lives; but we ought to remember the cracker who for no known reason was beating the boy. We ought to remember him because you don't have to be black to know that there's a straight line from that white man in Kentucky to all the white men who recoiled in horror 17 years later at the sound of Muhammad Ali saying, "No."

What he said, in full, was, "No, I'm not going ten thousand miles from here to help murder and kill and burn another poor people simply to help continue the domination of white slavemasters over the darker people the world over."

A group of intellectuals said something very similar and equally principled not long ago: "What is citizenship if, under certain circumstances, it becomes shameful submission? Are there not cases where the refusal to serve is a sacred duty, where 'treason' means a brave respect for what is true? And when, according to the will of those who use it as an instrument of racial or ideolog-

ical domination, the Army declares itself in overt or covert revolt against democratic institutions, does not revolt against the Army take on another meaning?"

Unfortunately for the decency of America, those questions were asked seven years ago, they were asked about Algeria, and the intellectuals who asked them were not American but French. Muhammad Ali's refusal to take the one step forward that constitutes formal induction into the armed forces of the United States is rife with ironies, and not the least of them is that an athlete, representing a feared and outcast group, has committed the act of leadership in the "best educated" nation in the world, while its intellectuals, far from banding together in defense of "treason"—if treason be necessary in pursuit of truth—bicker among themselves while they compete for government grants.

But perhaps the greatest irony is the almost uniform castigation of Ali for being what Americans have always professed most to admire: a man who combines courage and principle. At worst—as in a May 7th diatribe by Melvin Durslag of the Los Angeles Times (who of course calls him "Cassius Clay")—Ali is berated as a coward or a fake or both; at best, newsmen and columnists by the dozens have quoted, with sad, wise approval, a fellow inductee who said, "If I have to go, then he ought to have to go."

None of them, so far as I know, has drawn the obvious corollary: the other guy didn't have to go either. More important, none has taken the time to think out loud about the meaning of Muhammad Ali and his act.

If Ali's act in refusing to step forward for induction was treason, then it was a treason, certainly, which "means a brave respect for what is true," and in which decent men

A sports story by Gene Marine, with Robert Avakian & Peter Collier

must join or face the fact that we are, morally, valve tenders at Auschwitz. This is not to say that Muhammad Ali is America's Jean-Paul Sartre, much less to say that he holds all the principles and positions that are hastily being attributed to him. He is a symbol of the failure of the rest of us—but he is a person, a human being, before he is any kind of symbol.

[A SPIT IN THE FACE]

**A**LI IS, for one thing, a 25-year-old Southern black man. He is not well educated, not even particularly bright—though he is far from the dolt some sports writers made him out to be when, under earlier and more rigid standards, he failed some Selective Service verbal tests which white America and its newsmen referred to as “mental tests.” They gave his I.Q. out as 78—a figure whose meaning can be measured against the fact that before he was 20, he swung himself a highly favorable financial deal in negotiations with a group of businessmen that included the chairmen of the boards of Brown-Forman Distillers and the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company.

Still, his I.Q. probably *was* 78. The schools he went to in Kentucky probably didn't do much to prepare him for Stanford-Binet testing. But neither did they take away his pride.

After his recent fight, Ali told reporters, “I didn't go to the body because I didn't want to get hit in the face. Body punchers get bruised, cut and swelled up. I like to be able to dress up the next day.” At 18, he wore his Olympic medal to bed.

And he insists on being called by his chosen name.

It is a funny thing, that name. People in any trade can call themselves anything they want to—Mark Twain, Ross MacDonald, Jack Ruby, Robert Taylor, Fabian—and nobody much gives a damn. People change their names for religious reasons all the time, and few are the Irish sports writers who would insist on referring to Sister Mary Theresa as Annie O'Houlihan. Much less would they be likely to make fun of her religious name—like syndicated buffoon Jim Murray, out of the Los Angeles Times, who has called Ali things like “Abdullah Bull Bull” and “Abou Ben Hernia.”

The case of “Muhammad Ali,” however, is something else again. “Cassius Clay” is certainly a euphonious enough name, and it was as “Cassius Clay” that the man became famous. But it is not ignorance or forgetfulness that leads almost every sports writer, almost every copy desk, almost every radio or television news-actor to insist, like a spit in the face, on “Cassius Clay.” And this has gone on for three years.

