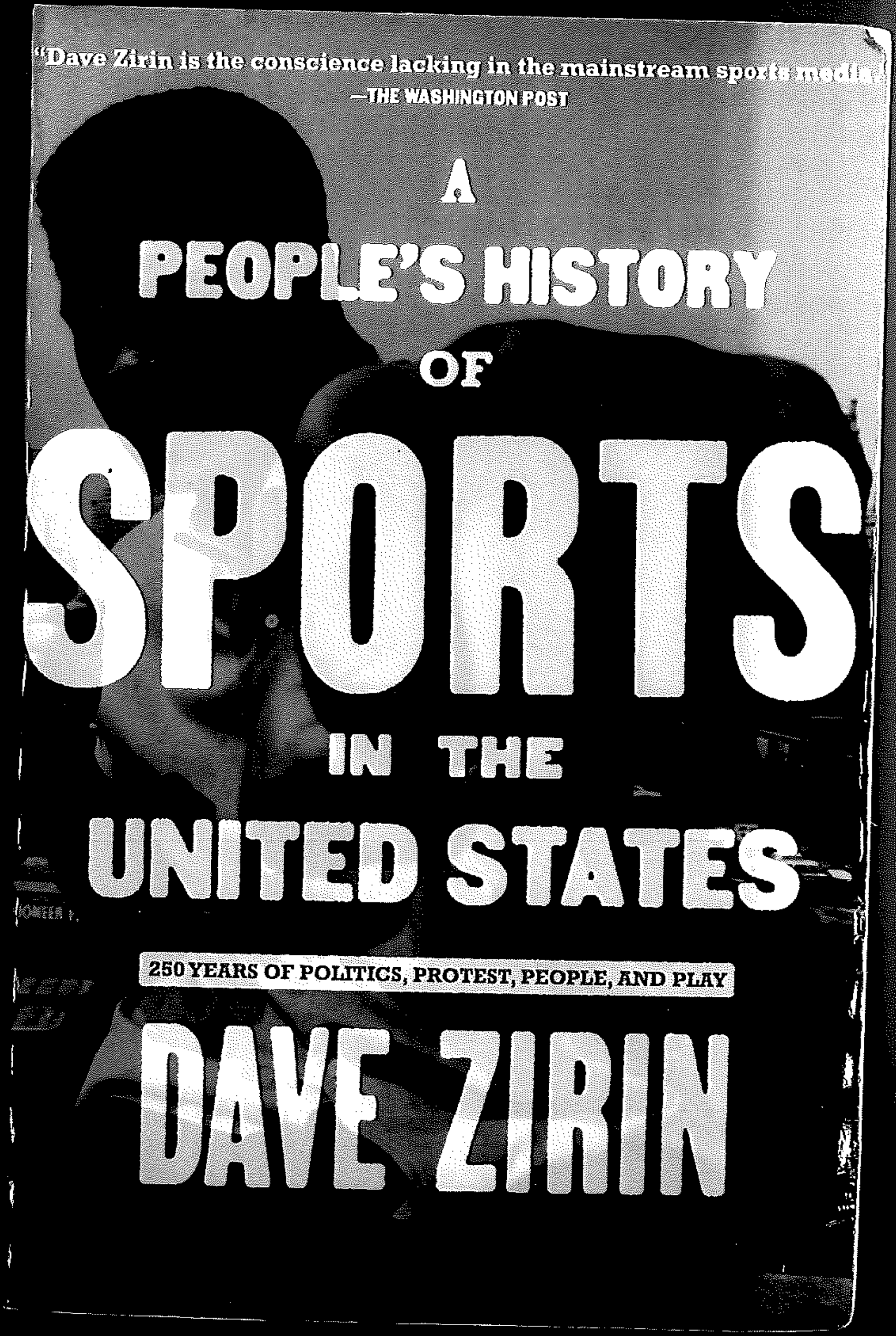

"Dave Zirin is the conscience lacking in the mainstream sports media."
—THE WASHINGTON POST

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF SPORTS IN THE UNITED STATES

250 YEARS OF POLITICS, PROTEST, PEOPLE, AND PLAY

DAVE ZIRIN

5

Have We Gone Soft?

If I wanted to destroy a nation, I would give it too much and
I would have it on its knees, miserable, greedy and sick. . . .
On all levels, American society is rigged.

—John Steinbeck[1]

The 1950s saw the greatest uninterrupted economic expansion in U.S. history. The abundance of disposable income, the creation of suburban tract housing, and the raised hopes of a generation all had a profound effect on the world of sports. *Fortune* magazine called the 1950s "a time of abundance," with 1.1 million families joining the middle class every year. *Fortune* said the United States was a "world of optimistic philoprogenetive [i.e., having a lot of babies] high spending, debt-happy, bargain-conscious, upgrading, American consumers." This extra wealth meant the spread of new technology in a way that was unprecedented. In 1950, 10 percent of American homes had television sets. By 1959, it was almost 90 percent.[2]

Athletes such as Mickey Mantle and Johnny Unitas were exemplars of the greatness that came with being a team player. In particular, Unitas, the star Colts quarterback with the flattop haircut and hardscrabble background, was an icon of the time. But before the country could be primed for wealth, creature comforts, and flattop haircuts, the upheaval that accompanied both the Depression and the war economy had to be squelched. The 1940s had seen the greatest strike wave in U.S. history. The first task of the government was the destruction of this tradition—a process often referred to as McCarthyism, although it both predates and endured beyond the heyday of the Senator Joseph McCarthy.[3]

McCarthyism began in earnest in 1947, when Democratic president Harry Truman put in place a regulation that forced eight million government workers to sign anticommunist loyalty oaths to keep their jobs and allowed the FBI to investigate more than two million federal workers. Under the McCarran Act, signed by Truman in 1950, offenders could be deported. Meanwhile, thousands of people were grilled at hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee about any kind of leftist or communist connection.

> It was the most widespread and longest lasting wave of political repression in American history. In order to eliminate the alleged threat of domestic Communism, a broad coalition of politicians, bureaucrats, and other anticommunist activists hounded an entire generation of radicals and their associates, destroying lives, careers, and all the institutions that offered a left-wing alternative to mainstream politics and culture. That anticommunist crusade . . . used all the power of the state to turn dissent into disloyalty and, in the process, drastically narrowed the spectrum of acceptable political debate.[4]

This was backed up culturally by an entire cottage industry of movies and books with titles such as *I Married a Communist* and *Communist Weapon of Allure*. During the 1950s, Mickey Spillane's salty noir Mike Hammer books, which sold millions of paperback copies, shifted from taking on the mob to taking on communists without missing a beat. "They were Commies. . . . They were real sons of bitches who should have died long ago. . . . They never thought there were people like me in this country."[5] Even Robert Oppenheimer, one of the designers of the atomic bomb, was put under the microscope. Oppenheimer opposed the massive funding and development of the hydrogen bomb and therefore was said not to be "on the team."[6]

This hysteria saw its apex in the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, the son and daughter of Jewish immigrants, who grew up in working-class families in New York City. The Rosenbergs were the parents of two young boys, a fact that was given a lot of play in the media—not out of sympathy, but to send a message: if this couple could be atomic spies, then your neighbor could be a spy too.

Despite demonstrations held around the world, involving figures ranging from Albert Einsten to Dashiell Hammett, the fate of the Rosenbergs was sealed.

> "We are not martyrs or heroes, nor do we wish to be. We do not want to die. We are young, too young, for death," Ethel wrote in the couple's last appeal to the president. "We long to see our two young sons, Michael and Robert, grown to full manhood. . . . We desire some day to be restored to a society where we can contribute our energies toward building a world where all shall have peace, bread and roses. Yes, we wish to live, but in the simple dignity that clothes only those who have been honest with themselves and their fellow men."[7]

Julius Rosenberg wrote in a letter to their lawyer Manny Bloch:

> This death sentence is not surprising. It had to be. There had to be a Rosenberg case because there had to be an intensification of the hysteria in America to make the Korean War acceptable to the American people. There had to be hysteria and a fear sent through America in order to get increased war budgets. And there had to be a dagger thrust in the heart of the left to tell them that you are no longer gonna give five years for a Smith Act prosecution or one year for Contempt of Court, but we're gonna kill ya![8]

Terror

Miriam Zahler, whose parents were Communists in Detroit, remembered:

> My worst nightmare when I was seven and eight was that my mother would be taken away . . . as the Rosenbergs had been from [their children]. Ethel and Julius were at the very center of my terror. . . . I asked my mother why the Rosenbergs were in jail. For passing out some leaflets, she said; I concluded that if the Rosenbergs were in jail because they passed out leaflets, my mother, who also passed out leaflets, might be arrested too. . . .
>
> I was overcome with fear that my mother would not return from the June 14 [1953] demonstration [for the Rosenbergs]. I went into her bedroom closet and stood among her clothes and cried. . . . My father tried to persuade me to come out, but I stood in the closet and wailed that I wanted my mother back—as if she had gone to meet the fate of the Rosenbergs, who were, in fact, electrocuted within the week.[9]

McCarthyism became a part of the sports world when Paul Robeson, possibly the most famous black American at the time, said in 1949, "Blacks would never pick up arms against the Soviet Union." The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) saw its chance to strike at Robeson. To legitimize its attack, HUAC called on Jackie Robinson to testify. NAACP lawyers offered to defend Robinson's right not to speak, but he refused their aid. Rickey wanted him to testify, and Robinson, who was anticommunist yet understood the importance of Robeson to the black community, thought he could use the HUAC hearing to speak out for racial justice and let Robeson off with a mild chiding. He was wrong.

Robinson, in prepared statements, said, "Negroes were stirred up long before there was a Communist party and they'll stay stirred up long after the party has disappeared—unless Jim Crow has disappeared as well."[10] Robinson noted that out of four hundred major league players, there were only seven African Americans and out of sixteen teams only three had been integrated.

These were courageous statements, but it was Robinson's next statement that stood the test of time, devastating Robeson and his supporters.

"I can't speak for any 15 million people any more than any other one person can, but I know that I've got too much invested for my wife and child and myself in the future of this country, and I and other Americans of many races and faiths have too much invested in our country's welfare, for any of us to throw it away because of a siren song sung in bass."

With those words he had done the bidding of HUAC—giving it license and cover to attack and persecute Robeson. Robeson's passport was revoked and he was hounded into exile. Robinson later spoke of this testimony as one of the great regrets of his life.

In his 1972 autobiography, *I Never Had it Made*, Robinson said of Robeson,

> In those days I had much more faith in the ultimate justice of the American white man than I have today. I would reject such an invitation if offered now. . . .
>
> I have grown wiser and closer to the painful truths about America's destructiveness. And I do have an increased respect for Paul Robeson who, over the span of that twenty years, sacrificed himself, his career, and the wealth and comfort he once enjoyed because, I believe, he was sincerely trying to help his people.[11]

Robinson and Robeson weren't the only casualties in the athletic world. The Olympics became Cold War morality plays, with all the attendant pressure placed on the shoulders of amateur athletes. In the Eastern bloc, this meant a doping regimen that physically damaged tens of thousands of athletes.[12]

Stateside, the hypernationalism of the Cold War used sports as a hammer to pound in obedience and anticommunist readiness as well as the values of the private market. Sociologist David Riesman said that in the context of corporate life in America, "the road to the board room leads through the locker room."[13] Little League baseball expanded robustly in America as suburban housing developed on the outskirts of cities. The youth baseball federation began in 1939, and in 1946 all of its teams were still in Pennsylvania. But by 1948, with the war squarely in the country's rearview mirror, Little League was starting to attract corporate sponsors. By 1953, it was being broadcast on television, hosted by a young Jim McKay, who would for more than a quarter century host ABC's *Wide World of Sports*.

In the 1950s, Little League became more than a money machine. It was seen as a bulwark of Americanism in a time of both rampant insecurity and prosperity. Before the season, players had to take the Little League oath: "I trust in God, I love my country and will respect its laws. I will play fair and strive to win, but win or lose I will always do my best." Its oath can't be separated from the need to steel the country against godless communism.[14]

McCarthyism Strands Robinson

The McCarthy era was also disastrous in stalling the momentum for civil rights seen after World War II. As Manning Marable writes convincingly in *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, McCarthyism is the only way to explain the seven-year gap between Truman's desegregation of the army and the *Brown vs. Board of Eduction* decision, the Montgomery bus boycotts, and the beginnings of the civil rights movement.[15]

It is no exaggeration to say that during this period, both white America's fear of civil rights and black America's aspirations were thrust upon the shoulders of professional athletes, particularly Jackie Robinson. Years later Martin Luther King Jr. called Robinson "a pilgrim walking the lonesome byways toward the high road of Freedom. He was a sit-inner before sit-ins, a freedom rider before freedom rides."[16]

Affection for Robinson in white America—outside of Brooklyn—began to wane. Robinson's speaking out against racism earned him the scorn of even previously friendly sportswriters such as Jimmy Cannon. "The range of Jackie Robinson's hostility appears to have no frontiers," Cannon wrote after Robinson sounded off to the press. "He is a juggler of a sort, flashily keeping feuds in motion like Indian clubs," offending "even Brooklyn partisans with his undisciplined protests."[17]

But Robinson was more eager than ever to speak out against Jim Crow and racism. In these dark years of McCarthyism, before the light of the Montgomery bus boycotts, "only Jackie Robinson," as his biographer Arnold Rampersad wrote, "insisted day in and day out on challenging America on the matter of race and justice."[18]

Goodbye Rosie

Part of McCarthyism's shock therapy involved getting Rosie the Riveter out of the factory, back in the kitchen, and once again making babies. Two months after the war, 800,000 women had been fired; within two years after the war's end, that number was 2 million. Eighty-two percent of the country disapproved of a woman being in the labor force if she had a hardworking husband. Twenty-six of forty-eight states had laws against hiring married women. While the 1940s presented the formidable Rosie as a feminine ideal, the 1950s saw Marilyn Monroe, June Cleaver, and Donna Reed take center stage. Unless you could do housework and raise kids while wearing pearls, you were something less than a woman.[19]

