

OCT 26

1970

KNOCKOUT

A *Muhammad* **L** **I**

ATLANTA

..... **AND**

THE FIGHT NOBODY WANTED

Muhammad
ALI

By David Davis

Jerry
QUARRY

KNOCKOUT

MUHAMMAD ALI WAS DESPERATE.

The year was 1970, and the self-proclaimed greatest boxer of all time had been idle for more than three years because of his ongoing lawsuit against the federal government. Stripped of his heavyweight title, the 28-year-old was spending his prime running up exorbitant legal expenses. A reported 22 states refused to grant him a boxing license, among them California, whose then-governor, Ronald Reagan, was quoted as saying, "That draft dodger will never fight in my state, period."

The notion that Ali—a conscientious objector who was a member of the Nation of Islam—would make his comeback in the deep South at the height of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War seemed laugh-out-loud ridiculous. After all, Georgia's annual sports highlight was the whites-only Masters golf tournament in Augusta; its most honored athlete was Ty Cobb, the fiercely racist baseball Hall of Famer; and its governor, Lester Maddox, was a segregationist. Not to mention that the state didn't even have an active boxing commission.

But thanks to one fortuitous telephone call to a local businessman—and the political savvy of State Senator Leroy Johnson, the most powerful African-American elected official in the South during the civil rights era—Atlanta stunned the world by granting Ali a boxing license and playing host to his return on October 26, 1970. His opponent? Right out of central casting: California's rugged Jerry Quarry, the reigning "Great White Hope."

The fight nobody wanted was on.

Interest was so intense that media from around the world descended on Atlanta; *Sports Illustrated* reported that the TV and ancillary rights would be "perhaps the richest of any sporting event." Celebrities, sports stars and civic leaders—including Bill Cosby, Sidney Poitier, Diana Ross, Hank Aaron, Coretta Scott King, Andrew Young, Julian Bond and the Reverend Jesse Jackson—flocked to show support for Ali, as did

another constituency: mink coat-wearing pimps and their bejeweled entourages.

As boxing historian Bert Sugar later commented: "It was the greatest collection of black money and black power ever assembled until that time. Right in the heart of the old Confederacy, it was *Gone With the Wind* turned upside-down."

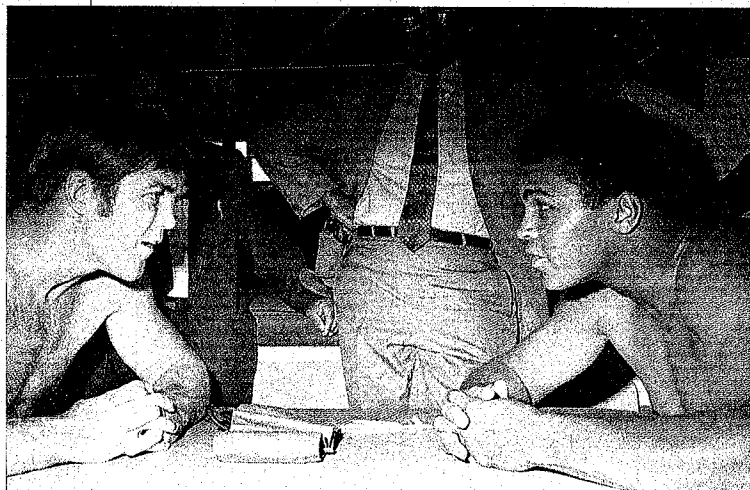
The bout itself was anticlimactic; Ali won on a technical knockout. But on the 35th anniversary of the fight, it's apparent that it was no ordinary evening. The fight resurrected Ali's career, and not even a brazen robbery at a post-fight party dimmed the luster of his performance. Five months later, after New York finally granted Ali a boxing license, he fought Joe Frazier for the heavyweight title. In 1971, the Supreme Court overturned Ali's conviction. Not so incidentally, Atlanta found itself on the world's sports map, paving the way for two Super Bowls, two Final Fours and, of course, the 1996 Summer Olympics (where, appropriately, Ali lit the Olympic flame during the opening ceremonies).

Perhaps more importantly, the fight cemented the city's growing reputation as a "black Mecca." As *Atlanta Magazine* discovered in this series of interviews, nothing better defines the emergence of modern-day Atlanta than the night Muhammad Ali defeated Jerry Quarry.

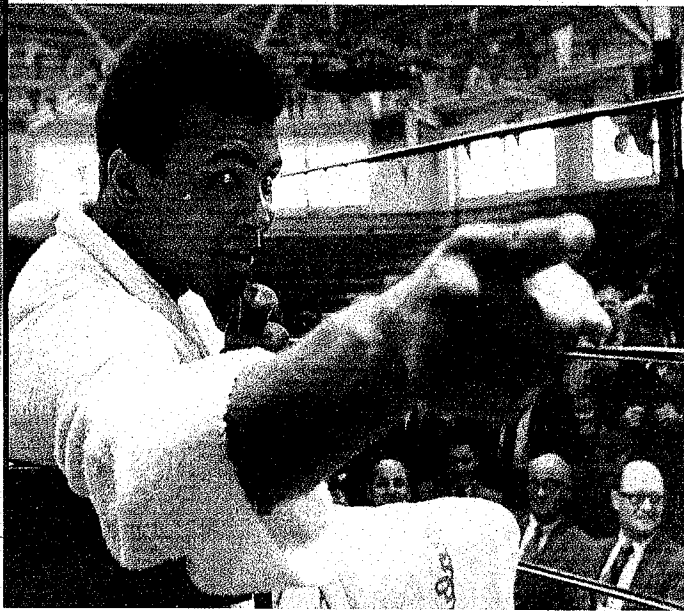
I. ALI IN EXILE

In 1966, the U.S. Army classifies Ali as 1-A, or eligible for the draft. His response is succinct: "Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong." Ordered to report for duty on April 28, 1967, he refuses on religious grounds. He is later sentenced to five years in prison for draft evasion. Free on bail as he appeals the sentence, Ali is not allowed to leave the country and is stripped of the heavyweight title.