Sports writers do not, of course, recognize the Muslims as a religious group, any more than do prison officials across the country, any more than does the Federal government (can you see Ali commissioned a lieutenant and made a chaplain?). No sports writer would poke fun at Floyd Patterson for attending Mass, or at Barney Ross for observing Passover. But all but three or four have for three years insisted on saying every day to the heavy-weight champion of the world that he will damned well wear a white name and like it.

That could make a guy a little angry. It could make him think, if he didn't think so already, that he lives in a white racist country.

[BROWN BOMBER, BLACK BEAUTY]

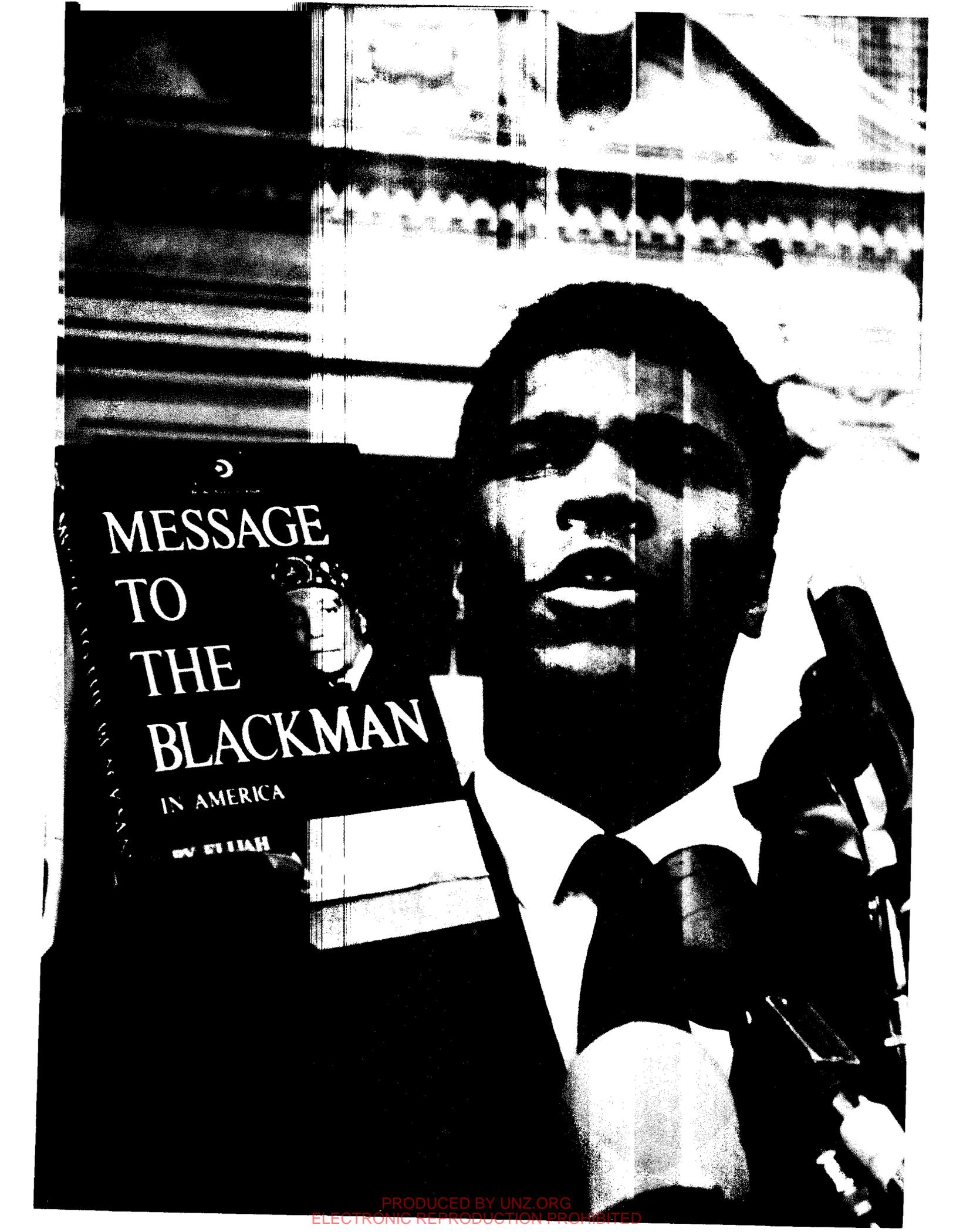
**T**HE AMERICAN SPORTS PAGE is far more influential than most press critics have noted. It was not many years ago, for instance, when the late Bill Leiser, sports editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, quietly issued an edict to print, whenever possible, the picture of a black man who won a race or hit a home run; he knew, as few intellectuals do, the subtle and far-reaching power of his medium.