This backlash was seen in women's baseball. Before the league was finally shut down for good, new rules were instituted in 1951 to make the game more ladylike. Dress guidelines included: "Always appear in feminine attire. This precludes the use of any wearing attire of masculine nature. Masculine hair styling? Shoes? Coats? Shirts? Socks, t-shirts are barred at all times." Players who challenged these rules were jettisoned. Others perceived as masculine got the boot. One player, Josephine D'Angelo, was cut for her "butch haircut"—but in reality, her firing was due to suspicions of lesbianism.[20]

More to the press's liking was African American female track star Wilma Rudolph, nicknamed the "Black Gazelle." Another woman who uncomfortably tried to fit the mold was Babe Didrikson. She was now known as Babe Didrikson Zaharias, having married George Zaharias, a mark in her favor. She also now played the more acceptably feminine sport of golf. It says something about Babe's bottomless athletic talent that she was able to thoroughly master a sport she didn't take up until adulthood. She was asked how "a girl" could hit a golf ball so far. She answered, "Just take off your girdle and swing."[21]

Babe was incredible, winning a ridiculous twenty-one straight golf tournaments. In 1947–48, with Rosie not yet out of the factories, and women still on the baseball diamond, Babe applied to play in the men's draw of the 1948 U.S. Open. When one considers the stink caused in recent years when Michelle Wie and Annika Sorenstam have tried to enter the men's tour, one can imagine the response. Babe demurely withdrew from the 1948 Open after the rules were hastily rewritten to say that this was a "male" event.[22]

When Babe Didrikson Zaharias died of cancer in 1956, Shirley Povich wrote, "The opponent that licked her, it must be noted, was the same deliverer of the sneak body-attack that also cut down those other champions, Jim Thorpe and Babe Ruth. It was not a stand up foe to be out-gamed or out-performed, else Babe Zaharias would have won this one, too, her admirers are sure."[23]

Bowling as Community

With suburban living came dislocation and isolation. Sports attempted to fill the void, particularly bowling, which was inexpensive and social. The number of bowling alleys and leagues exploded. A PR campaign was launched to cement bowling's appeal with the new middle class. The fancy shoe company Capezio introduced a line of bowling shoes with display ads showing aristocratic matrons and debs at the lane. The invention of the automatic pin-setting machine also made the game easier to play. Television brought the sport into people's homes. Shows such as *Championship Bowling*, *Make That Spare*, *Celebrity Bowling*, and *Bowling for Dollars* became staples in many living rooms.[24]

The Growth of the Civil Rights Movement

The oxygen around Robinson began to increase in 1954 and 1955 when *Brown v. Board of Education* came before the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that the separation of schoolchildren by race "generates a feeling of inferiority . . . that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone." In the field of public education, it said, "the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place." The Court did not insist on immediate change; after the 1954 decision the Court heard arguments about how fast the decision should be implemented and eventually ruled that segregated facilities should be integrated "with all deliberate speed." Throughout the 1950s, as major league baseball touted its integration project, black children played at decayed inadequate facilities and competed in segregated leagues.[25]

In 1955, the Montgomery bus boycotts began, exposing the nation to a twenty-six-year-old preacher named Martin Luther King Jr. As King said,

> We have known humiliation, we have known abusive language, we have been plunged into the abyss of oppression. And we decided to raise up only with the weapon of protest. It is one of the greatest glories of America that we have the right to protest. If we are arrested every day, if we are exploited every day, if we are trampled over every day, don't ever let anyone pull you so low as to hate them.[26]

But 1955 was also the year of the first backlash to the emerging trend toward an embrace of civil rights. This was the year of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till's brutal murder. The White Citizens' Council had swelled to 300,000 members. More than a hundred congressmen signed a document pledging to uphold segregation.

By this time in the world of baseball, a new generation of African American players had established themselves as stars. Only three teams now didn't have a black player in their farm system. Future Hall of Famers such as Willie Mays, Henry Aaron, Ernie Banks, and Roy Campanella wowed multiracial crowds across the country. It was a significant and special time in baseball history—and exposed white fans to the idea of cheering for black talent.

Pete Hamill, remembering his youth in Brooklyn, wrote,

> How full of marvels was the world! One of the marvels is that I got to see Roy Campanella coming to the plate, a bat in hand and men on base. I saw Jack Roosevelt Robinson rounding third, heading for home. I saw Willie Mays. And I saw them in the company of thousands of roaring human beings, glad people in a glad place in a glad time, all of them members of my tribe, the New York tribe. Nobody can ever tell me that such moments were trivial, mere examples of mindless entertainment and diversion, part of the bread and circuses devised by those who rule us. Such moments were possible only among people who ruled themselves.[27]

Althea Gibson

One of the women who changed perceptions was tennis star Althea Gibson. Many of the African American athletic successes had come from the South and the historically black colleges. They had also seen their success come almost exclusively in track and field. Gibson was different. First and foremost, she was from Harlem, the mecca of black cultural life in the United States. Second, her sport was tennis, the most country-club and lily-white of sports. Third, unlike most tennis players, she grew up poor. Gibson was a sharecropper's daughter raised on welfare. But what really set Gibson apart was that she was no "black gazelle," quiet and graceful. She was tough as steak from an old bull. She said, "People thought I was ruthless, which I was. I didn't give a darn who was on the other side of the net. I'd knock you down if you got in the way." She also said, "Being a champ is all well and good, but you can't eat a crown."[28] In 1957, Gibson won both Wimbledon and the U.S. Open on her way to becoming the first African American woman to be named Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year, an honor she repeated the following year.

"I always wanted to be somebody," she said. "If I made it, it's half because I was game enough to take a lot of punishment along the way and half because there were a lot of people who cared enough to help me." The people who helped Gibson most were those who demanded she receive the place in the game her abilities demanded. As journalist Alice

Marble, herself a former tennis champ, wrote in a 1950 issue of *American Lawn Tennis* magazine:

> The entrance of Negroes into national tennis is as inevitable as it has proven in baseball, in football, or in boxing; there is no denying so much talent. The committee at Forest Hills has the power to stifle the efforts of one Althea Gibson, who may or may not be succeeded by others of her race who have equal or superior ability. They will knock at the door as she has done. Eventually the tennis world will rise up en masse to protest the injustices perpetrated by our policymakers. Eventually—why not now?[29]

Robinson Agonistes

While players such as Mays and Aaron, silent and symbolic, were largely embraced, Robinson, silent no longer, found himself in the doghouse with many white fans. The more progressive *Sport Magazine* called him "the most savagely booed, ruthlessly libeled player in the game, his every appearance greeted by a storm of cat calls and name calling." At least in his professional life Robinson had the last laugh, leading the Dodgers to victory in the 1955 World Series. He retired in 1956 after learning that he had been unceremoniously traded to the rival Giants. Robinson then became a spokesman for the NAACP and quickly became the group's most requested speaker (number two was Martin Luther King Jr.). He would end speeches by saying, "If I had to choose between baseball's Hall of Fame and first-class citizenship I would say first-class citizenship to all of my people." In 1958, he was the marshal and lead organizer of the Youth March for Integrated Schools, which attempted to get one thousand black and white students to march on the Lincoln Memorial. They got ten thousand.[30]

In April 1959, he started writing a column on the sports page of the *New York Post* (then—believe it or not—a liberal paper) on a variety of topics that ranged from sports to civil rights. Critics, both black and white, said that as an athlete, Robinson didn't have the right to speak out on politics, but such comments never slowed him down.

Walter O'Malley, the Red Scare, and Chavez Ravine

Over a ten-martini lunch, famed scribes Pete Hamill and Jack Newfield, the legend goes, decided to write down on napkins a list of the ten most evil people of the twentieth century. For the first three, they wrote the same names in identical order: Hitler, Stalin, and Walter O'Malley. As anyone raised in postwar Brooklyn will attest, O'Malley's 1958 move of the Dodgers to Los Angeles ranks as something beyond the diabolical. In his defense, O'Malley saw the writing on the wall: a massive migration west was already under way. The exploding Cold War defense industry had taken root on the left coast, and LA had become a place of profound promise. Moving baseball out there was just business, not personal. But you couldn't tell that to the people of Brooklyn. As Hamill wrote, "After 1957, it seemed like we would never laugh again. Of course, we did. It's just that we were never young again."[31]

But Brooklyn wasn't the only place gutted by O'Malley's far-seeing avarice. There was another community out west, seen by O'Malley and major league baseball as merely the future site of Dodger Stadium. This was Chavez Ravine, called by its residents "a poor man's Shangri-la." It had been home to generations of Mexican Americans looking to live in a tight-knit valley community in the shadow of the big city. The people of Chavez Ravine ran their own schools and churches and even grew their own food. It was at the center of the Zoot Suit Riots, the epic 1943 battles between white sailors and the pachucos in their styling threads.[32]

In 1949, Chavez Ravine residents were informed that their community was going to be leveled for public housing. Some left willingly, receiving meager compensation. The ones who stayed had their homes bulldozed and received nothing, with the city claiming eminent domain. A protest movement arose to defend the area, but resistance was difficult to generate in the era of anticommunist crusades.

Here is where the story starts to twist in that pulpy left coast way. LA's big business interests accused the public housing proponents of being communists, particularly Frank Wilkinson, the assistant director of the Los Angeles City Housing Authority. These business interests organized themselves in a group called Citizens Against Socialist Housing, or

CASH. They wanted the Chavez Ravine land for development. Wilkinson was brought before HUAC for leading this "communist plot" of federal housing. He was fired from his job and sentenced to one year in jail.[33]

By 1952, the entire area had been flattened, but nothing had been built on top of it. This thriving community, this cradle of Chicano culture, had become a ghost town. As Wilkinson said years later, "It's the tragedy of my life, absolutely. I was responsible for uprooting I don't know how many hundreds of people from their own little valley and having the whole thing destroyed."[34]

This is what set the stage for O'Malley to swoop in and grab the land for little more than peanuts and Cracker Jack. As Wilkinson said, "We'd spent millions of dollars getting ready for [public housing], and the Dodgers picked it up for just a fraction of that. It was just a tragedy for the people, and from the city it was the most hypocritical thing that could possibly happen."[35]

Yet another protest movement, the first anti-stadium movement, arose over O'Malley's shady shenanigans. Debates flared up across the city. An actor and professional anticommunist making a transition to politics, Ronald Reagan, stepped in to call opponents of the stadium plan "baseball haters." He might as well have argued that they were breaking black bread and sipping borscht with Khrushchev. A public referendum was forced on the issue, and stadium proponents won with 51.5 percent of the vote, allowing O'Malley to move forward. (Of course, many of the refugees from Chavez Ravine were immigrants and could not vote.) On April 10, 1962, the 56,000-seat Dodger Stadium officially opened, but the period 1951–61 is still known among many Angelenos as "the Battle of Chavez Ravine."[36]

Corruption of College Athletics

This period also saw a flood of money swamp the college game. It had always been there, as we have seen, but in the postwar era, with the expansion of higher education, it became pervasive. Jim Aiken, head football coach at the University of Oregon from 1947 to 1950, put it bluntly: "If you have to choose between breaking the rules and losing games, wouldn't it be better to break the rules? If you lose your games you're certain to be fired. If you break the rules, you have to get caught to be fired." University of Southern California football coach Jeff Cravath said the game "reduced players to perjurers, scalpers and football gigolos. The alumni demand winning football teams. To get winning teams, colleges must violate the rules they themselves have made."[37]

Nowhere was the corruption more visible than at the City College of New York. City College was the preeminent basketball power in the country, having won both the NCAA and NIT championships in 1950. It was found that the team had been involved in an extensive point-shaving scandal. In February 1951 three players were arrested on bribery charges. That was just for starters. By the end of March, seventeen New York City college basketball players had been arrested. Eventually, district attorney Frank Hogan arrested thirty-two players from seven colleges who fixed eighty-six games between 1947 and 1950.[38]

As sportswriter Maury Allen said, "That was the last time I really believed in pure idealism. For these guys to sell out their schools and themselves and their careers for $800 was just such an emotional blow. You never really recover from something like that. It is a wound to your psyche for the rest of your life."[39]

In Allen's words we see the dominant view of the scandal: the players were sellouts. They had sold out their school and their sport. And they were bought cheap, as journalist Stanley Cohen described:

> They were poor, most of them, they needed the money. But that is a reason, not an explanation. It explains only why they were ready to dump for relatively small sums. . . . None of the players had about him the mood of a criminal. If they had not been college basketball players, it is not likely they would have ended up in the courts. They would not have stolen the money. They would not have robbed banks or knocked over gas stations or rolled drunks in Central Park. The likelihood is that most of them had committed the one crime for profit of which they were capable.
>
> They had, of course, functioned in an environment in which it might have been more difficult to play it straight than it was to ac-

cept a bribe. For point shaving was as much a part of college basketball in the forties and fifties as the two-hand set shot.[40]

Cohen was dead right. This was a far more pervasive issue, one that went beyond just City College or New York City. Adolph Rupp, the Kentucky coach, blamed it on New York City gamblers. "They couldn't touch my boys with a 10-foot pole," he said. He was wrong. Three players from the Wildcats' 1949 championship team were found to be involved, and Kentucky had to suspend its basketball program for a year. While the players took the fall, something more rotten was revealed. Most of the City College team, consisting mostly of African American and Jewish players, came from working-class backgrounds. The players were soaked by the bookies, as Allen indicates, for very small sums. The NCAA put the weight of the responsibility on the players. This really set the tone for how the NCAA would deal with these kinds of gambling or payola scandals for the next fifty years. Never would the NCAA look at the system with the critical perspective evident in Aiken's and Cravath's remarks. Never has the NCAA taken a step back and noticed that it was making billions off unpaid labor, and that perhaps this was the root of the problem.[41] It continues to be a narrative that catches minnows while whales swim free.