SIDNEY POITIER (actor) The Muhammad Ali I knew—and know today—was a very, very courageous, brash, interesting man. He was quite courageous in his determination to articulate what his feelings [were] and what his religion was and to stand firm on it.



FACE OFF The contest between "great white hope" Quarry and controversial champ Ali had all the elements of drama as the contenders descended on Atlanta (above, following physical exams at a training center). Ali's every move was a media event—such as the impromptu press conference held in a training ring (right).



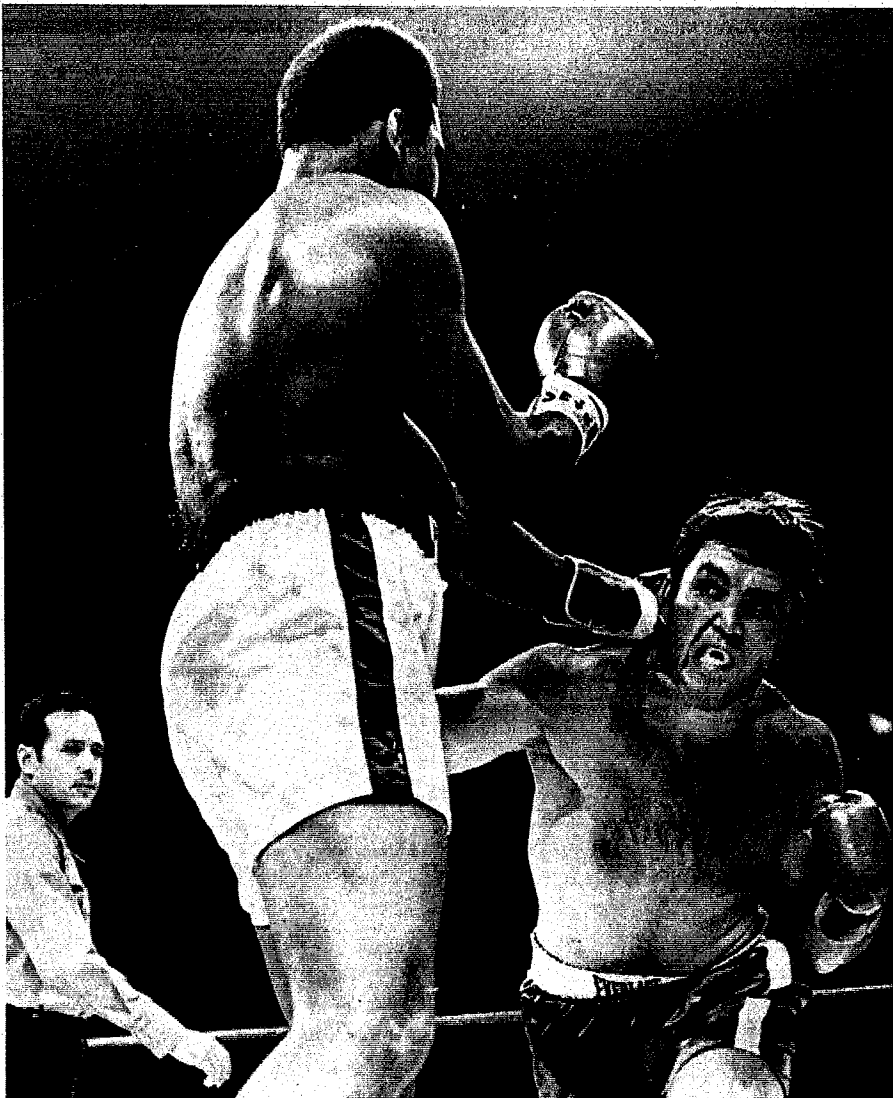
INTRO PHOTO, FACE-OFF, ALI: AP STAFF PHOTOS; ALI VS. QUARRY: KEYSTONE PARIS/NEWS.COM

ANDREW YOUNG (former Atlanta mayor, former U.S. congressman and former U.N. ambassador) Ali's attorney, Chauncey Eskridge, was also Martin Luther King's attorney. He defended Martin when they accused him of income-tax evasion. In 1967-68, when Eskridge was defending Ali, Martin was making up his mind about the war in Vietnam. All of us admired Ali's principled position. By that time, frankly, we knew that the war in Vietnam was more illegal and unnecessary than the present war.

JULIAN BOND (NAACP chairman) The perception about Ali, I think, among most whites, was negative: He was a draft dodger, anti-Christian, anti-white. He was a charged personality.

STAN SANDERS (attorney, first African-American Rhodes Scholar) To the extent that Ali was a symbol—and, I would say, a reluctant symbol—of the anti-Vietnam movement, he nevertheless let the anti-Vietnam War establishment buffer him from fallout that he would otherwise have had to fight himself.

His career in jeopardy, Ali searches for ways to support his family and pay his legal fees. He stars in a short-lived Broadway musical called Big Time Buck White, appears in a documentary about his life entitled AKA Cassius Clay, and participates in a "computerized" boxing match against Rocky Marciano.



GENE KILROY (Ali confidante) When they took his title, I started helping him do college lecturing. He had an agent out of New York who would set it up. The students loved him. He was very articulate, and a lot of students were against the war. Ali was doing maybe one [lecture] a week. We'd go there, he'd get paid, and then we'd go right to Western Union and send money to his mom and his dad in Louisville.

BERT SUGAR (boxing historian) I remember going to Harvard, following him around on the college tour. He gave a talk and then there were questions. At the end, Dick Cavett, the host/moderator, said, "Ali, if I asked you to say two words about yourself in a poem, could you?" Ali took a second and he went, "Me, Wheeee!"

