



Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties

By Mike Marqusee

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Shortlisted for the 1999 William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award and voted one of twenty-five “Books to Remember 2000” by the New York Public Library

Is there a more characteristic figure of the sixties than Muhammad Ali—playful and political, popular and non-conformist, defiant and triumphant? In a unique new book, Mike Marqusee puts the great boxer back in his true historical context to explore a crucial moment at the cross-roads of popular culture and mass resistance. He traces Ali’s interaction with the evolving black liberation and anti-war movements, including his brief but fascinating liaison with Malcolm X, as well as his encounters with Martin Luther King. Marqusee’s elegant and forceful narrative explores the origins and impact of Ali’s dramatic public stands on race and the draft, and reinterprets the “Rumble in the Jungle,” shedding new light on its triumph and tragedy. Above all, he imbues Ali’s story with a long-neglected international dimension, revealing why he was embraced with such warmth by diverse peoples across the globe.

This timely antidote to the apolitical celebration of Ali as “a great American” revisits the man and the period with a fresh eye, casting new light on both his courage and his confusions. And, in a new afterword for this second edition, Marqusee reflects on Ali’s legacy in the era of the “war on terror.”

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Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties By Mike Marqusee Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Ali has been a player on the world stage for so long, it's hard to remember that before his metamorphosis into a cultural icon holding the Olympic flame aloft he was a cultural lightning rod. Hero to some, traitor to others, he managed to land powerful punches both in and out of the ring. What changed him from athlete to personality to a heavyweight of global reach? "At the core of the Ali story," Mike Marqusee reminds us, "is a young man who made daunting choices and stuck to them in the face of ghastly threats and glittering inducements." *Redemption Song* explores those choices in the context of the turbulent times in which they were made.

Ali and the '60s were a naturally synergistic fit. It was a time of great change, and Ali, the seeker, had remarkable access to the fomenters of that change. They, in turn, had a prime influence on his symbolic rebirth and reemergence. As *Redemption Song* recounts, the night the young Cassius Clay upset Sonny Liston for the title in 1964, he skipped the traditional post-fight party and headed straight for Miami's black ghetto where he met with Black Muslim leader Malcolm X, singer Sam Cooke, and the running back Jim Brown, an early advocate of black rights in sports. The next morning, announcing to the white world that "I'm free to be what I want" and "I don't have to be what you want me to be," he confirmed rumors about his conversion to Islam. Clay was dead; long live Ali.

The conversion to Islam was only one of Ali's "daunting choices." As Marqusee moves through the decade, he carefully traces Ali's choices to confront the establishment and stand as a symbol of civil rights and the anti-war effort; his relationships with Malcolm X, Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, and Martin Luther King; and the importance of his travels to Africa. There's plenty of boxing too--Liston, Floyd Patterson, Joe Frazier, George Foreman; the ring, after all, was his arena. Marqusee, though, is more interested in how Ali expanded that arena to take in the kinds of fights that go beyond the ropes. It's a tall order, but *Redemption Song* fulfills it with solid reporting and worthy analysis. --Jeff Silverman

From Publishers Weekly

While David Remnick's *King of the World* focused on the character of Muhammad Ali, using historical context to buttress his portrait of the man, Marqusee has written a vibrant historical essay that reexamines Ali's role as a symbol of dissent and uses the man as a portal to an understanding of his era. In February 1964, the day after he shocked boxing experts by dethroning the much-feared Sonny Liston as heavyweight champion of the world, Cassius Clay had breakfast with Malcolm X and announced that he had joined the Nation of Islam. "I know where I'm going and I know the truth," he said, "and I don't have to be what you want me to be." From that moment, the young man who would soon become Muhammad Ali, who had a natural aversion to politics and a supremely independent spirit, was thrust into the center of events in an era of dramatic social change. Marqusee, who emigrated from America to Britain in 1971, argues that the true political context of Ali's actions and their international implications have been diluted in recent years as the defiant ethos of the 1960s has faded and as Ali has been appropriated as a corporate and even patriotic icon. Drawing upon the music of the day--Dylan, Hendrix, Sam Cooke--and ranging from Paul Robeson to Patrice Lumumba, Marqusee engagingly explains how Ali's penchant for turning events upside down often made him a symbol of heroism abroad and of disrespect for the status quo at home. As Marqusee charts how Ali helped create a global consciousness, he succeeds in knocking Ali off the respectable pedestal on which American culture has placed him, resurrecting him as the radical figure he truly was. (Aug.)

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Review

“A beautiful book.”

—**Arundhati Roy**

“Among the slew of recent Ali books, here’s one that returns the political sting to ‘The Greatest’ ... As Marqusee portrays him, Ali is still the righteous outlaw, as badass as ever and still in the eye of a global storm.”

—***Time Out New York***

“Fascinating, well-written, entertaining and significant. *Redemption Song* provides rare and important insights into Muhammad Ali and his immense global impact on a turbulent and ground-breaking era.”

—**Leon Gast, co-producer and director of *When We Were Kings***

“As Marqusee charts how Ali helped create a global consciousness, he succeeds in knocking Ali off the respectable pedestal on which American culture had placed him, resurrecting him as the radical figure he truly was ... a vibrant historical essay.”

—***Publishers Weekly***

“A thrilling book about a true and enduring hero ... Mike Marqusee has done him, and us, proud.”

—**John Pilger**

“Excellent ... Reminds us just how explosive and divisive a figure Ali was.”

—***Independent on Sunday***

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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