Pro Football's Ascendancy

The 1958 championship game between the Baltimore Colts and New York Giants delivered in one day the modern era of pro football, propelling it on a journey that would make it the most popular sport in the country. The game was a 23–17 thriller that ended in overtime with a plunge over the goal line by Alan "the Horse" Ameche. As Shirley Povich wrote, "As art form, it had an aspect of Greek tragedy with sudden death the inexorable ticket of one of the antagonists. And it launched a million debates." Pro football, a fringe sport for decades, was tailor-made for television like nothing else on the landscape.[42]

With popularity, however, came scrutiny. When Marion Motley and Bill Willis broke football's color line in 1946, few noticed. But now the fact that the majority of teams were all white could no longer escape notice. One of the most notorious segregationists was the patriarch of the Washington Redskins, George Preston Marshall. Marshall's Skins were the last team to integrate in the entire NFL. Povich once wrote famously that the Redskins' colors were "burgundy, gold and Caucasian." Marshall finally integrated the team in 1962 only when the Kennedy administration's interior secretary, Stewart Udall, issued an ultimatum: sign an African American player or be denied use of the new government-financed 54,000-seat D.C. Stadium. Marshall responded by making Ernie Davis, Syracuse's all-American running back, his number one draft choice. One problem: Davis's response was a forthright "I won't play for that S.O.B." Davis was traded to Cleveland for African American all-pro Bobby Mitchell.[43]

Marshall's racism was more than just a set of ideas. It was the material foundation upon which the Redskins empire was built. He had brought his football team to Washington with a plan to make them "the South's team." He signed TV contracts with stations in southern cities, and he drafted players mostly from southern colleges. The team, once again to quote Povich, "became the Confederates of the NFL." In fact, in the original version of the fight song "Hail to the Redskins," the line "Fight for old D.C." was "Fight for old Dixie."[44]

While the Redskins were the last team to integrate in the NFL, that "honor" in major league baseball went to the Boston Red Sox, who in 1959 brought up a marginal utility player, Pumpsie Green. But it didn't have to be Pumpsie. In April 1945 the Red Sox held a tryout at Fenway Park for Robinson himself. With only management in the stands, someone yelled, "Get those niggers off the field," and the door was shut. In 1949, the Red Sox laughed off the chance to sign the legendary Willie Mays, who would go on to hit 660 career home runs and awe crowds with his speed and defense. That decision killed the possibility that Mays and Ted Williams might have played in the same outfield.[45]

In the 1950s, as teams immeasurably strengthened themselves by signing players such as Mays, Aaron, Ernie Banks, Don Newcombe, Roy Campanella, Elston Howard, and others, the Red Sox stood pat with an all-white hand. Though Boston fans for decades complained about the "curse of the Bambino," the curse of racism in fact had a far worse effect.

As the civil rights movement blossomed, New England's black baseball fans would root for integrated clubs over their own home team. Unlike in other cities, such as New York and Chicago, where rooting for an integrated team actually helped advance people's consciousness and challenge racist ideas, the Red Sox were proudly planting themselves on the wrong side of history.

Sports on the Edge of Panic

John Kennedy loved sports, or so he told us. The man with the dazzling smile and slender physique delighted in giving the country a vision of a president with boundless energy, athletic passion, and a penchant for touch football games. In *Sports Illustrated*, the youngest elected president in U.S. history made a plea—not unlike Teddy Roosevelt and others—against the "soft American."[1] In reality, Kennedy was plagued by crippling back pain, Addison's disease, spastic colitis, and a need for painkillers in order to be able to function.[2] This gap between image and reality—touch football for the cameras and debilitating medical problems behind closed doors—matches a decade that started with aspirations of a new frontier and ended with, as Howard Zinn put it, "a series of explosive rebellions in every area of American life, which showed that all the system's estimates of security and success were wrong."[3]

As 1960 began, sports were still viewed as bedrock for the America of people's dreams: a place where the best of muscled white male America came together to act as an exemplar for the rest of us in how not to be "soft." But a new day was dawning that would turn these notions on their head. The leading edge of struggle in both the world of sports and in the streets was found in the arena of civil rights. Perhaps fittingly, one of the most prominent athletes of that year was an African American woman, Wilma Rudolph, who soared to superstardom after becoming the first woman to win three gold track-and-field medals in a single Olympics.

By 1960, the civil rights movement had reached an impasse. But on February 1, 1960, that changed when four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, sat at the whites-only Woolworth's lunch counter. They were refused service, but rather than leave, they remained planted in their chairs. The owners shut the lunch counter down, but in the days that followed, the students returned repeatedly. Lit cigarettes were put in their faces. They were cursed, beaten, and threatened. But they had resolve, and thanks to a national media, their efforts were seen around the country.

"The students in that picture had a certain look on their faces, sort of sullen, angry, determined," said an observer named Bob Moses, who would soon be a central participant in the civil rights movement "Before, the Negro in the South had always looked on the defensive, cringing. This time they were taking the initiative. They were kids my age, and I knew this had something to do with my own life."[4]

In the next year, more than 50,000 people, mostly black, some white, participated in demonstrations of one kind or another in one hundred cities, and more than 3,600 people were put in jail. You didn't have to be a sports star to prove that you were no longer a "soft American." You could be the kind of person who faced a terror most football players couldn't comprehend. And you could win. By the end of 1960, lunch counters were open for business to those of African descent in Greensboro, not to mention many other places. A growing group of young people discovered that protest worked. People believed that what they did actually mattered. The glacial realities of "all deliberate speed" would no longer carry the day.[5]

This spirit of change affected every aspect of American life, including the citadel of sports. Athletes actually had to defend their right not to be political. Willie Mays was criticized for not being vocal enough about racial discrimination. His response is fascinating: "I don't picket in the streets of Birmingham. I'm not mad at people who do. Maybe they shouldn't be mad at the people who don't."[6]

Sepia magazine gave a full-throated defense of athletes' right to not take a stand:

> The basic question—should Negro athletes be civil rights fighters?—goes deeper than selected incidents or personalities. It now involves, in many cases, the situation or problem or case of "Black Nationalism" and the widespread intolerance, on the part of publicized civil rights demonstrators, of all Negroes who aren't walking picket lines or laying their bodies down in front of trucks, or sitting in or wading in or getting "in" in some other way. . . .
>
> Long before protest demonstrations became a national entity, Joe Louis was changing anti-Negro attitudes to pro-Negro attitudes. No American civil rights fighter has yet reached the 300 million (or more) people as Willie Mays does, around the world, in a World Series. Two years prior to the Supreme Court's momentous school integration decision, Negroes starred in Southern baseball and three years prior to the Supreme Court decision, Southern baseball was integrated. Integrated baseball was seen and accepted in such states as Louisiana, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, and Virginia long before local authorities got around to serious consideration of overall democracy. Baseball fought segregated housing, eating facilities, segregation in other areas in the South.[7]

In 1959, one of the NBA's stunning new black players, Elgin Baylor of the Minneapolis Lakers, attracted national attention to the issue of segregation of public accommodations when he refused to play in a regular conference game scheduled in Charleston, West Virginia. He sat stoically on the team bench in street clothes to protest the refusal of a local hotel to permit him to register with his teammates.[8]

It was a time of flux, including for Jackie Robinson. Robinson was a proud northeastern Republican, never more so when he was a guest at the 1960 Democratic National Convention and saw nominee John Kennedy sitting side by side with Orval Faubus, the Democratic governor of Arkansas and an arch segregationist. This confirmed his suspicions that there was nothing really new in Kennedy's New Frontier. But Robinson would be disappointed time and again by Republicans' "commitment" to civil rights. When Martin Luther King Jr. was sentenced to four months on a Georgia work gang, Robinson asked his friend Richard Milhous Nixon to intervene and was ignored.[9]

Though disillusioned with both political parties, Jackie never stopped going to the front lines of the civil rights battles and encouraging African Americans to vote. On a speaking tour to raise money for the SNCC sit-ins, Robinson said in Tennessee, "We are going to get our share of this country—we are going to fight for it. We must take it step by step and support the youngsters in their stand-ins and sit-ins."[10]

As the black freedom struggle grew and a revolutionary wing developed, Robinson, in spite of his actions, was viewed as a "white man's Negro" due to his abiding faith in electoral politics and belief in integration. He was an icon of "the old way of doing things in the eyes of many." He was especially a target of scorn because of his verbal feud with Malcolm X. Robinson was tough, never backing down in the face of Malcolm's withering scorn. He wrote in his *New York Post* column, "Malcolm is very militant on Harlem street corners where militancy is not that dangerous. I don't see him in Birmingham. . . . He is terribly militant on soapboxes and street corners yet he has not faced the police dogs or gone to jail for freedom."[11]

Robinson could not have known that he was touching on the pressure point of Malcolm's pain and frustration with the political abstention of the Nation of Islam. Yet although they were political opponents, Robinson and Malcolm shared something in common: their ideas shifted in the struggles of the 1960s. Yet neither could have been prepared for the man who was about to impact both of their lives—not to mention the lives of everyone else.[12]

Shaking Up the World

Muhammad Ali's identity was forged in the 1950s and 1960s, as the black freedom struggle heated up and boiled over. He was born Cassius

Marcellus Clay Jr. in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1942. His father, a frustrated artist, made his living as a house painter. His mother, like Jackie Robinson's mother, was a domestic worker. The Louisville of 1942 was a segregated horse-breeding community where being black meant being seen in service-oriented jobs and rarely heard. But the young Clay could do two things that set him apart: he could box and he could talk. His mouth was like that on other no fighter or athlete or any public black figure anyone had ever heard. Joe Louis used to say, "My manager does my talking for me. I do my talking in the ring." Clay talked, inside the ring and out. The press called him the "Louisville Lip," "Cash the Brash," "Mighty Mouth," and "Gaseous Cassius." He used to say he talked so much because he admired the style of a pro wrestler named Gorgeous George. But in an unguarded moment he once said, "Where do you think I'd be next week if I didn't know how to shout and holler and make the public take notice? I'd be poor and I'd probably be down in my hometown, washing windows or running an elevator and saying 'yassuh' and 'nawsuh' and knowing my place."[13]

Ali, of course, could back up the talk. His boxing skills won him the gold medal in the 1960 Olympics at age eighteen. When he returned from Rome—and this was the first step in his political arc—the young Clay held a press conference at the airport, his gold medal swinging from his neck, and said:

To make America the greatest is my goal
So I beat the Russian, and I beat the Pole
And for the USA won the Medal of Gold.
Italians said "You're greater than the Cassius of old."[14]

Clay loved his gold medal. Fellow Olympian Wilma Rudolph remembered, "He slept with it, he went to the cafeteria with it. He never took it off." The week after returning home from the Olympics, Clay went to eat a cheeseburger with his medal swinging around his neck in a Louisville restaurant—and was denied service. As he later said, that medal found a home "at the bottom of the Ohio River."[15]

The young Clay actively looked for political answers and began finding them when he heard Malcolm X speak at a meeting of the Nation of Islam. He heard Malcolm say, "You might see these Negroes who believe in nonviolence and mistake us for one of them and put your hands on us thinking that we are going to turn the other cheek—and we'll put you to death just like that." Malcolm X was an attractive figure. His impatience, his militancy, his rejection of nonviolence, and his stony-eyed critiques of Democratic politicians and middle-of-the-road civil rights leaders gave him a following far beyond his organization.[16]

As Malcolm X said in 1964,

> You'll get freedom by letting your enemy know that you'll do anything to get your freedom; then you'll get it. It's the only way you'll get it. When you get that kind of attitude, they'll label you as a "crazy Negro," or they'll call you a "crazy nigger"—they don't say Negro. Or they'll call you an extremist or a subversive, or seditious, or a red or a radical. But when you stay radical long enough and get enough people to be like you, you'll get your freedom.[17]

The young fighter and Malcolm X became both political allies and fast friends. Malcolm stayed with Clay as he trained for his fight against the "Big Ugly Bear," the champion Sonny Liston.

Before he had signed to fight Clay, Liston had been portrayed in the press as eight steps beyond evil. He had an arrest record that could fill a file cabinet and had been in the past employed by the mob as a strikebreaker and enforcer. Radical poet Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) called Liston "the big black Negro in every white man's hallway, waiting to do him in, deal him under for all the hurts white men, through their arbitrary order, have been able to inflict on the world."[18]

Before Liston's championship fight when he won the title against Floyd Patterson, President Kennedy took the time to call Patterson and express that it would not be in "the Negroes' best interest" if Liston won. As one writer noted dryly, "The fight definitely was not in Patterson's best interest." Liston destroyed Patterson, setting the stage for his fight against Clay.[19]

The writer James Baldwin was sent to cover Liston before the fight.

He wrote, "[Liston] is far from stupid; is not, in fact, stupid at all. And, while there is a great deal of violence in him, I sensed no cruelty at all. On the contrary, he reminded me of big, black men I have know who acquired the reputation of being tough in order to conceal the fact that they weren't hard. Anyone who cared to could turn them into taffy."[20]

But by this point, most of the press were paying far more attention to Clay, little of it positive. With Malcolm around, rumors flew that Clay was going to join the Nation of Islam, and the press hounded him, wanting to know. At one point he said, "I might if you keep asking me."

While everyone was predicting an easy knockout for Liston, Malcolm said that Clay would win. He "is the finest Negro athlete I have ever known, the man who will mean more to his people than Jackie Robinson, because Robinson is the white man's hero." Malcolm also pointed out, "Not many people know the quality of mind he has in there. One forgets that though a clown never imitates a wise man, the wise man can imitate the clown."[21] Although the verdict was out on whether he was wise or a clown, no one gave him a chance against Liston. But Clay—quicker, stronger, and bolder than anyone knew—shocked the nation and beat Liston. He then shouted to the heavens, over a reporter's questions, "I'm king of the world!"