With Ali out of action, Joe Frazier, 1964 Olympic gold medalist, methodically whips every contender, including Jerry Quarry. In early '70, the undefeated Frazier is crowned the new heavyweight champ.

SUGAR The heavyweight division that Ali was returning to was the best it's ever been. There was not only Quarry, but Jimmy Ellis, Oscar Bonavena, George Chuvalo, Ernie Shavers, Mac Foster and some young kid named George Foreman. This was the best pledge class the heavyweight division had in the history of boxing.

FAST FIGHT While the events before and after the fight were outrageous, the contest itself was undramatic; Ali won after three rounds.

JOSE TORRES (light heavyweight champion, author) No doubt about it, Frazier was a great, great fighter. We could see that. But Ali didn't lose [his title] in the ring, so in a lot of people's minds, he was still champion.

All the while, Ali's camp works to return him to the ring.

KILROY We found out that Mississippi didn't have a boxing commission. I met with Governor John Bell Williams. They had had a big flood down there, so we agreed that if they gave Ali a license, we'd donate [the proceeds of] the live gate to the state of Mississippi for the flood victims. They gave us a license, but it made the headlines and people started to complain. So they said it was only a permit, and they reneged on it.

DR. FERDIE PACHECO (Ali's physician) He was going to fight here, he was going to fight there. They kept mentioning different places—an Indian reservation, Las Vegas, South Carolina, Toronto, Detroit, Florida, Tijuana, you name it—but nobody wanted to take a chance on him.

KILROY We met one time with Melvin Belli, the attorney. He said, "You could sue all the states that are refusing Ali a license because they're denying him the right to make a living." Muhammad said, "No, I'm not going to sue anybody."

II. ENTER, ATLANTA

New York-based attorney Robert Kassel, whose Sports Action company had put on the Frazier-Ellis championship fight, finances numerous attempts to get Ali back in action. All efforts fail. In August, Kassel decides to try his father-in-law, Harry Pett, who owns an Atlanta-based company called Pett Spice Products.

ROBERT KASSEL (promoter) I went to school at Emory University. My first wife was from Atlanta. I went to the office one day and thought, it sounds weird to try the South. It wouldn't be very likely. But what the hell, I'll give my father-in-law a call. I called him and said, "Dad, do you know anybody in Atlanta to see if it's possible to pull off an Ali fight?" He called back and said, "Yeah, I do. I know this senator, Leroy Johnson."

In 1963, attorney Leroy Johnson became the first African-American elected to the state legislature since Reconstruction. An Atlanta native and Morehouse College alum, 42-year-old Johnson is one of the first politicians to recognize how Atlanta's emerging black majority will alter the city's power structure.

SAM MASSELL (former Atlanta mayor) Leroy was, and still is, a very smooth politician. He knows how to build bridges and work with whites and blacks and all others. He was the focus for the black community because he was well received, in contrast to, some years later, Julian Bond, who was barred from the legislature even after he was elected.

SANDERS Leroy Johnson wasn't a civil rights guy; he wasn't a Julian Bond or Marion Barry. He was a wheeler-dealer. He was slick. He could talk to the black guys as well as to the white guys.

BOND He was almost a perfect politician—and I mean that as a real compliment. I think, when you're good at this, it's

an art. Bill Clinton, for example, is perfect at this. Leroy was that kind of figure. He made friends easily, and a lot of what goes on in politics is friendship. The fact that he was black in this overwhelmingly white [legislative] body—and the fact that he became successful—was just a measure of what kind of guy he is.

JESSE HILL (president of Atlanta Life Insurance Co.) Senator Johnson, along with myself, Reverend Martin Luther King Sr. and Reverend Samuel W. Williams were always on the point in Atlanta on issues that impacted the lives of African-Americans for good. We were kind of like a trouble-shooting group.

Kassel instructs Pett to contact Johnson.

KASSEL I said, "Call him. And what I'll do is: I'll give you guys the live gate [proceeds] if you can pull off the fight."

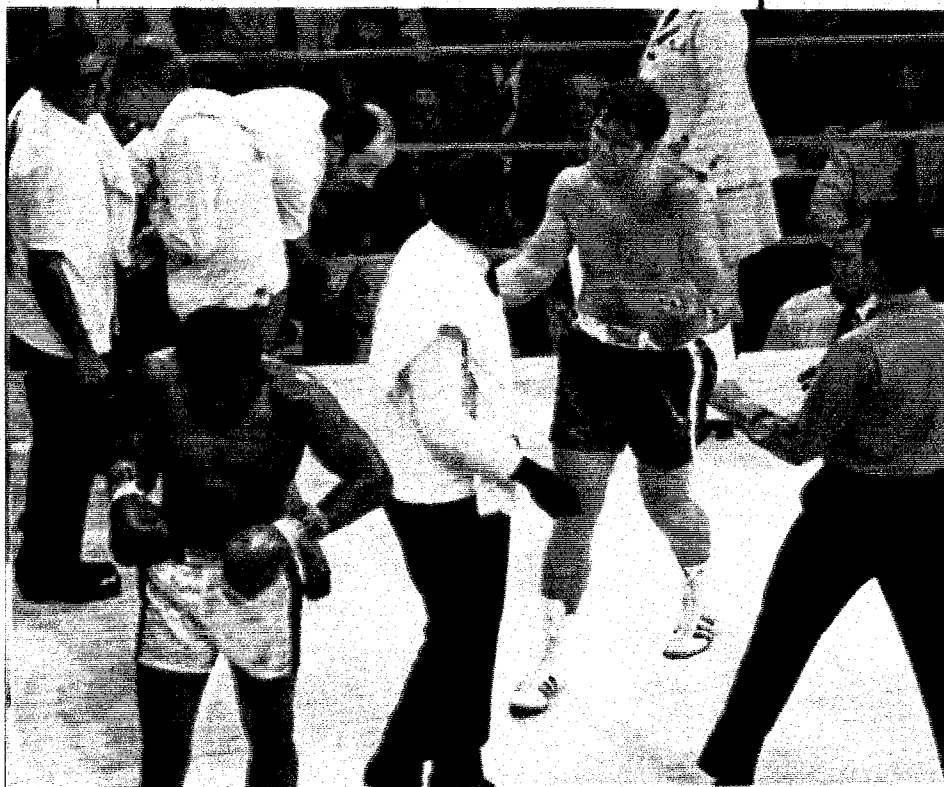
LEROY JOHNSON (state senator) When I spoke to Harry Pett, I said, "Let me find out what the law says and get back to you." I had my office search the law and found out that, in Georgia, there was no state law on the books governing the sport of boxing. Therefore, the question of whether or not a person got a license to fight addressed itself to each municipality: Whatever municipality the fight was supposed to be in, it would be that body that would decide the issue.