The claim that Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson have done as much as any civil rights leader to force white Americans to regard black men as something more than subhuman supernumeraries is far from unfounded. Sports figures are closer to Americans, of whatever color, than virtually any other group, with the possible exception of motion picture and television stars. At the same time, our sports pages, as much as any other segment of our national life, reflect our concern with the idea that the game ought to be played by certain rules.

A professor or a poet may protest and be greeted by the general public with a shrug; but the heavyweight champion of the world makes treason or racism, or both, stand out for everyone to face and deal with. Muhammad Ali is a long way from an intellectual. But he saw, somewhere, at some time, what being a black champion in a white country was supposed to mean, what role he was supposed to play, and he refused.

“Be a credit to your race,” they told him in the vocabulary of 30 years ago, “and all will be yours: adulation, Cadillacs, women, the wide-eyed admiration of the white nation.” Cassius Clay not only refused to play, he bought his own Cadillac, turned down the women, surrendered the adulation (and some millions of dollars in endorsement fees), joined an unpopular religion and changed his name.

“Be Joe Louis,” they told him in effect—but you can't be the affectionately tolerated Brown Bomber if you



MESSAGE  
TO  
THE  
BLACKMAN

IN AMERICA

BY ELIJAH

believe in black beauty. The Brown Bomber, first in the long line of black champions, had to prove himself to the white sports writers and the white fight world; by the time of Muhammad Ali things had changed, a black world had come into existence in which it is the white man's job to prove himself. The sports writers and the Broadway wise guys and the fight game hipsters are 30 years behind the times, and they still don't know it.

And so they hate this man—the entrenched, the mighty and would-be-mighty, the black *assimilados*, the word-smiths and the image men. He was such a nice kid, and the black devil has possessed him. If it were only 1692.

["I KNOW THE TRUTH"]

**A**T 18, YOUNG, EAGER, CASSIUS CLAY returned from the 1960 Olympics in triumph, and they all loved him. He was a "warm, natural young man, totally lacking in sophistication, whose personality could be a refreshing breeze in a becalmed sport"; that was Dick Schaap, writing in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1961. He was "an amiable and unsophisticated young man, who loves life and people and success and fame," said *Newsweek*—and the whites complacently read it, "good, simple, happy nigger."

Amiable, unsophisticated Clay swung his deal with the white Louisville businessmen—they did all the investing, he got more than half the income—and deliberately manufactured his attention-getting "I am the greatest" pose. His corny "poetry" (he writes poetry only a little better than the average sports writer) and his uncanny knack for naming the round in which his opponent would fall, was offensive to a few and misleading to many, but it brought him up the ladder fast.

Clay had only 19 professional fights before he was matched with terrible "Sonny" Liston ("the King of Hip," Norman Mailer called him, "the Ace of Spades"). The underlying racism of the heavyweight world had been showing on the surface more than usual, aimed for a time at Floyd Patterson, who was then thought by the white-hope dreamers to be black. Another amateur champion, Pete Rademacher, had been elevated to a pro and matched with Patterson in his first fight, through a financial guarantee put up by a racist group; Patterson had demolished him. Ingemar Johansen had come from Scandinavia to prove the superiority of the white man; Patterson took the title back and kept it.

Then—as so often happens—the ringmasters realized that things hadn't been so bad after all. "Sonny" Liston had appeared—a burly, lazy, slow, hulking ex-con, a cool killer, the absolute stereotype of the black man in the white man's nightmares about his sister—and had clob-

bered Patterson twice, both times in the first round.

Liston could hit like a falling boulder, and he probably wasn't afraid of any *fighter* alive—but Clay convinced Liston that he was facing the completely unpredictable. He pulled up in front of Liston's house at three a.m., stood on the lawn, and shouted insults. At the weigh-in before the fight, Clay turned up—somehow—with a pulse rate of 120, convincing the examining physician that Clay was hysterically frightened. The sports writers—so devoted to the "big black buck" stereotype that they were convinced Liston was invincible—gleefully began to predict that Clay wouldn't show up for the fight.