When Clay said he was the greatest, it wasn't far from the truth. The day after he beat Liston, he announced publicly that he was a member of the Nation of Islam, causing a firestorm. The fact was that the heavyweight champion of the world was joining the organization of Malcolm X. The Olympic gold medalist had linked arms with a group that called white people "devils" and stood unapologetically for self-defense and racial separation. Not surprisingly, the power brokers of the conservative, mobbed-up, corrupt fight world lost their minds. Jimmy Cannon, the most famous sportswriter in America, apparently forgetting the entire career of Jack Johnson, wrote that this was the first time that boxing had ever "been turned into an instrument of mass hate. . . . Clay is using it as a weapon of wickedness."[22]

Clay was attacked not only by Cannon and his ilk but also by the respectable wing of the civil rights movement. "Cassius may not know it, but he is now an honorary member of the White Citizens' Councils," said Roy Wilkins. Clay's response at this point was very defensive. He repeatedly said that his wasn't a political stand but purely a religious conversion. His defense reflected the conservative perspective of the Nation of Islam: "I'm not going to get killed trying to force myself on people who don't want me. . . . Integration is wrong. The white people don't want integration, and the Muslims don't believe in it. So what's wrong with the Muslims?" At another point he said, "I have never been to jail. I have never been in court. I don't join any integration marches. . . . I don't carry signs."[23]

But much like Malcolm X, who at the time was engineering a political break from the Nation, Clay—much to the anger of Elijah Muhammad—found it impossible to explain his religious worldview without speaking to the mass black freedom struggle exploding outside the boxing ring. He was his own worst enemy—claiming that his was a religious transformation and had nothing to do with politics, but then in the next breath saying, "I ain't no Christian. I can't be when I see all the colored people fighting for forced integration get blowed up. They get hit by stones and chewed by dogs and they blow up a Negro church." Unrepentantly Clay said, "People are always telling me what a good example I could be if I just wasn't a Muslim. I've heard it over and over, how come I couldn't be like Joe Louis and Sugar Ray. Well, they've gone now, and the black man's condition is just the same, ain't it? We're still catching hell."[24]

If the establishment press was outraged, the new generation of activists was electrified. "I remember when Ali joined the Nation," remembered civil rights leader Julian Bond. "The act of joining was not something many of us particularly liked. But the notion that he would do it, that he'd jump out there, join this group that was so despised by mainstream America and be proud of it, sent a little thrill through you. . . . He was able to tell white folks for us to go to hell; that I'm going to do it my way."[25]

For a time he was known briefly as Cassius X, but Elijah Muhammad gave Clay the name Muhammad Ali—a tremendous honor and a way to ensure that Ali would side with Elijah Muhammad in his split from Malcolm X. Ali proceeded to commit what he would later describe as his

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greatest mistake—turning his back on Malcolm. But the internal politics of the Nation were not what the powers that be and the media noticed. To them the Islamic name change—something that had never occurred before in sports—was a sharp slap in the face.

Almost overnight, whether an individual called the champ Ali or Clay indicated where that person stood on civil rights, black power, and eventually the war in Vietnam. The *New York Times* insisted on calling him Clay as editorial policy for years thereafter.

This all took place against the backdrop of a black freedom struggle rolling from the South to the North. During the summer of 1964, there were a thousand arrests of civil rights activists, thirty buildings bombed, and thirty-six churches burned by the Ku Klux Klan and their sympathizers. In 1964, the first of the urban uprisings and riots in the northern ghettoes took place in Harlem. The politics of black power was starting to emerge, and Muhammad Ali became the critical symbol in this transformation. As news anchor Bryant Gumbel said, "One of the reasons the civil rights movement went forward was that Black people were able to overcome their fear. And I honestly believe that for many Black Americans, that came from watching Muhammad Ali. He simply refused to be afraid. And being that way, he gave other people courage."[26]

A concrete sign of Ali's early influence was seen in 1965 when Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) volunteers in Lowndes County, Alabama, launched an independent political party. Their new group was the first to use the symbol of a black panther. Their bumper stickers and T-shirts were of a black silhouette of a panther and their slogan was straight from the champ: "We Are the Greatest."[27] It's this broader context that allows us to understand why Ali's post-name-change fights—like the Louis-Schmeling fight years before—became incredible political dramas of the black revolution versus the people who opposed it. Floyd Patterson, who wrapped himself tightly in the American flag, challenged Ali and said, "This fight is a crusade to reclaim the title from the Black Muslims. As a Catholic I am fighting Clay as a patriotic duty. I am going to return the crown to America."[28]

In the fight itself, Ali brutalized Patterson for the entire twelve rounds, dragging it out and yelling, "Come on America! Come on white

America!" Future Black Panther Party leader Eldridge Cleaver wrote in his 1968 autobiography *Soul on Ice*, "If the Bay of Pigs can be seen as a straight right hand to the psychological jaw of white America, then [Ali/Patterson] was a perfect left hook to the gut."[29]

Vietnam

During 1965, more than 200,000 American soldiers were implanted in South Vietnam. In 1966 200,000 more were sent. The U.S. Air Force was in the process of dropping more bombs on the country than were used in all of World War II.[30] To this point, however, sports had been little touched by the controversy over the war.

One exception was Billy Mills, an Oglala Sioux raised on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. Pine Ridge was and remains one of the poorest areas in the United States, a place where sneakers were a luxury. Mills was an orphan who earned a track scholarship at the University of Kansas, where he was an all-American in 1959 and 1960. He left running to join the Marines but came back and despite remarkable odds won the 1964 gold medal in a mammoth upset in the 10,000 meters at the Tokyo Olympics. Yet by 1965, Mills was done with running: "I felt I could not participate in a sport when people were being killed in Vietnam."[31] The 1983 film about his life, *Running Brave*, starring Robby Benson, ends after Mills's Olympic triumph, and his former Kansas coach apologizing for his prejudice, preserving the ideal of the redemptive powers of sports.

As the hippie and black power cultures began to flower, sports became more than a symbolic weight against an era of sex, drugs, and resistance. They became a very overt political opposition to the new. Coaches such as Notre Dame's Ara Parseghian called hippies "scum." In 1966, the American Football League proscribed all facial hair save mustaches.[32]

On the day Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in 1968, Larry James, a track star at the University of Tennessee, heard that news of King's death started a standing ovation in the student center. He was pondering this while jogging to an on-campus meet when, as, James re-

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called, "a VW passed and I heard, 'run, nigger, run!' I immediately started to walk. And I began to internalize things."[33]

At Penn in 1965, jocks "taunted, grabbed, and hit some students and faculty members who happened to be carrying signs of protest [though] most were content to chant 'Hit 'em again, harder, harder' . . . or to sing the national anthem." Michigan State football player Phil Hoag said simply that demonstrators were "just losers, going nowhere, doing nothing. There was no question that anytime you could punch one, you punched them."[34]

Often, the 1960s radicals analyzed sports in a way similar to the pre–Lester Rodney communists: an opiate, a distraction, a negative good for little more than manufacturing consent. It was called "the worst kind of indulgence in the American cult of the rugged, unique, superior individualist."[35]

And yet, in the most individualistic, rugged, and violent sport of them all, an athlete who finished at the bottom of his high school class went down as the most famous draft resister since Thoreau.

In early 1966, the army came calling for Ali and he was classified 1-A, eligible to be drafted. Ali heard this news surrounded by reporters, and he blurted out one of the most famous phrases of the decade: "Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong." This was an astounding statement.

"What I saw that afternoon wasn't particularly religious or political," *New York Times* reporter Robert Lipsyte recalled. "That was a patina that came later. I saw a twenty-four-year-old scared of being drafted. It was, 'How can they do this to me? I don't want my career ruined.' He thought he'd put the draft behind, and now his life was about to be turned upside down. Someone had just told him he was going to Vietnam. Then the telephone started ringing. . . . Finally after the tenth call—'What do you think about the Vietcong?'—Ali exploded. 'Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong.' And bang. There it was. That was the headline. That was what the media wanted."[36]

There was little opposition to the war at the time. The antiwar movement was in its infancy and most of the country still stood behind the war. *Life* magazine's cover read, "Vietnam the War Is Worth Winning," the song "Ballad of the Green Berets" was climbing the charts, and standing against this seemingly insurmountable tide was Ali. As Mike Margusee wrote, Ali's response "was a major boost to the anti-war movement. This was not an academic or a clergyman, not a beatnik or a bohemian or a clergyman . . . [he] could not be dismissed as 'unmanly' or 'cowardly.' "[37]

It is worth noting though that Ali did not create antiwar sentiment among blacks. That was already beginning to bubble. In 1965, a black student in the South who lost a close friend in Vietnam passed out leaflets on his campus reading, "No Mississippi Negroes should be fighting in Vietnam for the White Man's freedom, until all the Negro People are free in Mississippi. Negro Boys should not honor the draft here in Mississippi. Mothers should encourage their sons not to go. . . . No one has a right to ask us to risk our lives and kill other Colored People in Santo Domingo and Vietnam, so that the White American can get richer."[38]

But Ali was the heavyweight champion. The reaction was therefore immediate, hostile, ferocious, and at times hysterical. Jimmy Cannon wrote,

> He fits in with the famous singers no one can hear and the punks riding motorcycles with iron crosses pinned to their leather jackets and Batman and the boys with their long dirty hair and the girls with the unwashed look and the college kids dancing naked at secret proms held in apartments and the revolt of students who get a check from dad every first of the month and the painters who copy the labels off soup cans and surf bums who refuse to work and the whole pampered style-making cult of the bored young.[39]

And the two most famous sportswriters in the United States weighed in strongly against Ali. Red Smith declared, "Cassius makes himself as sorry a spectacle as those unwashed punks who picket and demonstrate against the war." In the *Los Angeles Times*, Jim Murray called the champ "the white man's burden."[40]

Jack Olsen wrote years later in *Sports Illustrated*, "The noise became a din, the drumbeats of a holy war. TV and radio commentators, little old ladies . . . bookmakers, and parish priests, military strategists at the Pentagon and brave dog feet wading across the ricefields of Vietnam, all joined in a get-Cassius clamor."[41]

Ali was given every opportunity to recant, to apologize, to sign up on some cushy USO gig boxing for the troops and the cameras, just like most athletes of his era. At one point in 1966, only 2 of 960 pro athletes were serving in the military. Many local National Guard boards would have whole regiments made up of athletes from particular teams.[42]

But Ali refused an easier way out. Once again, the man who told the world how pretty he was would turn conventional notions of manliness inside out. As Ali explained to the Louisville draft board,

> Sir, I said earlier and I'd like to again make that plain, it would be no trouble for me to go into the Armed Services, boxing exhibitions in Vietnam or traveling the country at the expense of the Government or living the easy life and not having to get out in the mud and fight and shoot. If it wasn't against my conscience to do it, I would easily do it. I wouldn't raise all this court stuff and I wouldn't go through all of this and lose the millions that I gave up and my image with the American public that I would say is completely dead and ruined because of us in here now. I wouldn't jeopardize my life walking the streets of the South and all of America with no bodyguard if I wasn't sincere in every bit of what the Holy Qur'an and the teachings of the honorable Elijah Muhammad tell us and it is that we are not to participate in wars on the side of nonbelievers, and this is a Christian country and this is not a Muslim country. We are not, according to the Holy Qur'an, to even as much as aid in passing a cup of water to the wounded. I mean, this is the Holy Qur'an, and as I said earlier, this is not me talking to get the draft board or to dodge nothing. This is there before I was born and it will be there when I'm dead and we believe in not only part of it, but all of it.[43]

His refusal was gargantuan because of what was taking place in U.S. society. There was the black revolution over here and the draft resistance and antiwar struggle over there. And the heavyweight champ had one foot planted in both. Howard Cosell captured this dynamic when he said, "Look at what was happening then: . . . riots in the streets, an ugly unwanted war, assassinations. . . . That time period was incredible, and Ali understood it; he was at the heart of violent, turbulent, almost indecipherable time in America, and Ali was in all of those fires at once; he helped shape it."[44]

An incredible groundswell of support built up for Ali. That is why, despite the harassment and the media attacks and the prospect of a prolonged stay in a federal prison, he stood firm. At one press conference later that year, he was expected to apologize. Instead he stood up and said, "Keep asking me, no matter how long / On the war in Vietnam, I sing this song / I ain't got no quarrel with the Vietcong."[45]

"It's hard now to relay the emotion of that time," remembered the poet Sonia Sanchez. "This was still a time when hardly any well-known people were resisting the draft. It was a war that was disproportionately killing young black brothers, and here was this beautiful, funny, poetical young man standing up and saying no! Imagine it for a moment! The heavyweight champion, a magical man, taking his fight out of the ring and into the arena of politics, and standing firm. The message that sent!"[46]

But Sanchez's was still a minority view. No less a force than army veteran and sports trailblazer Jackie Robinson said, "He's hurting the morale of a lot of young Negro soldiers over in Vietnam. And the tragedy to me is, Cassius has made millions of dollars off of the American public, and now he's not willing to show his appreciation to a country that's giving him, in my view, a fantastic opportunity. That hurts a great number of people."[47]

Jerry Izenberg, at the time another young writer more willing to identify and listen to Ali, remembered, "I can't tell you what I went through for defending him. All the cancellations of my newspaper column, the smashed car windows, the bomb threats; the thousands of letters from

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Army war veterans talking about Jews like me and concentration camps."[48]

Ali had to go to Canada to fight because promoters were more and more concerned that the despised heavyweight champ couldn't draw a crowd in the States. Starting in March 1966, he defended his title seven times, four of them outside the United States.

Bob Arum, a leading fight promoter, called Ali a "dead piece of merchandise." But by becoming such a polarizing political figure, he became someone everyone, love him or hate him, had to see. As Ali said years later:

> All kinds of people came to see me. Women came because I was saying, "I'm so pretty," and they wanted to look at me. Some white people, they got tired of my bragging. They thought I was arrogant and talked too much, so they came to see someone give the nigger a whuppin'. Longhaired hippies came to my fights because I wouldn't go to Vietnam. And black people, the ones with sense, they were saying, "Right on, brother; show them honkies." Everyone in the whole country was talking about me.[49]

In 1967, Ali fought Ernie Terrell. Before the fight, Ali was his typic self, seemingly immune to the "drumbeat of a holy war." At the airport h uncorked a classic poem saying, "I predict that Terrell will catch hell the sound of the bell. He is going around saying he's a championsh fighter but when he meets me he'll fall 20 pounds lighter. He thinks h a champ but after I'm finished he'll just be a tramp. Now I'm not sayi this just to be funny. But I'm fighting Ernie because he needs t money."[50]

But the fight itself was anything but fun and games. "I had a questi for him when we met to sign," Ali said two days before the fight. "It w only three words—'What's my name?' And Terrell said, 'Cassius Cl using my slave name. That made it a personal thing, so I'm gonna wh him until he addresses me by my proper name. I'm gonna give hi whupping and a spanking, and a humiliation." Terrell called Ali "Clay the lead-up, which led to Ali hitting him mercilessly, shouting, "I'll keep on hitting him, and I'll keep talking. Here's what I'll say. 'Don't you fall, Ernie.' Wham! 'What's my name.' Wham! I'll just keep doing that until he calls me Muhammad Ali. I want to torture him. A clean knockout is too good for him."[51]

This is exactly what happened. Ali was at the height of his powers, overmatching, taunting, and beating Terrell. Some would say this is exactly what boxing is, the art of brutalizing an opponent, but Ali was not praised for his skill; instead, he was torn apart for it. The New York *Daily News* called the fight "a disgusting exhibition of calculating cruelty, an open defiance of decency, sportsmanship and all the tenets of right versus wrong." Jimmy Cannon called it "a kind of lynching."[52] It was as if the entire history of boxing was a gentleman's sport that Ali was sullying because he was a political figure. The coverage served to further deepen animosity to Ali on Main Street USA.