When I discovered that, I called Pett and said, "Look, I can get him a license to fight in Georgia," because I knew that the only legal body to make that decision was the mayor of Atlanta and the Board of Aldermen. Now, I was a friend of Sam Massell and had assisted him in getting elected. And members of the board were my friends because I had assisted them in getting elected.

HILL I think that if someone asked [Massell] who was the key to his election as mayor [in 1969], he'd probably say Senator Johnson and Jesse Hill. So we went to him and laid out the plan.

MASSELL I'm of the opinion that they came prepared to persuade me, being they were political supporters of mine, that this was a good thing for the city. Although I'm not a fight fan, I just feel a person has a right to earn a legal living. Also, I had been an appeal agent for the selective service during World War II, so I was familiar with the regulations and procedures regarding conscientious objectors. That in and of itself didn't offend me like it did some because it's a matter of law, whether you agree with the law or not. I said, "Okay, he can fight, but I want him to do something for the community." We had started what was called a drug reward program, with money paid for

HIGH DRAMA The fight ended abruptly (left) but the events in Atlanta, which attracted everyone from Coretta Scott King and Ralph David Abernathy (right) to Diana Ross, amounted to a coming-out party for Atlanta.



KNOCKOUT

information leading to convictions in major drug busts. They agreed to make a \$50,000 contribution to the program.

Johnson, Pett and Hill quickly form a company called House of Sports to put on the fight. Kassel's company maintains control of the closed-circuit television operation and revenues even as he tries to convince the world that Atlanta can pull it off.

KASSEL I flew down to Atlanta, and sure enough, they have a license. It was for a fight between Muhammad Ali/Cassius Clay—I think they used both names—and Joe Frazier. I said, "What are you going to do about [Lester] Maddox?" Johnson said, "I'll take care of that."

JOHNSON I made an appointment to see Lester at his office at the capitol. Now, about a week or two before I went to the governor, his son was involved in some kind of minor [incident]. At the trial, the judge said to him, "Every person deserves a second



chance." When I met with the governor, I said to him, "Everyone deserves a second chance. That's what I'm trying to get for Ali." After our conversation, he turned to me and said, "Senator, on with the fight." I said, "Thank you, governor."

HILL Governor Maddox had the power and the influence of his office—he could have stopped the fight—but he looked the other way.

YOUNG It speaks to a different image of Lester Maddox than most people have. He worked with us on a lot of things: the creation of the Georgia World Congress Center, the passage of the MARTA referendum. In spite of—or because of—the racist past, there was a good working relationship between the races at the highest levels.

KASSEL I called [Ali's promoter] Bob Arum. I said, "Bob, I think I have this put together in Atlanta." He said, "That's ridiculous. That's not gonna happen." Then we called [Ali's trainer] Angelo Dundee. They all said, "That can't be." Nobody believed the fight was going to happen because nobody had been able to pull it off. Finally, I convinced them that we had the license.

Johnson journeys to Philadelphia to negotiate with Frazier's camp. They demand that Johnson show the world that he can deliver Ali.

JOHNSON Jesse Hill and I strategized that if we put Ali in the ring at the city auditorium [in Atlanta], then the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizen's Council would come in and tear up the place. So I called [Morehouse College president] Hugh Gloster, a personal friend of mine, and asked if he would let us have an exhibition at Morehouse. We believed the black community would insulate us from the possibility of an eruption from the Ku Klux Klan and other whites.

On September 2, an estimated crowd of 3,000 people crams into Archer Hall Gymnasium to watch Ali spar eight rounds with three opponents.

"IT WAS THE GREATEST COLLECTION OF BLACK MONEY AND BLACK POWER EVER ASSEMBLED UNTIL THAT TIME... IT WAS GONE WITH THE WIND TURNED UPSIDE-DOWN."

—BOXING HISTORIAN BERT SUGAR

ALVIN DARDEN (dean of the freshman class, Morehouse College) I was a junior when Ali boxed here. You couldn't get into the gym; it was packed. At the time, among Morehouse students, there was enormous interest in Afro-American consciousness and pride. That's why we loved Ali. He was fighting for his liberation—to be recognized as a Muslim, to be recognized for his stance on the war—and this was a metaphor for what we were going through. So it wasn't just a boxer in our gym. It was part of a movement.

JOHNSON After we staged the exhibition without any complications, I went back to Philadelphia to talk to Frazier's people. Even though we had put Ali into the ring as they had requested, they said no. They weren't going to let Frazier fight. I came home very disgusted.

KASSEL I said to [Frazier's manager] Yank Durham, "How could you turn us down? This is the biggest payday you'll ever have." Turns out, Frazier was on the road with his singing group, Smokin' Joe and the Knockouts. He was out of shape. He wasn't ready for a fight.

PACHECO [Fighting] Frazier would have been a big, big mistake. That's not the guy you want the first fight coming back.