He showed up—with a steady pulse rate—and he has been champion ever since. Immediately afterward, he announced his adherence to the Muslim faith, and in March 1964—after a brief flirtation with "Cassius X" that may have risen from his friendship with Malcolm—he announced that, as is the custom in the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad had bestowed on him a "holy name" because he had fulfilled the requirements of his faith. He wished, he said, to be known as Muhammad Ali.

Two days later, Ali told reporters, "I know where I'm going and I know the truth, and I don't have to be what you want me to be; I'm free to be what I want to be."

Roman Catholic Floyd Patterson immediately metamorphosed from black threat to dark-skinned white hope. "I disagree with the precepts of the black Muslims," he said, "just as I disagree with the Ku Klux Klan—in fact so much that I am willing and desire to fight Cassius X to take the title from the black Muslim leadership." He offered to fight for no purse. Cassius X turned the offer aside with a mild put-down of Patterson (mild, possibly, because Patterson hadn't called him "Clay") and the serious remark, "I don't want no religious war."

Any non-Muslim, black or white, who has ever read *Muhammad Speaks* or listened to Elijah Muhammad's broadcasts is likely to have some reservations about the Nation of Islam. Aside from the pseudo-science, the improbable sociology and the falsified history, it is at least disconcerting to read about the hypocritical white man who forces the use of the hated word "Negro"—in a newspaper you've bought from a black man who said, "Excuse me, sir, would you buy a paper and help the Negro?"

And there can be little doubt that the Muslims get as much out of Ali as he ever got out of them. For one thing, they get money; for another, they get a forum that they could never buy. Probably it is trust rather than understanding that binds Ali to them.

"Followers of Allah," he has said, "are the sweetest people in the world. They don't carry knives. They don't tote weapons. They pray. The women wear dresses that come all the way to the knees and don't commit adultery.

All they want to do is live in peace with the world. They don't hate anybody. They don't want to stir up any kind of trouble. All the meetings are held in secret, without any fuss or hate-mongering."

But there is more to be said about the Muslims, and their impact on Ali, than that. "Muslims are righteous people," Elijah Muhammad said recently (in a lengthy interview with CBS and ABC reporters, only a small portion of which was broadcast, on ABC). "They do not believe in making war on anybody—and senseless aggression against people violates a Muslim's religious belief . . . I refused to take part in the war at that time [in 1942] against Japan and Germany, or help America to fight those wars. I considered myself a righteous Muslim, and I teach peace. . . . If it is fighting for truth and righteousness—yes, we go along with that. But if it is fighting for territorial gain, or to master and rule people in their own spheres, no. We think it is an injustice. . . ."

A Catholic bishop could as easily make those statements, in full conformance with his dogma, for the guidance of a Floyd Patterson—but none has. Any leader could stand and trumpet those words—but none has (Martin Luther King is certainly more black leader than Baptist leader). A few lonely Christian pacifists have always resisted war—but no major Christian religion, least of all the Roman Catholic, has dared to step so far outside the "acceptable" on moral grounds.

The irony is not only that a group of black outcasts, hated and feared by white America, leads in taking the one position that upholds the rhetoric of great American ideas, and is willing to sacrifice American material rewards. It is equally ironic that Elijah Muhammad's Muslimism is the only religion in the United States that is willing to say unequivocally that God is higher than Caesar—even if they call him Allah.

["WHAT'S MY NAME?"]

**A**LI HAD BARELY BECOME ALI when the World Boxing Association and its president, Ed Wassman, started trying to take his newly won title away. Fewer than 60 days had gone by before Wassman was quoted in the press as saying that the behavior of "Clay" since becoming champion was "detrimental to boxing." Since his only public behavior had been to proclaim his religion and his change of name, the meaning was clear.

On a pretext, they took the title from Ali in September 1964; the importance of the action is evident from the fact that everybody but the WBA ignored it.

Ali kept up his anti-Liston tactics in preparation for a second fight, originally scheduled for Boston. He had

already made famous his nickname for Liston ("the big ugly bear"), and he turned up in downtown Boston with a coat that said "Bear hunt" on the back, running up and down stately Commonwealth Avenue, stopping motorists and asking, "Have you seen the bear?" Boston ultimately unloaded the fight, and it was finally held in Lewiston, Maine. It lasted two minutes.