In 1967, in another huge step for the antiwar movement, Martin Luther King Jr. came out against the war. In a press conference where King proclaimed his opposition he said, "As Muhammad Ali has said, we are all victims of the same system of oppression."[53]

Ali and King, to the anger of the Nation of Islam, struck up a private friendship that we know about thanks to the good people at the FBI. Here is a synopsis of one wiretapped conversation between King and Ali in which Ali is referred to as "C":

> MLK spoke to Cassius, they exchanged greetings. . . . C invited MLK to be his guest at the next championship fight, MLK said he would like to attend. C said he is keeping up with MLK, that MLK is his brother, and he's with him 100% but can't take any chances, and that MLK should take care of himself . . . and should watch out for them whities.[54]

The only other time these private friends came together in public was later that year, when Ali joined King in Louisville, where a bitter and violent struggle was being waged for fair housing. Ali spoke to the protesters, saying,

> In your struggle for freedom, justice and equality, I am with you. I came to Louisville because I could not remain silent while my own people—many of whom I grew up with, went to school with, and some of whom are my blood relatives—were being beaten, stomped and kicked in the streets simply because they want freedom, justice and equality in housing.

Later that same day he cemented his position as a lightning rod between the freedom struggle and the antiwar struggle when he said:

> Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights? No, I am not going ten thousand miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slavemasters of the darker people the world over. This is the day when such evils must come to an end. I have been warned that to take such a stand would put my prestige in jeopardy and could cause me to lose millions of dollars. But I have said it once and I will say it again. The real enemy of my people is right here. I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom and equality. . . . If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to twenty-two million of my people, they wouldn't have to draft me, I'd join tomorrow. . . . I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So I'll go to jail. We've been in jail for four hundred years.[55]

When it came time for Ali to go to the induction center in Texas, it was still up in the air whether he would take that step forward when his name was called. Outside the building, twenty demonstrators walked in a circle, carrying placards reading, "Draft Beer—Not Ali." When the induction officer said the name "Cassius Clay," Ali did not move. Ali was informed that he was risking fine and imprisonment by refusing induction. He said he understood.[56]

Afterward in a statement, he made clear just how much he understood. "I am proud of the title 'World Heavyweight Champion'. . . . The holder of it should at all times have the courage of his convictions and carry out those convictions, not only in the ring but through all phases of life. It is in light of my own personal convictions that I take my stand in rejecting the call to be inducted into the armed services. I do so with full realization of its implications and possible consequences."[57]

Years later, upon reflection, Ali said he had no regrets. "Some people thought I was a hero. Some people said that what I did was wrong. But everything I did was according to my conscience. I wasn't trying to be a leader. I just wanted to be free. And I made a stand all people, not just black people, should have thought about making, because it wasn't just black people being drafted. The government had a system where the rich man's son went to college, and the poor man's son went to war. Then, after the rich man's son got out of college, he did other things to keep him out of the Army until he was too old to be drafted."[58]

Said Julian Bond, "When Ali refused to take that symbolic step forward everyone knew about it moments later. You could hear people talking about it on street corners. It was on everybody's lips. People who had never thought about the war—black and white—began to think it through because of Ali."[59]

One hour after Ali refused induction—before he'd been charged with any crime, let alone convicted—the New York State Athletic Commission suspended his boxing license and withdrew recognition of him as champion. Soon all other jurisdictions in the United States followed suit, and the title Ali had worked for throughout his life was gone. It was the beginning of his three-and-a-half-year exile from the ring.

Ali's refusal to cross the line was front-page news not only in America but also around the world.

> In Guyana, Cheddi Jagan led a picket of the U.S. embassy. In Karachi, a young Pakistani fasted outside the U.S. consulate. There was a demonstration in Cairo. An editorial in the *Ghana Pioneer* deplored what it called the "concerted efforts" to strip Ali of his championship. During the first major British demonstration

against the war in April 1967, among the host of leaflets handed out in Grosvenor Square was one reading, "LBJ Don't Send Muhammad Ali to War." Bertrand Russell congratulated Ali on his courage and assured him, "The air will change. I sense it." An Irish boxing fan named Paddy Monaghan picketed the U.S. embassy in London and collected twenty thousand signatures over the course of three years.[60]

Manthia Diawara, presently chair of the Africana Studies Department at New York University, said:

> You see, for me then [in Mali], and for many of my friends, to be liberated was to be exposed to more R&B songs and to be au courant of the latest exploits of Muhammand Ali, George Jackson, Angela Davis, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. These were becoming an alternative cultural capital for the African youth—imparting to us new structures of feeling and enabling us to subvert the hegemony of *francité* after independence.[61]

Ali at this point saw himself as someone who had a responsibility to an international base that saw him as something beyond his sport. "Boxing is nothing, just satisfying to some bloodthirsty people. I'm no longer a Cassius Clay, a Negro from Kentucky. I belong to the world, the black world. I'll always have a home in Pakistan, in Algeria, in Ethiopia. This is more than money."[62]

Support also began to come from unlikely sources at home. Floyd Patterson, who was himself being shaped by the movements around him, said, "What bothers me about Cassius Clay's situation is that he is being made to pay too stiff a penalty for saying and doing what is right. The prizefighter in America is not supposed to shoot off his mouth about politics, particularly if his views oppose the government's and might influence many among the working classes who follow boxing."[63]

This view that Ali was being made to pay too high a price gained greater currency when he received a five-year sentence for his refusal to fight. The day of Ali's conviction, the U.S. Congress voted 337–29 to extend the draft four more years. It also voted 385–19 to make it a federal crime to desecrate the flag. At this time, a thousand Vietnamese noncombatants were being killed each week by U.S. forces. One hundred U.S. soldiers were dying every day, the war cost $2 billion a month, and the movement against the war was growing.

Kwame Toure, who then was known as Stokely Carmichael, said:

> Muhammad Ali had everything. Fame, glory, money, women, good looks, champion of the world. So when Muhammad would call me—we'd speak back and forth on the telephone—and he'd tell me, "I ain't going," I'd say, "Yeah; right on!" But I always wondered, when that final moment comes and he actually has to take that step, how will it come out? Because, no question, the FBI viewed Ali as more of a threat than H. Rap Brown and myself. Muhammad Ali had a broader base than we had. The government recognized that Muhammad Ali could cause a lot more trouble than all of us. That's why we understood that the weight of the blow would be hardest against Muhammad Ali. They were going to take his championship crown; no doubt about it. They were going to prosecute him; no doubt about it. They were going to do everything possible to bring him to his knees. And of all the people who opposed the war in Vietnam, I think that Muhammad Ali risked the most. Lots of people refused to go. Some went to jail. But no one risked as much from their decision not to go to war in Vietnam as much as Muhammad Ali. And his real greatness can be seen in the fact that, despite all that was done to him, he became even greater and more humane.[64]

On June 23, 1968, Ali appeared at his first and only antiwar demonstration. Lyndon Johnson was scheduled to speak at a $500-a-plate fund-raising dinner at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. In response, local antiwar activists organized a rally at the Cheviot Hill Playground. Twenty thousand turned out for the largest antiwar gathering yet held in southern California. The speakers included Benjamin Spock and Rap Brown. Ali arrived in a Rolls-Royce and mounted a garbage can to address the crowd. "Anything designed for peace and to stop the killing I'm for one hundred percent," he told them. "I'm not a leader. I'm not here to advise you. But I encourage you to express yourself." Then he began his familiar refrain: "Who's the champion of the world?" The *Los Angeles Times* reported that marchers replied with "Clay's Black Muslim name."[65]

In 1968, Ali was accumulating tremendous financial debt. He attempted to stop the flow by giving a series of speeches, two hundred by his count, at college campuses around the country. In the late 1960s, when *Esquire* magazine gave Ali five pages to do with what he would, he crafted a political manifesto. He wrote that black athletes should "take all this fame the white man gave to us because we fought for his entertainment, and we can turn it around. Instead of beating up each other . . . we will use our fame for freedom." Arguing for reparations long before the term ever entered the parlance of our times, he proposed using $25 billion allocated for the Vietnam War and use it to construct houses in the South. "Each black man who needs it is going to be given a home," he wrote. "Now, black people, we're not repaying you. We ain't giving you nothing. We're guilty. We owe it to you." Later, in a 1970 interview in *Black Scholar*, it was clear Ali had been radicalized. "I was determined to be one nigger that the white man didn't get," he said. "Go on and join something. If it isn't the Muslims, at least join the Black Panthers. Join something bad."[66]

Ali got his first taste of jail in December, serving ten days for driving without a license. "He got sentenced for being Cassius Clay," Ali's lawyer told reporters after Ali was sentenced. "Everyone is caught up in the hate Clay hysteria."[67]

Yet Ali's isolation would reach new depths in April 1969, when Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam officially distanced themselves from Ali. On the front page of *Muhammad Speaks*, the Nation of Islam's newspaper, was this statement:

> We tell the world we're not with Muhammad Ali. Mr. Muhammad Ali plainly acted the fool. Any man or woman who comes to Allah and then puts his hopes and trust in the enemy of Allah for survival

> is underestimating the power of Allah to help them. Mr. Muhammad Ali has sporting blood. Mr. Muhammad Ali desires to do that which the Holy Qur'an teaches him against. Mr. Muhammad Ali wants a place in this sport world. He loves it. Mr. Muhammad Ali shall not be recognized with us under the holy name Muhammad Ali. We will call him Cassius Clay.[68]

Why would the Nation of Islam so disavow someone who had sacrificed so much? The most obvious answer is that the Nation was a very conservative organization. It did not believe in the kind of active resistance being practiced by Ali, who was too incendiary even for them. But still Ali did not waver. Perhaps the late actor Richard Harris said it best when he commented, "All boxers would sell their soul to become heavyweight champion of the world. He regained his soul by giving it up."[69]

Yet the Ali saga was far from over. Elimination bouts were held to fill the vacant title. Protesters appeared outside of the venues with placards reading "Hell No We Ain't Goin' " and "Fight Racism, Free Muhammad Ali." The promoters didn't care, but Ali warned with the voice of truth: "Everybody knows I'm the champion. My ghost will haunt all the arenas. I'll be there, wearing a sheet and whispering, 'Ali-e-e-e! Ali-e-e-e!' "[70]

Bill Russell Goes Up

Those at the absolute zenith of the sports world were disproving the old saw that politics and sports don't mix: that off-field "distractions" would undermine the ultimate goal of victory. There was Ali in the world of boxing—an individual sport, of course—and then the most successful athlete in the history of team sports: the Boston Celtics' Bill Russell. The Celtics won eleven championships in thirteen seasons. The mainstay of that team was Russell, a player of immense skill, unselfishness, and leadership. Russell won five MVPs to go with his eleven rings. In 1967 he became the first African American coach of a pro team. In 1974 he was elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame, and in 1980 the country's basketball sportswriters voted him the greatest player in the history of the NBA.

Russell also felt a duty to resist racism. Once in Marion, Indiana, he had been given the key to the city only to be refused service that evening in his hotel's dining room.[71]

His fierce pride (which the media called a "bad attitude") did not exactly mix well with the Boston fans of the day. The result was that the greatest player in Boston team sports history was the target of a constant campaign of racial harassment. When Russell tried to move from his home in the Boston suburb of Reading to a new home across town, neighbors filed a petition trying to block the move. When that failed, others in the community banded together to try to purchase the home that Russell wanted to buy, remembered Tom Heinsohn, a close friend of Russell's who played with him from 1956 to 1964. Once, vandals broke into Russell's home and defecated on his bed.[72]

Russell's achievements during his days in Boston, from 1956 to 1969, drew national acclaim but never won local fans' hearts the way later Boston sports heroes did, from hockey player Bobby Orr to baseball player Carl Yastrzemski to basketball player Larry Bird. Despite all the championships, the Boston Garden averaged 8,406 fans during Russell's playing career, thousands short of a sellout. "We always sold out on the road, but rarely when we played at home," said Satch Sanders, who played with the Celtics from 1960 to 1973. By contrast, the Celtics teams led by Larry Bird in the 1980s sold out the 14,890-seat Garden for 662 straight games, from 1980 to 1995. "I didn't play for Boston," Russell once said, "I played for the Celtics." Another time he called Boston a "Flea Market of Racism."[73]

Russell did more than confront the racism that planted itself in his face. He also took part in the 1963 March on Washington and launched an integrated sports training camp in the South. Russell also organized investments in Liberian rubber plantations as a way to aid the West African country's ailing economy. In 1966, he wrote a groundbreaking autobiography, *Go Up for Glory*, in which he would echo the late Malcolm X's words and make the case that "civil rights today has become too tranquil, too filled with compromise."[74]

The Miners of Texas Western

No one would confuse Don Haskins at first glance with a civil rights pioneer. The man who would coach the 1966 Texas Western Miners to a national championship took the job in 1961 after taking a pay cut from coaching high school. What made Haskins different was his desire to coach the best possible players he could get to come to the borderlands of El Paso. Hardly a revolutionary idea, but then again neither is wanting to use a public water fountain nor asking for a cup of coffee at the local luncheonette.[75]

The 1966 Miners were the first African American starting five to win the NCAA championship game. Their legend was burnished further by vanquishing Kentucky, led by fabled coach and arch-segregationist Adolph Rupp. The contest's symbolic magnitude, occurring in the eye of the black freedom struggle, has transformed it into far more than just a game. Over time, the contest's aura has only grown. Texas Western versus Kentucky is now the athletic equivalent of the Selma Bridge or a Greensboro lunch counter. It has the feel of a bygone era, aided both by the fact that Texas Western no longer exists by that name (it is now the University of Texas at El Paso) and that in those days the finals, far from the billion-dollar spectacle they are now, were shown on tape delay with the grainy production values of a hostage video.