III. THE OPPONENT

The promoters and Ali's camp quickly settle on an alternate opponent: 25-year-old "Irish" Jerry Quarry, who had upset the No. 1 heavyweight contender, Mac Foster, earlier in the year. On September 10, Ali signs to fight the Los Angeles-based Quarry for a reported \$200,000, against 42.5 percent of the revenues. Quarry is to get \$150,000 guaranteed, or 22.5 percent of the revenue.

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KASSEL I think it was [PR guru] Hal Conrad who suggested, "Let's get a white hope." So that's why we went after Quarry. **GIL CLANCY (Jerry Quarry's former trainer)** Jerry was one of the best all-around fighters that I ever trained. He could do it all. He could punch with either hand, and he could take a punch better than anyone outside of Ali.

SUGAR Ali's comeback fight was not against a ham-and-egger or a tomato can or a resume builder—call it what you will. It was against one of the top 10 heavyweights, and Quarry had balls enough to take the fight.

CLANCY Jerry had all the ability in the world, but it never came out 100 percent. He always found something to psych himself down before a fight. When he fought Joe Frazier, we worked every day in the gym, having him move to his right. As soon as the first round started, he started moving to his left, which opened him up to Frazier's left hook—and Frazier had the best left hook in the business. When he came back after the first round, he said to me: "Gil, I have nothing tonight, I have nothing." I said, "You know your left from your right, don't you, you dumb son of a b?" That was Jerry. He always liked to do things the hard way.

DIANNA QUARRY (Jerry's sister) Before the fight [with Ali], Jerry tried hypnosis with Jimmy Grippo. He was a famous hypnotist who hypnotized many other athletes, including [heavyweight champ] Ken Norton. What Jimmy Grippo would do is tell them, "You've already won the fight." He'd have signs taped up around the room, "I knocked him out with a left" or "I set him up with a right."

With just six weeks to erase the effects of his 43-month layoff, Ali trains at his usual haunt—Dundee's Fifth Street Gym in Miami Beach. Quarry, who recently split from longtime handler Johnny Flores, trains at a ranch 100 miles southeast of L.A. Approximately two weeks before the fight, after both fighters arrive in Atlanta, they stage their final workouts at the Sports Arena. Quarry stays at the Matador Inn; Ali and his entourage bunk at Senator John-

son's home outside the city, with Johnson's sister doing the cooking. Meanwhile, artist LeRoy Neiman is hired to sketch the fighters for the event poster.

HILL Ali was a young man in every sense of the word. We had to chaperone him 24 hours. Then we had to put him on a curfew.

KASSEL Johnson's cabin was right down the street from Otis Redding's house. Ali and I would walk over and visit him. He had a big screening room, and we would go there and watch movies.

PACHECO We expected a lot of trouble. We had police protection, but every night someone shot at the cottage. We would go to the back of the house and let them shoot at the front of the house.

JACK QUARRY (Jerry's father and co-manager) We felt intimidated. We were scared of everything. We never got any direct threats, but there were threats spread around in Atlanta. We were fearful because [the Muslims] made like they were going to shoot Jerry down in the ring. That was the word that got back to us. Ali told me later that he didn't know anything about that.

KASSEL When I got to Atlanta, the Black Muslims had guys allocated to protect me. They didn't want anything to happen to me. I was getting threats from some of Atlanta's rural residents—my wife and kids stayed at my father-in-law's place outside of town.

Last-minute protests from segregationists and veterans' groups pressure Governor Maddox to attempt to halt the fight. Attorney General Arthur Bolton, however, rules that the state has no authority to intervene. Maddox can only mutter that he hopes "Clay gets beat in the first round—flattened for a count of 30." Simultaneously, Kassel faces legal battles.

JOHNSON I was very disturbed then; I really didn't want to get into a fight with the governor. But after the attorney general made the ruling, Maddox took his hands off and we didn't have any problems with him.

SUGAR Maddox said, "This is a day of mourning," or some such shit. When it was repeated to Ali, he said, "What's 'mourning' mean?" Someone said, "It's

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a sad day, a black day." Ali said, "It's a black day, indeed."

KASSEL Everybody was furious at me because I was this young kid, inexperienced with boxing promotions, who had gotten the license. It got really hairy. They started bringing lawsuits to stop the fight and get a piece of the action.

IV. THE SCENE

Ali-Quarry becomes part of what Mayor Massell calls Atlanta's "sports spectacular weekend," featuring a Georgia Tech-Tulane football game, an Atlanta Hawks-Boston Celtics NBA match-up and an Atlanta Falcons-New Orleans Saints game that Quarry attends. Over the weekend, journalists and the fight crowd congregate at the newly opened Hyatt Regency. Designed by architect/developer John Portman, the hotel is the first to incorporate his trademark atrium-lobby and glass-enclosed elevators.

SANDERS I had never seen that kind of convocation of African-Americans.

There were the civil rights leaders—I remember running into Whitney Young in the lobby—and the prominent businessmen, and there were the famous African-American athletes. But there were also the hustlers and gangsters, with names like "Sacramento Joe" and "Detroit Slim." And these guys were coming through in their mink and ermine coats and their bejeweled fingers and necklaces, the chicks on their arms. The pimps and the drug dealers were dressed better than their chicks.

PEE WEE KIRKLAND (street-yard basketball legend) We went down to Atlanta in a fleet of cars—something like 25 cars, tailgating one another. I bought 500 tickets for the fight, all ringside, because I thought it would be real good if a lot of people from Harlem that I grew up with was able to see Ali in ringside seats.

PACHECO It was a freak show. Everyone was smoking grade-A pot. It's funny because they were celebrating a man—Ali—who never touched the stuff.