In fact, the fight was over so fast that the officials and a great many television watchers thought that Liston had never been hit. The sports pages came as close as they dared to yelling "fake." Joe Louis—who is trotted out whenever Ali is in the news, to show that there are still credits to the race—said scornfully, "I don't see how any man can get so much power while punching on his toes."

Slow motion films of the fight show what happened—Ali, his pivotal foot perfectly flat and planted, had thrown a right cross hard enough so that his own shoulders turned a complete 180 degrees, and the punch lifted Liston several inches off the canvas before he dropped—but the odor of words like "fiasco" has never left the fight.

When, in November of 1965, Ali finally clobbered Patterson, he infuriated sports writers—not because he won, but because he won so easily, took 12 rounds to do it in, and was quite clear about why. All the pre-fight talk proved costly to Patterson: in the ring, Ali continually taunted Patterson by calling him "Mr. White America." The white writers were outraged, but there must have been some black smiles.

In Ali's next to last fight, Ernie Terrell threw several visibly low blows and rabbit-punched and kidney-punched throughout the fight, but when it was over and he was beaten, he called Ali a "dirty fighter"—and half the writers who covered the fight echoed the charge.

That fight, more than any other, brought down on Ali not only the contempt but the righteous wrath of the sports pages. Already he had been classified 1-A; already he had said that he wasn't going to go. Already he had been barred from fighting in several states because he refused to support the war in Vietnam. Already he had made it clear that he would play no newsman's game, that he would say what he felt like saying and insist on his dignity as a man. And already he had told them, over and over, "My name is Muhammad Ali," and they had ignored him.

Ernie Terrell chose to ignore him too, and to make a public issue out of calling him "Cassius Clay." In February 1967, Ali held Terrell up for 15 rounds while he hit him; there is no more charitable description. And every so often, Ali—the fastest heavyweight who has ever been in a ring—would throw a particularly fast combination of punches, step back, and shout, "What's my name?"

How they hated that! "He showed himself to be a

mean and malicious man," Arthur Daley wept in the New York Times—as though anyone could pretend that it was only Terrell to whom the question had been addressed. "I hope he's all right," Ali said of Terrell the next day. "He's a gentleman. He's still my brother. He's black like me." But the Daleys and the Murrays missed the point.

[STEVE CANYON, LYNDON JOHNSON, ET AL.]

**T**HE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, these days, is the freedom to be sure that all the propaganda is on one side. Long feature stories dot the Sunday editions about the stars who entertain the troops; the gossip columnists glorify the prizefighters (black and white) who travel in the right chic circles; Steve Canyon grimly flies the comic pages; the sports pages are celebrations of publicity for local heroes. "They tell me it would be a wonderful thing if I married a white woman," Ali once sneered, "because this would be good for brotherhood." It would be good for the gossip columnists, anyway; they'd be very noble, just as the sports writers are very noble about black prizefighters so long as they are content to be brown bombers.

But Ali challenges the sports page picture of America, and for that reason, if for no other, the sports writers must feel compelled to get him. Possibly they are all liberals; possibly they would all insist that the name change is a symbol only of separatism, and that they defy it in the cause of some word-magic variant of integration. But to Ali it must look—as, indeed, it looks to many white Americans—like an attempt to deny him his dignity, his prerogatives of choice, his opportunity to be a man.

They may be liberals; but if they are, they are the same sort of liberals as those who asked actor Ossie Davis in bewilderment why he delivered an oration at the funeral of Malcolm X—the question to which Davis answered, in part, "No Negro has yet asked me that question."

"Malcolm kept snatching our lies away," Davis wrote. "He kept shouting the painful truth we whites and blacks did not want to hear from all housetops. And he wouldn't stop for love or money." And Davis wrote: "White folks do not need anybody to remind them that they are men. We do! This was his one incontrovertible benefit to his people."

Muhammad Ali, alone among athletes, fits Davis' description. "The white men want me hugging on a white woman," Ali said, "or endorsing some whiskey, or some skin bleach . . . But by my sacrificing a little wealth I'm helping so many others. Little children can come by and meet the champ. Little kids in the alleys and slums of Florida and New York, they can come and see me where they never could walk up on Patterson and Liston. Can't

see them niggers when they come to town."