The Miners of Texas Western have been grossly misrepresented over the years. The story has been that by using "urban" black players, Texas Western's "athleticism" overwhelmed the "fundamentally sound and intelligent" Kentucky farm boys. This idea, of course, has very racist roots. "Hot Rod" Hundley, the former West Virginia and Lakers star, said of Texas Western at the time, "They can do everything with the basketball but sign it.' " James H. Jackson of the *Baltimore Sun* wrote, "The Miners, who don't worry much about defense but try to pour the ball through the hoop as much as possible, will present quite a challenge to Kentucky. The running, gunning Texas quintet can do more things with a basketball than a monkey on a 50-foot jungle wire."[76]

Yet, as columnist Frank Fitzpatrick analyzed in his brilliant breakdown of old game footage, the Miners were far from flashy. They more accurately fit their moniker, playing a lunch-pail-style ball that stressed defense and rebounding. The Miners gave up a scant 62 points a game and, in the pre-shot-clock era, didn't so much walk as trudge the ball up the court. "We played the most intelligent, the most boring, the most disciplined game of them all," said Texas Western guard Willie Worsley. This approach put shackles on a Kentucky team that tried to turn the game into a track meet.[77] Yet one place where legend does intersect with reality was the psychological importance of the contest for the emerging civil rights struggles sweeping the South.

Before the game, Rupp allegedly vowed that "five Negroes" would never beat his team. Whether Rupp said it or not, Haskins told his team of Rupp's promise. This was not something to say in 1966 when blacks in a quest for civil rights were being stoned and beaten across the South. The Texas Western players made their own locker-room vow that Rupp would eat his words.

On the Miners' second possession, Miners center David "Big Daddy" Lattin slammed a forceful dunk over Kentucky's Pat Riley, then said, "Take that you white honky." As Riley—a future Hall of Fame NBA coach—recalled, "It was a violent game. I don't mean there were any fights—but they were desperate and they were committed and they were more motivated than we were." In the end, Rupp choked on the loss, leaving the runner-up trophy in the locker room. Rupp clung to his all-white policy until 1971.[78] This was a proper capstone for a man who can be likened without exaggeration to George Wallace with a clipboard. When school president John Oswald ordered Rupp to desegregate, he reportedly let out the plaintive whine, "That son of a bitch is ordering me to get some niggers in here. What am I going to do?"[79]

Unlike other legendary southern coaches, such as Alabama's Bear Bryant, who recanted any role they may have played in buttressing the system of Jim Crow, Rupp was unrepentant, and the bitterness of that 1966 loss ate him alive. "[He] carried the memory of that game to his grave," wrote Russell Rice, biographer.[80]

"No one will remember him without remembering us," said Texas Western's Harry Flournoy. "And I guess there is a certain justice to that."[81]

Revolt of the Black Athlete

Russell, Ali, and the success of Texas Western were canaries in the coal mines, signaling what was about to explode onto the sports landscape. Arriving was what Dr. Harry Edwards would label "the revolt of the black athlete." As Edwards wrote, "It was inevitable that this revolt of the black athlete should develop. With struggles being waged by black people in the areas of education, housing, employment and many others, it was only a matter of time before Afro-American athletes shed their fantasies and delusions and asserted their manhood and faced the facts of their existence. . . . The roots spring from the same seed that produced the sit-ins, the freedom rides and the rebellions in Watts, Detroit and Newark."[82]

In 1965, the twenty-one African American players involved in the American Football Conference's all-star game forced Commissioner Joe Foss to move the game to Houston from New Orleans because of the Crescent City's politics of segregation. The *New York Times* called the rebellion "a boycott without precedent in professional sports by 21 Negro athletes."[83] In 1968, black athletes at the University of California at Berkeley football team boycotted athletic activities to support suspended black basketball player Bob Presley. John Erby was soon named as the first black assistant coach at Berkeley to appease the newly restless athletes.[84]

Doc Young wrote in 1968, "The black players—about 35 Negro athletes on the campus—then organized a protest, demanding that three coaches be dismissed on the grounds of 'general incompetence,' lodging various charges of racial discrimination and demanding that the school administration hire 'five or six' Negro coaches. . . . It is absolutely stupid for a white coach or general manager to indulge himself in bigotry and then expect a Negro athlete to play his best. Sports need Negro athletes, and sports had better believe it."[85]

The next year, players at Michigan State delivered a list of demands, drafted by black professor Robert Green, to coach Biggie Munn.[86]

Calvin Hill, now known best as the father of NBA star Grant Hill but a top football player in his day, remembered in a 1988 interview his shock at how quickly things had politicized for black athletes, even at his alma mater, prestigious Yale University.

> Now a change occurred between my freshman year and sophomore year: the thrust became more cultural. In my sophomore year (1966–67), guys came back with Afros and dashikis and those kinds of things. When I was shifted from quarterback there were some black students on campus who approached me and asked me if I wanted to make an issue of the fact that as a black I had been shifted. I remember meeting an upperclassman, had lunch with him, I guess my second week there, and he asked me: "How would you feel about us picketing the offices because they shifted you from quarterback?" I'd been there four or five days. The last thing I wanted to do was to cause any controversy, you know? I mean I was trying to figure out what the hell was happening at Yale.[87]

NBA star Chet Walker described in the book *Long Time Coming: A Black Athlete's Coming of Age in America* the specific conditions that spurred the black athletes' revolt. He wrote about his experience at Bradley University.

> Bradley's first road trip in 1960 began in St. Louis. Before the game that night, the St. Louis University marched out playing "Dixie," and we came out on the court surrounded by a sea of waving Confederate flags, which almost made me sick to my stomach; to me, going onto that court was like running headlong into a military rally.
>
> . . . During warm-ups for the Houston game, fans threw lit cigarette butts on the floor at us and screamed, "Nigger!" I was in a state of great confusion and frustration, and scored only one point in the first half, wondering why I was subjecting myself to such abuse. At halftime, Coach Orsborn had a different take on the

> game. He berated me, yelling, "Don't quit on me, Chet. Just don't quit on me!" With a final sneer he concluded more softly, "All-American, my ass!"
>
> . . . My fleeting sense of equality was gone. Heaven help me if I permanently lost the ability to play basketball. . . .
>
> Sometimes I feel [Branch] Rickey should have given Jackie permission to punch somebody's lights out. The incident might have resulted in a race riot, the end of the "great experiment." But suppose not? Suppose that Robinson's courage had validated an outward expression of just anger? Suppose it was acknowledged that Jackie had a right to express that anger instead of being lionized for withholding it? Because Jackie had the great strength to endure, he set a precedent. All black athletes since have had to live up to his powerful dignity and forbearance. But my soul died a little each time a nightmare like that southern trip had to be lived through."[88]

Walker also wrote about what it was like to feel like chattel on the campus.

> I became desperate enough to consider flunking out. If I couldn't play for another school, I would just fail and go home. Of course, my lack of self-confidence had taken over. Like countless black kids before and after me, I'd been placed in a white society that seemed unnavigable. I had no support systems. I was lonely. My options were zero. I remember taking a music appreciation course that spring. For the final exam we listened to recorded selections and then identified the composer, such as Mozart or Bach. I scrawled across the top of my exam, "The only music I can appreciate is the Blues," and then left the rest of the paper blank. The professor gave me a C and wrote on the exam that I showed "great vision." So I was caught. . . . Bradley had me as its employee; they had me as a commodity for as long as I was of use. If I publicly expressed my anger or desire to leave, they would destroy me.
>
> . . . One minute I was an All-American basketball player as full

> of myself as a powerful young man could be. But the next minute, I was reduced to the nigger in the doorway. No amount of sports heroism in America could change that. Early on I understood this doubleness and that it would never truly change for me.[89]

The successful basketball coach at Kansas State University during the 1960s, Tex Winter, said: "We're getting ourselves into a situation where outstanding Negroes with talent are being exploited."[90]

No Turning Back: 1968

Already in 1968 the world had seen the Tet offensive in Vietnam, proving that the U.S. military was vulnerable to defeat; the Prague Spring, where Czech students challenged the Stalinist tanks; the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the mass revolts that followed; the growth of the Black Panther Party in the United States; and the largest general strike in world history in France. In 1968, this ferment spread to the world of athletics.

In March, all-American guard and future hall of famer Calvin Murphy slammed the admissions policy of his school, Niagara, which had resulted in only two black players on the team and six on campus.[91]

In April, after the assassination of King, Pirates star outfielder Roberto Clemente, who idolized King because of the latter's positions against the war in Vietnam and structural poverty in the United States, led a charge to prevent the Pirates and Astros from opening their season on April 8, the day before King's burial. Opening day was moved to April 10. Roberto Clemente had put sports in its proper perspective in a way that no one could miss.[92]

Arthur Ashe emerged in the lily-white world of tennis. He won both the U.S. Open and the U.S. Amateur Open in 1968. Years later, he was described by journalist Mike Towle as "a statesman, author, activist, husband, father, teacher, politician, barrier breaker, traveler, student, champion, board director, television commentator, trusted friend, protestor. And that's not a complete list." But in 1968, he was just a great tennis player. He told the *Washington Afro American*, "Athletes have an obligation to the civil rights cause."[93]

The campuses were at the forefront of Ashe's call to ideological arms. University of Washington athletes pushed for a study of racism in the athletic department after accusing the football trainer of making racial slurs and providing inadequate treatment for injuries. The university's athletic director, Jim Owens, admitted to the presence of racism within the department and announced, in the words of the *Afro American*, "Colored athletes agree to play in exchange for a search for a colored coach; colored professor to serve as a link between athletes and staff; a student-athlete advisory committee will be formed."[94]

The jocks, whom administrators had been counting on to keep the hippie freaks in line, were starting their own journey away from unquestioned obedience. Now athletes, the people who were supposed to be examples of how to succeed through following the rules, were coming up with their own demands. In May, athletes and coaches at Howard University threatened to quit unless their concerns were addressed. Removing athletic director Samuel Barnes topped their list of demands. They also wanted "better food, more medical attention, streamlined means of transportation, more equipment, better living conditions and a fulltime sports information director." Student assembly president Ewart Brown Jr. (today the premier of Bermuda), a member of the track team, burned his Howard varsity sweatshirt. As it went up in ashes, football player Harold Orr said, "This is what we think of the athletic program. [We need a] cremation of the old system."[95]

The student athletes issued a statement reading:

> We the athletes of Howard University in order to create a more cohesive atmosphere in the athletic program here, are addressing ourselves to the token and modicum benefits that we as athletes are receiving. We, as athletes, would like to see a furbished upheaval of the paternalistic attitudes that are embedded in Howard's fibers of administrative rule which have diffused into the athletic charade. The athletes have seen the archetype of hypocrisy in both society and athletics, and are at odds with all forms of authority that sham; be it captain, coach, department head or administrator. We, as athletes, who believe sincerely that we are the chosen few

> and are aloof, would like to know conclusively who in athletic hierarchy is committed and his degree of commitment to needs of athletes and athletic program here at Howard.[96]

Not all athletes were moving in this direction. Also in 1968, college football players were called upon to break up campus protest rallies, most infamously at Columbia, where the football team formed a ring around the buildings occupied by antiwar students to keep out efforts to get them food and water. Campus activist James Kunen described the situation as one where "every so often I get hit with eggs, which a small group of jocks are having good clean fun throwing. Since they have no arguments and no support for their arguments (of which they have none) they have no recourse but to assault us like this and sing fight songs—that's right, fight songs. They are standing there—I beg you to believe this—throwing eggs and singing 'Roar Lion Roar' all the while."[97]

Actions like this were applauded. Representative Gerald Ford said, "Personally I'm glad that thousands of fine Americans can spend this Saturday afternoon 'knocking each other down' in a spirit of clean sportsmanship and keen competition instead of assaulting Pentagon soldiers or policemen with 'peace' placards and filthy words." Spiro Agnew made a career of speeches extolling the "manhood" and "character building" of athletics, in contrast to the un-American unwashed protesters. But now the line between those out on a Saturday afternoon and the people with the peace placards wasn't so clear-cut.

The Utterly Explosive 1968 Olympics

It has been forty years since Tommie Smith and John Carlos took the medal stand at the 1968 Olympics and created what is arguably the most enduring image in sports history, their black-gloved fists extended to the sky. Smith and Carlos's stunning gesture of revolt and resistance was not the result of some spontaneous urge to get face time on the evening news, but rather the result of several years of organizing.

In the fall of 1967, amateur black athletes formed the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) to organize an African American boycot of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. OPHR, its lead organizer, D

Harry Edwards, and its primary athletic spokespeople, 200-meter star Tommie Smith and 400-meter sprinter Lee Evans, were very influenced by the black freedom struggle. Their goal was nothing less than to expose how the United States used black athletes to project a lie, both at home and internationally. But it started on much humbler terms. As Lee Evans said to me, "I didn't speak out until the fall of 1967, when no one would rent us housing close to the university. At that time, the only black males on the campus were athletes: basketball, football, or track. Harry Edwards was working on his doctorate and he was around. He got wind about our complaints and called a meeting. This is how it started. We started the Olympic Project for Human Rights. And all this came out of us not finding housing close enough to the university."[98]

For Smith, it started through what he was learning in his classes at San Jose State. "It really started last semester," he said in 1968. "I took a class in black leadership. It started me to thinking. What the hell is going on in the U.S.? I'm a human. What kind of rights do I have? What kind of rights don't I have? Why can't I get these rights?"[99]

In the founding statement of OPHR, they wrote,

> We must no longer allow this country to *use* . . . a few "Negroes" to point out to the world how much progress she has made in solving her racial problems when the oppression of Afro-Americans is greater than it ever was. . . . We must no longer allow the Sports World to pat itself on the back as a citadel of racial justice when the racial injustices of the sports industry are infamously legendary . . . any black person who allows himself to be used in the above matter is . . . a traitor . . . because he allows racist whites the luxury of resting assured that those black people in the ghettos are there because that is where they belong or want to be.[100]

The roots of the boycott had started to develop in 1964, when black activist/comedian Dick Gregory (also once upon a time a fine college athlete in his own right) called for an international boycott of the 1964 games alongside Olympic veteran Mal Whitfield, who said in a 1963

Ebony magazine article, "It is time for American Negro athletes to join the civil rights fight—a fight that is far from won.' "[101]

Roots of Kareem

One of the first to get on board with OPHR was Lew Alcindor. Later known as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Alcindor was at the time the most prominent college athlete in the United States. Alcindor dominated the basketball world as the center for John Wooden's dynastic UCLA Bruins teams. Alcindor talked to *Sports Illustrated* about why he was joining the revolt:

> I got more and more lonely and more and more hurt by all the prejudice and finally I made a decision: . . . I pushed to the back of my mind all the normalcies of college life and dug down deep into my black studies and my religious studies. I withdrew to find myself. I made no attempt to integrate. I was consumed and obsessed by my interest in the black man, in Black Power, black pride, black courage. That, for me, would suffice. I was full of serious ideas. I could see the whole transition of the black man and his history. And I developed my first interest in Islam.[102]

At the founding conference for OPHR, the soft-spoken Alcindor made a speech that put the crowd on their feet.