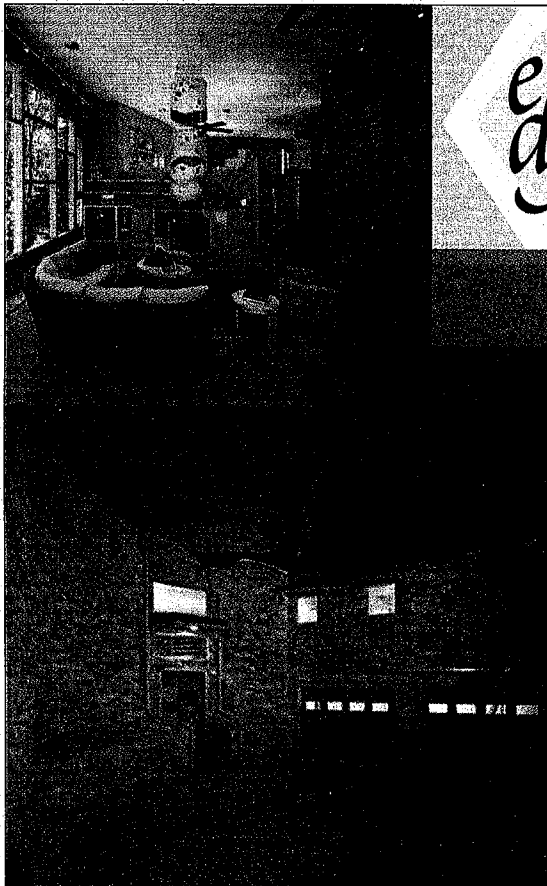
BUDD SCHULBERG (novelist, boxing journalist, screenwriter) The bartender [at the

Hyatt] was a real white cracker. I thought he was going to have a heart attack when these hustlers came in and put wads of money on the bar, hundreds and hundreds of dollars.

SUGAR It was un-f-ing-believable. They had these see-through glass elevators that rose up from the lobby. I remember watching as Ali was ascending, and they were cheering him. It was like some scene from a sci-fi movie: The god was rising and the people were cheering. It was 1984-ish in 1970.

JOHNSON People would walk into the atrium, and they'd look up and see that elevator, and the response was "God damn!" For that weekend, that atrium got the name of "God damn." They would come in and say, "Did you see the God damn . . . ?"

SANDERS On Saturday, and then again a couple times on Sunday, Ali himself came through the Hyatt. And all of the women, all of the businessmen, all of the hustlers—everybody would go to him like he was a magnet. It would take him the better part of an hour to work his way



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across the lobby. Ali was the only person who could have drawn together such a wide cross-section of so many prominent people in the community. A Martin Luther King—dead by two years—could have drawn a great crowd, but no hustlers would have shown, and not too many of your All-American athletes would have shown.

KASSEL The day before the fight, it's customary to throw a party for the press. We wanted to use the Playboy Club in Atlanta, but it was Sunday so it was closed. Someone suggested we get in touch with Hugh Hefner, so I got him on the phone. He said, "I'll make you a deal. You run a closed-circuit line into the Playboy Mansion [in Chicago], and I'll give you the club." I said to Mike [Malitz, who ran the technical side of the closed-circuit operation], "Can we do that?" He said, "Yup." So they opened the club and brought in all the bunnies. It was the wildest scene you ever saw.

SUGAR The weekend was homecoming, New Year's Eve and Mardi Gras put together.

BOND Had Atlanta ever seen something like this? Never, never, never.

V. FIGHT NIGHT

The fight sells out the 5,000-seat Civic Auditorium, with ringside tickets going for \$100. Some 205 theaters in the United States and Canada, including a facility at Atlanta's Sports Arena, broadcast the fight via closed circuit; millions more tune in around the world. The total gate: an estimated \$3 million.

Curtis Mayfield sings the national anthem while renowned ring announcer Johnny Addie handles the pre-fight introductions. Football-great-turned-broadcaster Tom Harmon does the play-by-play, with comedian Bill Cosby doing color commentary, as spectators watch three preliminary fights (including one featuring Rahaman, Ali's brother).

At about 10:30 p.m., Quarry, a 6-footer weighing in at 196 pounds, enters the ring wearing a kelly green robe. When 6-foot-3 Ali, fighting at 215 pounds, comes into view, the predominantly pro-Ali crowd goes crazy.

SCHULBERG In the dressing room, getting ready, Bundini [Brown, Ali's aide] had brought the wrong protective cup. Ali was like a model, admiring himself in the mirror, and he didn't like the way he looked. It kind of stuck out, and he wanted the trunks to completely hide it. So he made Bundini go all the way back to the lake house and get the right one. I got the feeling that Ali was more concerned with how he looked in the mirror than with the fight.

PACHECO We didn't have a clearly defined aisle to the ring. We were going through a crowd where anyone could touch you or pull out a snub-nosed revolver and shoot you. That walk into the ring was one of the worst experiences of my life. We were just hoping no one could get through to us. It wasn't pleasant times.

JACK QUARRY I sat near an aisle because if this became involved with a shooting or something, I wanted to be near to where I could get up and leave.

KASSEL The night of the fight, I got served with an injunction by a federal

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district court judge to stop the fight. I stuck it in my pocket and walked away like nothing happened.

As referee Tony Perez gives Ali and Quarry last-minute instructions at the center of the ring, the fighters exchange unpleasantries. Then the bell sounds, and the fight, scheduled for 15 rounds, is on.

SCHULBERG You couldn't really put it up at the top as a pure boxing contest. Even with the long layoff, Ali, with his range and his jab and his movement, was too much for Jerry.

PACHECO Ali hadn't fought in, like, three and a half years, but you couldn't tell. He hadn't lost any speed. The only question was: How long would it last?

BOND I'm in the third row. There's a woman sitting in front of me in the second row. When the fight begins, I start hitting her on the back—I'm so engaged in what's going on. And the wonderful thing was, she didn't notice. She never turned around and said, "Stop that."