He said: "Jackie Gleason tried to show me why I shouldn't be a Muslim. He said, 'Champ, why don't you think about it?' He's not the onliest one. All the big whiteys are trying. . . . Take those big niggers Floyd Patterson, 'Sonny' Liston. The whites make 'em rich, and in return they brainwash the little Negroes walking around. Liston lives in a white neighborhood, Patterson lives in a white neighborhood. I can live in the Fontainebleau, anywhere I want; but I live here in a slum with my people. I could have taken money from the whites, but it would brainwash all the little black children."

But Muhammad Ali is not a "credit to his race"; according to Ring magazine, he is "not to be held up as an example to the youngsters of the United States."

"I went in one place in Louisville," Ali once said, "and asked to be served, and the waiter told the boss, 'He's the Olympic champion,' and the boss said, 'I don't give a damn who he is, get him out of here!'"

[A HIGHER BANNER]

**F**ROM "I DON'T GIVE A DAMN WHO HE IS" to "What's my name?" is not so far as all that. And Olympic champion Cassius Clay, now heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali, once said he wanted "some type of little mission, something to do with the freedom of the Negro in America." He's found it; it has something to do with my freedom, too, and that of a lot of other white Americans.

It started on February 17, 1966, when Muhammad Ali was reclassified 1-A. Nine days later he announced that, as a Muslim, he would not fight in Vietnam. The New York Times quoted him as saying, "I don't have no personal quarrel with those Vietcong," but he actually said it much better than that:

"I ain't got nothing against them Viet Congs."

If that be treason, it is the kind of treason that rises to a banner above the banner of Caesar: it rises to the banner of truth. Alone, young, uneducated, Ali may not be able to take it by himself; but he certainly isn't getting any help from intellectuals.

The principled act of Muhammad Ali is a tragic-ironic heroism. He stands out not only because he is right but because he is alone, in a position which might be, but isn't, shared by all the intellectuals, the religious leaders, the men and women who by profession or position or announced dedication should today be in the forefront of "treason."

It is time, I think, to call Muhammad Ali by his right name.

# The Inquest

**G**RAND conspiracies need not be grand. There need be only a few central figures in a position to manipulate, wheedle, dupe, blackmail, and buy the bit actors. This is the theory of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison as applied to the assassination of President Kennedy. "The people who engineered the killing of one of the finest Presidents we ever had are walking around today," he declares. "Not to do anything about it is un-American."

The Louisiana populist can hardly be accused of disloyalty. He has, he claims, discovered who killed Kennedy, who organized the plot, and what forces were involved in planning the various steps that led to the assassination. And he has done all this against formidable odds. He has been denounced and ridiculed by such columnists as Bob Considine, Jim Bishop and Victor Reisel. The press has, for the most part, slanted its coverage of his investigation to imply motives of personal glory and political gain. The government Establishment has given him the cold shoulder, and the FBI, which "cleared" two of his present suspects immediately following the assassination, refused to release its information to him.

The truth, according to Garrison, is certain to rock the republic as it gradually unfolds in court. He is convinced that Lee Harvey Oswald was not a triggerman, and that Jack Ruby was the puppet of a more sophisticated master. He is equally sure that the working level of the conspiracy was composed of rabid anti-Castro Cuban exiles in league with elements of the American paramilitary right. The con-

certed Establishment effort to confine the events of the assassination to Oswald and Ruby suggests the Garrison thesis: a vertically integrated plot rising step by step into high echelons of government and the military-industrial complex. "Honorable men did in Caesar," dryly observes the prosecutor with a fondness for historical metaphor.

Thus far, the dramatis personae of Garrison's terse drama have been wildly disparate. On February 22 of this year, after preliminary, lengthy questioning by the D.A.'s office and shortly before he was to be arrested by Garrison and charged with conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy, David William Ferrie was found dead in his cluttered New Orleans apartment.

The second major figure in Garrison's probe is 54-year-old Clay L. Shaw, retired executive director of the New Orleans International Trade Mart. Charged with conspiracy by Garrison, he is now awaiting trial.

A third individual expected to figure prominently in the Garrison inquiry is Manuel Garcia Gonzales. The New Orleans D.A. has come into possession of a photograph

by William W. Turner