> I'm the big basketball star, the weekend hero, everybody's All-American. Well, last summer I was almost killed by a racist cop shooting at a black cat in Harlem. He was shooting on the street—where masses of people were standing around or just taking a walk. But he didn't care. After all we were just niggers. I found out last summer that we don't catch hell because we aren't basketball stars or because we don't have money. We catch hell because we are black. Somewhere each of us have got to make a stand against this kind of thing. This is how I take my stand—using what I have. And I take my stand here.[103]

The struggle was on. OPHR had six central demands: (1) restore Muhammad Ali's title, (2) remove Avery Brundage as head of the United States Olympic Committee, (3) bar South Africa and Rhodesia from the Olympics and other athletic competitions, (4) boycott the New York Athletic Club, (5) hire more black coaches, and (6) the "complete desegregation" of the New York Athletic Club.[104] Tommie Smith took the boycott case public in a piece titled "Why Negroes Should Boycott" for the March 1968 issue of *Sport*. He wrote:

> We learn through observation and education. I know more now than I did when I was a boy. I know now, for instance, that Negroes do not have equality in the United States and do not have all of the rights supposedly granted to them by the Constitution of the United States. What is right is right. What is wrong is wrong. I recognize wrongs and I am willing to fight for right. . . .
>
> I am not a militant. I am an extremist only where a fight for my rights as a human being are concerned. I recognize that Negroes have had greater opportunities in sports in general and the Olympics in particular than they have in [any] other field. . . .
>
> . . . To emphasize my point, I have said I would give up my right arm to win a gold medal in the Olympics, but I would not give up my personal dignity. . . .
>
> I am not entirely sure of my actions. No one could be. But I have searched my conscience and I am acting as I believe I should act. I am concerned that I may have harmed my "image" and thus damaged the future I hope to make for my family. I would be a fool not to be concerned. But I would be less than a man if I did not act for what I believe.[105]

Gene Johnson, a world-class high jumper, concurred:

> I would like to pose this as a question: what would be the fate of a Ralph Boston were he not a 27-foot broad jumper? Or of a Charlie Greene if he were not a 9.2 sprinter? They would be "faceless"

> black men caught in the same system of racial discrimination as many other black citizens. . . .
>
> I am proud to see that those proposing the boycott have enough social awareness to realize that this struggle of the man in Fillmore, Watts and Harlem is their struggle also. The efforts of Negroes in athletics have benefited only the athlete involved. The Civil Rights Movement or struggle requires the aid and contributions of all black men regardless of station in life. Negro athletes should not be exempt, nor should they divorce themselves from this struggle. The fact that a great sacrifice is involved such as foregoing [sic] an opportunity to participate in the Olympics points to the urgency.[106]

The boycott became a national debate. California governor Ronald Reagan had harsh words for the plan: "I disapprove greatly of what Edwards is trying to accomplish. . . . Edwards is contributing nothing toward harmony between the races." (Reagan's statement was indirectly profoundly offensive to people such as Smith, Evans, and Alcindor, who resented being represented as Edwards's puppet.) Edwards responded to Reagan by calling him "a petrified pig, unfit to govern."[107]

It would be wrong though to think that resistance to the boycotters came only from the "petrified pig" section of the establishment. Just as Roy Wilkins and the 1950s civil rights activists had spoken against Muhammad Ali, there was a similar backlash against the boycotters. Black press sportswriting icon A.S. "Doc" Young wrote in the *Chicago Tribune*,

> If Tommie Smith . . . believes "I'm nothing but a nigger" when he isn't performing on the track, then he is "nothing but a nigger." When one considers that millions of American Negroes have withstood the worst of Southern bigotry without ever being reduced to the acceptance of the state, what is Tommie Smith crying so much about? I have nothing but contempt for people who complain because we don't have enough heroes but who spend their time try-

> ing to destroy the showcases for which heroes are produced and displayed. The charge that "America is as racist as South Africa" is the most extravagant lie in our times."[108]

But their boycott received support from none other than Jackie Robinson, who said, "I do support the individuals who decided to make the sacrifice by giving up the chance to win an Olympic medal. I respect their courage. We need to understand the reason and frustration behind these protests . . . it was different in my day . . . perhaps we lacked courage."

It also received solidarity and support from Martin Luther King Jr. in the months before his death. His spokesman, Andrew Young, said, "Dr. King applauds this new sensitivity among Negro athletes and public figures and he feels that this should be encouraged. Dr. King told me this represents a new spirit of concern on the part of successful Negroes for those who remain impoverished. Negro athletes may be treated with adulation during their Olympic careers, but many will face later the same slights experienced by other Negroes."[109]

Later, speaking for himself alongside Edwards, King gave the boycott "absolute support. . . . This is a protest and a struggle against racism and injustice and that is what we are working to eliminate in our organization and in our total struggle. . . . No one looking at these demands can ignore the truth of them." He went on, "Freedom always demands sacrifice and . . . they have the courage to say 'We're going to be men and the United States of America have deprived us of our manhood, of our dignity and our native worth, and consequently we're going to stand up and make the sacrifices.'"[110]

Momentum built throughout the year. The assassination of King shook some of the stalwart antiboycott athletes. Ralph Boston, the most prominent track-and-field star, said, "For the first time since the talks about the boycott began, I feel that I really have a valid reason to boycott." He explained how he arrived at this conclusion:

> I sat and thought about it and I see that if I go to Mexico City and represent the United States I would be representing people like

> the one that killed Dr. King. And there are more people like that going around. On the other hand, I feel if I don't go and someone else wins the medal and it goes to another country, I haven't accomplished anything either. It is disturbing when a guy cannot even talk to people and he is shot for that. It makes you think that Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown are right. All my life I felt that violence wasn't the way to deal with the problem. How do you keep feeling this way when things like that keep coming? How?[111]

Throughout the year, more and more athletes began asking the same question. Historian Douglas Hartmann writes in his book *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete*:

> Nine track-and-field stars (including future gold medalist long jumper Bob Beamon) at the University of Texas at El Paso were kicked off the team by coach Wayne Vanderburge after they refused to compete in a meet with BYU in protest for the Mormon Church's treatment of blacks. . . . (Every edition of the *Track and Field News* that spring contained at least a couple of snippets regarding incidents of protest or discontent among top-flight black trackmen.) In July, twenty-three of the twenty-five black athletes at Iowa State announced their withdrawal from school effective August 1 because the athletic council rejected some of their eight demands—including one that called for the hiring of Negro coaches in all sports.[112]

A boycott looked like a possibility, but it was not to be. The wind went out of its sails for a myriad of reasons. Some felt threatened by Brundage's stern warning, "If these boys are serious, they're making a very bad mistake. If they're not serious and they're using the Olympic Games for publicity purposes, we don't like it." Others felt that just raising the issues was enough. But the most central problem was that athletes who had trained their whole lives for their Olympic moment quite understandably didn't want to give it up.[113]

Track legend Rafer Johnson, in his autobiography *The Best That I*

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Can Be, reflected the conflicted feelings some black athletes had toward the boycott and the movement itself. It is a rather clear exposition of the double consciousness of black athletes, who carry both a taste of privilege and a taste of pain. "What you have to ask yourself is, 'What good is it going to do? Is it going to help housing? Is it going to help education? Is it going to help job opportunities?' I don't see how a boycott of the Olympics is relevant at all to these problems." He also wrote about the movement as a whole, "The militant tactics of Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Angela Davis, and Malcolm X seemed divisive and sometimes destructive. Still, I was glad they were around. They dared to utter truths that others could not, and their fervor accelerated the process of social change. The larger society might have never awakened if those fierce, threatening voices had not been raised."[114]

John Carlos expressed to me years later his frustration about this mind-set. "A lot of the athletes thought that winning medals would supersede or protect them from racism. But even if you won the medal, it ain't going to save your momma. It ain't going to save your sister or children. It might give you fifteen minutes of fame, but what about the rest of your life?"[115]

But it accomplished its goal of raising a broader awareness. As Lee Evans said:

> Harry [Edwards] was media savvy. He said all year that we were going to take a vote at the Olympic trials and all year there was commentary in all the newspapers. Some editors made fools of themselves. They would write, "Look at these narrow, stupid Black guys. They don't know what they're doing." They just said things that exposed themselves to who they really were. The athletes, of course, voted down the boycott. I was hoping it was going to be voted down because I wanted to run in the Olympics. I knew that this would happen, that the proposal was a way for us to get leverage. Tom and I had talked about it, and I said, "Let's say we're going to boycott so we can get some things done," but we all knew that we were going to run in Mexico. Push comes to shove, we were going to be there.[116]

One person who was not there, it must be noted, was Lew Alcindor, who staged his own one-person boycott and stayed home.

Then on October 2, ten days before the Games opened, Mexican security forces massacred hundreds of students in Mexico City. Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell issued a statement on Mexico and the Olympic Games:

> The Mexican government has behaved with a barbarity comparable only to the massacres carried out by occupying Nazi troops in Europe or by napalming American planes in Vietnam. Throughout the world people have been aroused to passionate anger and alarm. We express our profound solidarity with the heroic Mexican students. We ask people, organizations and nations to boycott the Olympic games. . . . Almost immediately after this ambush-massacre occurred, the Mexican Government met with the Olympic Committee and said: "The intervention of the forces of order have assured calm and there will be no trouble to prevent the Olympics from taking place." The same day the United States State Department declared: "The disturbances in Mexico City affected only a small part of the population and order is now restored." There is a clear complicity between the United States and Mexican Governments to meet popular resistance with massacre. If the Olympic Committee agrees to hold the games in Mexico, it stands guilty of complicity in this crime.[117]

Although you cannot compare the harassment and intimidation o the OPHR athletes to the massacre of the students and their supporters the intention was the same: to stifle protest. The effort to silence th OPHR athletes came in different forms, even in the form of track legen Jesse Owens. Brundage sent Owens to discredit the Olympic rebels. A Douglas Hartmann wrote,

> In Owens's view, the boycott was nothing but "political aggrandizement," which he condemned on the grounds that "there is no place in the athletic world for politics." Instead, Owens claimed,

> The Olympics help bridge the gap of misunderstanding of people in this country," thus promoting the "way of American life." In a follow-up statement published under the title "Olympics a Bastion of Non-Discrimination," the legendary figure added that athletic scholarships help youngsters to attend the colleges of their choice.[118]

Owens wasn't the only black athletic legend to come down on OPHR. As the *Washington Afro American* reported, "Joe Louis says colored athletes should consider themselves Americans first and colored Americans second and disagrees with those pushing for a boycott. 'Whenever you have a chance to do something for your country you should do it,' Louis said."[119]

In Mexico City, Brundage sent Owens to talk to the track team to try to discourage them from any protest on the track. Brundage's ear was notoriously tin. He could not have picked a worse representative. As Lee Evans tells the story:

> Jesse was confused as far as I'm concerned. The USOC [United States Olympic Committee] dogged him, and he knew they dogged him. . . . Treating him badly after his exploits in the [Berlin] Olympic games, when he ran [and won four gold medals]. He came back, didn't have a job, was racing horses for money. We were really annoyed with him because he knew what we were going through, yet he pretended that it didn't exist, and that just blew our minds when he called a meeting with us in Mexico City. I thought he called this meeting because Avery Brundage sent him there. Jesse Owens was sitting on the fifty-yard line with all the important people of the world, the royalties, the Avery Brundages. They have a special section where they sit in the games, right at the fifty-yard line, and Jesse—that's where he was sitting. He thought he was one of them. He had forgot that he was once an athlete struggling like we were. So he came and talked to us like he was Avery Brundage or the King of England or somebody, and really talking stupid to us, and we just shouted him out of the room.

> . . . I still admire him to this day, that's why I say he was confused, coming to talk to us like that, because we knew that he was being victimized. He was a victim, and we felt sorry for him, actually.[120]

(After the events of 1968, Owens said to Smith and Carlos, "The black fist is a meaningless symbol. When you open it, you have nothing but fingers—weak, empty fingers. The only time the black fist has significance is when there's money inside. There's where the power lies.")

It was on the second day that Smith and Carlos took their stand. First Smith set a world record winning the gold and Carlos won the bronze. Smith then took out the black gloves. When the silver medalist, a runner from Australia named Peter Norman, saw what was happening, he affixed an OPHR button to his chest to show his solidarity on the medal stand.