In the third round, after the fighters clash in the corner, Ali opens up a huge gash over Quarry's left eye. When Quarry returns to the corner, blood streaming down his face, trainer Teddy Bentham stops the fight.

YOUNG My wife and I were sitting in the fourth row. It was so brutal that blood splattered on my wife's dress.

DIANNA QUARRY Jerry was in the best shape of his career. That's why he cried in the ring and didn't want the fight stopped, even though the cut was horrendous. It had to be stopped. But that cut, I would like to state for the record, was created by Teddy Bentham. He said that between the second and third rounds, he slit Jerry above the eye with a shaved half dollar.

EDDIE FOY III (actor, Bentham's friend) Teddy told me that Jerry hit Ali in the liver in the first or second round and thought he had a decent chance to do some damage. He came back to the corner and told Teddy to cut the eye. He wanted to see—anytime you have swelling over the eye, it obstructs your vision. It was a very humane thing to do: Teddy wanted Jerry [to see] so he would-

n't get hurt. But Ali hit Jerry on the button during the third round. Teddy stopped the fight because he didn't want Jerry to lose his eye.

DIANNA QUARRY Who knows what would have happened if the fight had continued and Jerry had been able to come back and win. A white, good-looking heavyweight champion who had just defeated Muhammad Ali—that would have opened up the door to everything.

KASSEL After the fight, I'm in the middle of the ring—it's all kind of mayhem—and I'm standing next to Angelo Dundee, who's cutting the gloves off of Ali. Inside the left-hand cuff, in the soft cotton part, it was written in a ballpoint pen, "TKO, 3rd Round." So help me God. That glove was taped on, so nobody could have slipped in there and written that.

VI. THE AFTER-PARTY

As Ali celebrates at the Hyatt, more than 100 people attend an invitation-only party on Handy Drive in the northwest part of the city. There, police later report, they are greeted by several men wearing ski masks and holding sawed-off shotguns. Partygoers are robbed of their money and jewelry, marched to the basement and made to disrobe and lay on the floor. When the floor is covered with bodies, newcomers are forced to lie on top of the others.

BOND At the fight, they were handing out invitations to the party at the mansion. You could just pick one up in the crowd. For some reason, I said, "No, I don't think I'll go." Thank heavens. I loitered in the Hyatt because there were so many stars there. Diana Ross—I had never been close to Diana Ross.

KIRKLAND Because of my stature as a legend in two games—I was the guy that everybody saw as the best point guard in the country and also was [involved in] the life of crime—it was said that Pee Wee Kirkland was at the party and was robbed of thousands of dollars of jewelry. I wasn't at the party. Before and after the fight I was at the hotel.

SUGAR I saw them handing out the invites at the arena, but they were purposely passing over the white people. The

people were in a party mood; Ali had won. How did they know that they were going to be stacked up like cordwood?

KILROY After the fight, we went back to the Hyatt, and Ali hung out with the people. Later that night, I got a call from his dad. I had to bring him some clothes because [the robbers] went in and took all their clothes. People were standing there naked with sheets around them.

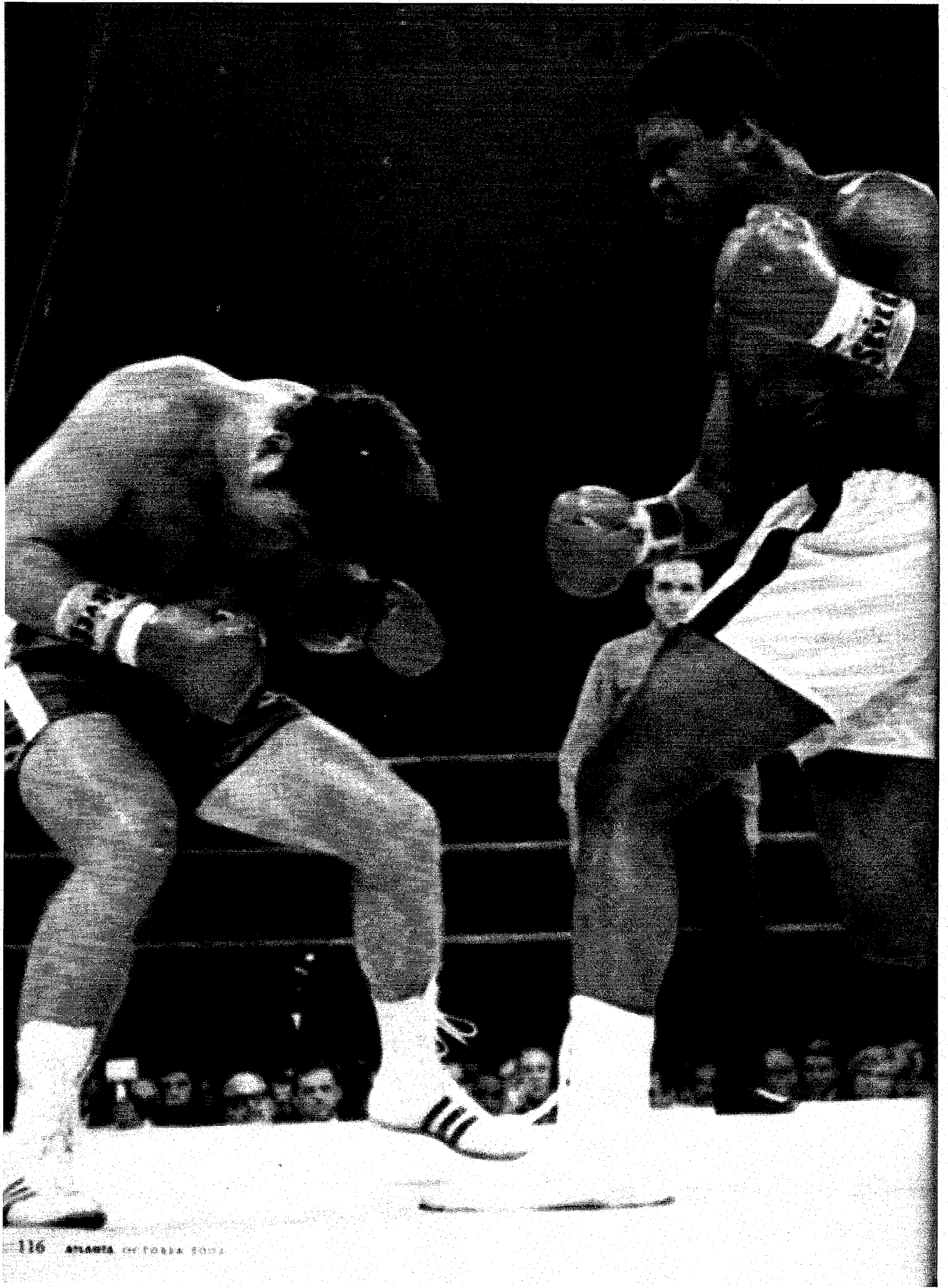
JOHNSON Jesse Hill and I had a note that was supposed to be paid to us after the fight. Of course, they renege on it and we never got that money. I jokingly said afterwards that if I had got a percentage of that robbery, rather than a percentage of the fight, I would have been much better off.