As the U.S. flag began rising up the flagpole and the anthem played, Smith and Carlos bowed their heads and raised their fists in a black power salute. But there was more than the gloves. The two men also wore no shoes, to protest black poverty, and beads, to protest lynching. Within hours, Smith and Carlos were expelled from the Olympic Village and word spread that they had been stripped of their medals (although they were not). Avery Brundage justified this by saying, "They violated one of the basic principles of the Olympic games: that politics play no part whatsoever in them."[121]

Ironically, it was Brundage's reaction that really turned the spotlight on the protest. As Red Smith wrote, "By throwing a fit over the incident, suspending the young men and ordering them out of Mexico, the badgers multiplied the impact of the protest a hundred fold."[122]

In Brundage's unpublished autobiography he was still muttering about Smith and Carlos, writing, "Warped mentalities and cracked personalities seem to be everywhere and impossible to eliminate."[123]

But Brundage was not alone in his furious reaction. The *Los Angeles Times* accused Smith and Carlos of a "Nazi-like salute." *Time* magazine had the Olympic logo but instead of the motto "Faster, Higher, Stronger," it blared, "Angrier, Nastier, Uglier." The *Chicago Tribune* called the act "an embarrassment visited upon the country," an "act contemptuous of the United States," and "an insult to their countrymen." Smith and Carlos were "renegades" who would come home to be "greeted as heroes by fellow extremists."[124]

The coup de grâce was by a young reporter for the *Chicago American* named Brent Musberger, who wrote, "One gets a little tired of having the United States run down by athletes who are enjoying themselves at the expense of their country. Protesting and working constructively against racism in the United States is one thing, but airing one's dirty clothing before the entire world during a fun-and-games tournament was no more than a juvenile gesture by a couple of athletes who should have known better." He then described Smith and Carlos as "a pair of dark-skinned storm troopers."[125]

For Smith and Carlos, there were no regrets. Carlos was clear on why he had to act:

> I was with Dr. King ten days before he died. He told me he was sent a bullet in the mail with his name on it. I remember looking in his eyes to see if there was any fear, and there was none. He didn't have any fear. He had love and that in itself changed my life in terms of how I would go into battle. I would never have fear for my opponent, but love for the people I was fighting for. That's why if you look at the picture [Carlos and Smith with their raised fists] Tommie has his jacket zipped up, and [Australian silver medalist] Peter Norman has his jacket zipped up, but mine was open. I was representing shift workers, blue-collar people, the underdogs. That's why my shirt was open. Those are the people whose contributions to society are so important but don't get recognized.[126]

Upon their return home, there was support for Smith and Carlos in the black community, but not the entire black community.

> There was pride, but only from the less fortunate. What could they do but show their pride? But we had Black businessmen, we had Black political caucuses, and they never embraced Tommie Smith

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> or John Carlos. When my wife took her life in 1977 they never said, "Let me help."

Carlos believes to this day that the lack of support led to his wife's suicide.

> We were under tremendous economic stress. I took any job I could find. I wasn't too proud. Menial jobs, security jobs, gardener, caretaker, whatever I could do to try to make ends meet. We had four children, and some nights I would have to chop up our furniture and make a fire in the middle of our room just to stay warm. . . . I was the bad guy, the two headed dragon—spitting fire. It meant we were alone.[127]

But if Smith and Carlos were being attacked from all corners, they received immediate solidarity from their track-and-field allies. As Lee Evans said, "I was very distraught. I wanted to go home. I said I wasn't going to run. But Tommie and John—they came to me and said I better run and I better win. They came to my room, and that freed my mind up to go run because I was confused, but when they told me that I should run that really freed me up." Evans made his own statement when he and his fellow medal winners wore black berets on the medal stand. When the media asked him why, he said sarcastically that it was because it was raining. The reality was quite different. As Evans recalled:

> We knew that the black beret was a symbol of the Black Panther Party. . . . I thought they were pretty brave guys, but I wouldn't do what they were doing. They were having a shoot-out with the police almost every day. So my job [protesting at the Olympics] was easy. This is one of the things I learned from Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Everybody can play a part, but everyone has to do something. I used to say to guys I was trying to get to come to meetings, I said, "It's going to be easy for us. We're just going to the Olympic games. I know some guys in Oakland shooting out with the police. So what we're doing is nothing compared to those guys.

> We're not putting our life on the line." But, as it turned out, we did put our lives on the line because I had maybe twenty death threats on my life in Mexico City. You have mailboxes in the Olympics. I had the KKK, the NRA, saying "Yeah we're going to shoot you niggers." They even tell you what time they're going to shoot you.

But Evans also remembers criticism from people back home.

> I had a tough time too because the Blacks thought that I didn't do enough, and the whites were just mad. I got it from both sides. The Black people thought I should have done nothing less than dynamite the victory stand. That's the only thing that would have satisfied them because, after Tommie and John, what else could I do?[128]

They also received support from unlikely sources. The Olympic crew team, all white and entirely from Harvard, issued the following statement: "We—as individuals—have been concerned about the place of the black man in American society in their struggle for equal rights. As members of the U.S. Olympic team, each of us has come to feel a moral commitment to support our black teammates in their efforts to dramatize the injustices and inequities which permeate our society."[129]

Not every athlete showed them love. Boxer George Foreman, in what was seen as a direct rebuke of Smith and Carlos, waved a small American flag to all four corners of the ring after winning heavyweight gold. This endeared him to the corporate media, but not to others. As Foreman said in 2003, "Most people thought it was great, but then something happened that caused me more pain than I had ever felt as an individual. I was a happy nineteen-year-old boy, and some people came up to me in the 5th ward and said, 'How can you do that when the brothers [Smith and Carlos] are trying to do their thing?' They thought I betrayed them. That people would think that caused great pain." (Foreman, unlike the track team, was given and accepted an invitation to the Nixon White House.)[130]

OPHR and the actions of Smith and Carlos were a terrific rebuke to the hypocrisy at the heart of the Olympics. However, present was one deep flaw that was mirrored in other aspects of the new left and black power movement: women were largely shut out. Many of OPHR's calls to action had statements about "reclaiming manhood," as if African American women weren't victims of racism or were incapable of being a strong voice. The foolishness of this move was quickly seen when many women athletes became major voices of solidarity after the fact. The anchor of the women's gold-medal-winning 4-by-100 team, Wyomia Tyus, said, "I'd like to say that we dedicate our relay win to John Carlos and Tommie Smith." Tyus commented years later, "It appalled me that the men simply took us for granted. They assumed we had no minds of our own and that we'd do whatever we were told."[131]

The critiques are valid, but Smith and Carlos's efforts are immortal as a moment when the privileges of athletic glory were proudly trashed for a greater goal. Jimmy Hines, the 100-meter gold medalist in Mexico City, said of the effect Smith and Carlos's protest had on the 1968 Olympics in people's minds, "I've done maybe a thousand speaking engagements and after each I've had the question: 'Were you the ones . . . ? The ones who . . . ? ' I guess that's forever."[132]

The Revolt After Mexico

Despite the backlash, the struggle continued after the Mexico City games. As Douglas Hartmann writes, "Black students took to reenacting Smith and Carlos's clenched-fist salute in athletic contexts and arenas across the country. . . . Posters of the two athletes poised on the victory stand appeared within weeks . . . in 'head-shops, radical churches and student-movement headquarters' around the country."[133] The *Washington Afro-American* reported in January 1969 that posters of Carlos and Smith in full black-fisted glory were banned from the room of a student who was attending a Catholic Youth Organization meet.[134]

In February, African American players on Notre Dame's basketball team threatened to quit unless they receive a public apology from students for booing them at a game at Michigan State. Basketball players Bill Chamberlain and Charlie Scott spoke openly of "affiliating" with the black student movement at the University of North Carolina, and students at the University of Houston demanded that the school's new fieldhouse be named after basketball star Elvin Hayes instead of Roy Hofheinz, owner of the Houston Astros.[135]

Brigham Young University (BYU) became a particular lightning rod for controversy. BYU was affiliated with the Mormon Church, which denied leadership positions to African Americans, claiming that their dark skin was "the mark of the curse of Ham." Fourteen African American players were dismissed from the University of Wyoming football team on October 14 for wearing black armbands the evening before the team was scheduled to play BYU. They called themselves the Black 14 and with the support of the NAACP unsuccessfully sued for $1.1 million in damages. On October 25, in a game with San Jose State, the entire San Jose team wore black armbands to support the fourteen.[136]

In December, a headline in the black press read, "College Cager Dropped for Ignoring 'Anthem.'" The article was about Chris Wood, the co-captain of the Adelbert College basketball team. He was unceremoniously dumped from the team he led after refusing to stand during the national anthem. Jasper Wood, Chris's father, supported his son, saying, "We believe in the fellowship of man. We don't believe in nationalism."[137]

In November 1969, Stanford University president Kenneth Pitzer announced that Stanford would henceforth honor what he called an athlete's "right of conscience." This would allow the athlete to boycott a school or event that he or she deemed "personally repugnant." Though this was not heartily endorsed by other schools, it was nevertheless a breakthrough.[138]

This all led Oklahoma State and U.S. Olympic basketball coach Hank "Mo" Iba to tell *Sports Illustrated* in the summer of 1969, "We are facing the greatest crisis in sports history. In the next eight months we could see sports virtually destroyed. Nobody seems to realize how critical this situation is."[139]

Even the walled city of segregation known as professional golf gave way as Lee Elder and Charlie Sifford were granted entry to play in Grand Slam tournaments. In 1970, for the first time, blacks could tee off at the Masters. This was a huge crack in the system. Sifford would recount a story of a tournament in 1959: "I had a good chance to get in the Masters if I finished good. . . . Suddenly I was intercepted by five white men who started following me around the course. They threw their beer cans at me and called me 'nigger' and other names."[140]

The political situation was cutting so closely to the surface, it was even finding expression in professional football.

Dave Meggyesy: Out of Their League

David Meggyesy was an all-American linebacker at Syracuse University before playing for the National Football League's St. Louis (now Arizona) Cardinals from 1963 to 1969. He was active in the movements for civil rights and stood in opposition to the war in Vietnam. In 1970 he wrote his football autobiography, *Out of Their League*, which examined how big-time sports in the United States can dehumanize athletes and fans alike. As a player, he was part of something new.

> Coaches and teammates would see me reading various progressive books and magazines on the away game plane trips, and sometimes they would ask me what I was reading, but it wasn't any big deal. We didn't have sit-ins or study groups reading Karl Marx. I was going through a process of my own self-education. Through these various influences, I got involved in the Civil Rights movement. I was reluctant, at first, to tell my African-American teammates about it. My feelings were that it would be embarrassing for them to have this white guy being active and they maybe feeling like they should have been involved . . . but if I would be reading *Ramparts* magazine or an interview with Malcolm X, other players, including our star running back Johnny Roland, would give me a power fist salute as if to say, "We're with you."[141]

Toward the end of his career, Meggyesy began to look very critically at the relationship between sports and football and society.

> I began wondering why other countries don't play this game. I was coming to the understanding that big-time football was more than

> a game, that it was a form of political expression and political theater. During that time there was this jingoistic, super patriotic use of football, particularly during the Super Bowl, to sell the war in Vietnam. Yet there were a tremendous number of people against the war including myself. My response was to get more serious and start organizing my teammates on the Cardinals. I started a petition drive on the Cardinals, which would be sent to our congressional delegation and senators, calling for an end to the war. My teammate Rick Sortun and I put it together. Rick was a Goldwater Republican in 1964, and he was my roommate on the road. We had many heated discussions. During the off season in 1967, he went back to the University of Washington, and when he came back for training camp in 1968, he had gone from Goldwater Republican to a member of the Young Socialist Alliance. I kid Rick and tell him he was my first convert.
>
> The times they were a-changing. The next petition Rick and I put together, in 1969, we had thirty-seven teammates sign it. . . . The next day Cardinals head coach Charlie Winner said to me, "I want you to apologize to the team. This is a big distraction for the team, and you owe the team an apology." I got up in front of the team and said I was sorry the petition almost went public because I said it would be kept private and that was all I was apologizing for. I told them if they wanted to sign a new petition they could stop by my locker after practice and do it. Charlie almost had a heart attack.[142]

Meggyesy felt the immediate pressure from management to cease and desist all "radical" activities.

> They tried to put the hammer on me to get me to stop my antiwar activities. In 1968, I was taken outside by one of the coaches and asked, "Do you want to play football? I have been told to tell you by the ownership that if you continue to do what you're doing, you are going to be thrown out of the League." A few days later, I wrote the Cardinal management and told them if they continued to threaten me this way, I would go public. I said in my letter that half the

> country is against this war, and my antiwar work doesn't impact my playing, and it is my right as a citizen to protest the war. Nothing happened. Later in the season, NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle sent an order down to the teams that when the national anthem is being played, we, the players, would have to hold our helmets under our left arm, look up, and salute the flag. I found it repulsive that anyone would be telling me and my teammates that we had to salute the flag and how to do so. So I did a low-key "Tommie Smith" and held my helmet in front of me and bowed my head. The next week, a sports columnist wrote about how reprehensible it was that anyone would refuse to salute the flag. The team didn't know what to do. They thought that if they would be cool, maybe it would go away. So at the start of our next game, some fans unfurled a big banner that said "The Big Red [the nickname of the Cardinals] thinks Pink." It was their way of saying that I was a "pinko" (a communist), and we were a "pinko" team.
>
> Midway through the 1969 season, I got benched. That hurt as much as anything because the ultimate power management has over a player is whether you play or not. At the professional level, this is also your livelihood. When they benched me, I just couldn't believe it. Clearly, I was superior to my backup. On the plane ride back to St. Louis with Rick Sortun after our last game in Green Bay, we decided were going to quit. We were tired of being part of what we saw as an American war game and political theater that was supporting the Vietnam War. Personally, what really hurt was not being allowed to play. . . . When I was benched for "political reasons," all kinds of self-doubts began to creep into my mind. Because one of the core values in sports from the athlete's point of view is that it is a meritocracy: The best players play. An athlete has to believe this is true, or he can't play. When someone messes with that, it messes with everything that is great about sports.[143]

Women Roar

For women, the 1960s was a decade of evolution, as opposed to the revolution the 1970s would bring. It was the time when the groundwork for the revolution was laid. Roberta Gibb in 1966 was the first woman to run the full Boston Marathon. In 1968, Wyomia Tyus became the first woman to win golds in consecutive Olympics in the 100-meter dash. In 1969, Diane Crump became the first woman to ride in a parimutuel race in the United States, and in 1970 she became the first woman to ride in the Kentucky Derby. In 1969, a schedule of national championships for women's sports was announced that included gymnastics and track and field for the first time. In 1968, when the most prestigious tennis tournaments for women were officially open only to amateurs and under-the-table payments were offered to the top players to ensure they would play, a working-class tennis player (itself an oddity) named Billie Jean King began to make waves by insisting that prize money be paid to women openly at Wimbledon.

Rebellion even made it to the cheerleaders. In Oakland, an all–African American cheerleading squad chanted, "Ungawa! Black Power! Destroy White Boy, We said it! We meant it, We always represent it!!"[144]

In 1969, Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley—the lord of Chavez Ravine, a combination of Hitler and Stalin to the people of Brooklyn—looked ahead to the 1970s and said, "Is baseball on the spot? I would say yes. But then religion is on the spot, government is on the spot, the integrity of treaties is on the spot. These are times when people spit on the flag, when priests go over the fence. You have to understand the pattern of things today. There is rebellion against the establishment and baseball is linked to the establishment."[145]