Police estimate that the robbers netted about \$1 million. Initially, the homeowner, a local hustler named Gordon "Chicken Man" Williams, is considered the prime suspect. Williams publicly denies the allegation, but he is reportedly killed as payback for the robbery. Four years later, Sidney Poitier and Bill Cosby make a movie called Uptown Saturday Night; the caper in the film appears to be based on the heist.

JEFF KEATING (screenwriter/director, currently working on a documentary about the robbery) [The criminals] were hustlers from the Northeast and from here. Good luck figuring everything out—there's still so much mystery surrounding the heist that we'll probably never know the real story.

YOUNG What happened was, Chicken Man had a party at his home where all of the other "numbers people" around the country were invited. But somebody who knew about it—or somebody who wasn't invited—decided that everybody going there would have big bankrolls of cash and jewelry.

KEATING Call it yellow journalism or call it false journalism, but since 1970, the media has reported that Williams is dead. As recently as a few years ago, when the Mike Tyson fight was going to come here, a sportswriter wrote something like, "Be careful if you throw an after-hours party because you might wind up dead like that hustler Chicken Man." In doing research for the film, I





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found out that Williams is very much alive and living in the area. He is a minister at a local church.

YOUNG Hollywood took the story, but the movie didn't do justice to what actually happened. They didn't really get to the flamboyance of the times. Or maybe, by the time the movie came out, we were used to those things.

POITIER If there were similarities [between the real-life heist and the film], it was serendipitous.

VII. THE AFTERMATH

Having bucked enormous odds in staging the Ali-Quarry fight, Johnson and Hill believe Atlanta is well positioned to host the blockbuster Ali-Frazier championship. Instead, in early 1971, Ali squares off against Frazier in Madison Square Garden in what is known as "The Fight." Ali loses by decision.

HILL We wanted the Frazier fight. That was the big one. We thought we were dealing with people who recognized our abilities, management and contacts, and wanted us to be a closer part of Muhammad Ali's career, business-wise. But once Ali got the license, the wheeler-dealers in New York and around the country—the major people in the fight industry—used the entree of Atlanta to make the Frazier fight. After all that we did, it was all about the almighty American dollar.

KASSEL One more year, 18 months, of retirement, and I'm not sure Ali would have been able to come back. He was on the cusp of finishing. He was demoralized, very jaded and upset. Had Atlanta not opened the door, I don't think Ali's career would have continued.

JOHNSON What we went through to get Ali back in the ring has never been fully appreciated. Something like 40 or 50 cities turned him down, and only Atlanta permitted him to box again. Years later, they did a major motion picture about Ali's life. They had one line about how he got back in the ring in Atlanta. That's the most disappointing part for me.

KASSEL When I signed Ali, it was for one fight. I got bad advice from the guys I was working with and didn't tie Ali up. I should have tied him up for 10 years because we were the only game in town.

DIANNA QUARRY Nobody realized it at the time, but it was one of the most political fights of the golden era of boxing. After that fight is when the big money came into boxing.

In 1972, Ali and Quarry clash again in Las Vegas, with Ali winning by TKO in the seventh round. Their careers diverge: Ali regains the heavyweight crown by defeating George Foreman in 1974 and becomes an international icon. Quarry never gets to fight for the title and dies in 1999, having suffered brain damage from taking too many punches. Ali, now 63, has Parkinson's syndrome as a result of his ring career. Their long-overlooked legacy to Atlanta, however, lives on.

JOHNSON The fight was a feather in Atlanta's cap—and a feather in the South's cap—for having this person, who was a Muslim and who had been kicked out of the ring by the liberal state of New York, to come back in a state with, at the time, a questionable admiration for blacks.

YOUNG The fight meant recognition of Atlanta as the capital of the civil rights movement in that we were having an impact, not only on the South, but on the nation. There was a tidal shift coming to politics: Jimmy Carter's election [as governor] and my running for Congress [in 1970] kind of launched the new South.

HILL The fight showed the emergence of African-American political power and influence in Atlanta. It indicated this was a city that had progressive associations among its black and white leadership.

MASSELL [Outsiders to Atlanta] didn't know what was going on here. The fight did get national publicity, and I think that opened their eyes and made them think, "That's a different place. Atlanta must be unique." It gave us an image, but we already had the facts.

KASSEL It's amazing because the whole thing happened on a fluke. The professional boxing career of the greatest fighter of all time—one of the most controversial figures in history—hung on the thread of an inexperienced 30-year-old promoter calling up his father-in-law on a whim. Sometimes, not knowing works in your favor. ☼