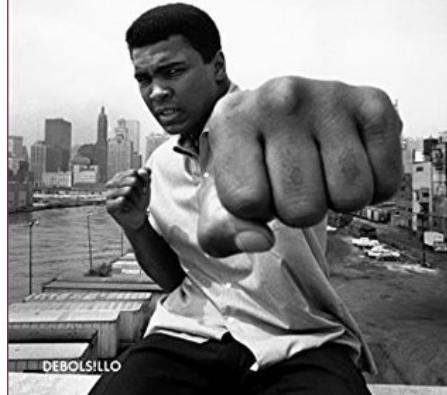


Ensayo

**DAVID  
REMNICK**  
**Rey del mundo**

Muhammad Ali y el nacimiento  
de un héroe americano



## **Rey del mundo: Muhammad Ali y el nacimiento de un héroe americano**

*David Remnick*

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# Rey del mundo: Muhammad Ali y el nacimiento de un héroe americano

David Remnick

## Rey del mundo: Muhammad Ali y el nacimiento de un héroe americano David Remnick

There had been mythic sports figures before Cassius Clay, but when he burst upon the sports scene in the 1950s, he broke the mold. Those were the years when boxing and boxers were at the mercy of the mob and the whim of the sportswriters. If you wanted a shot at a title, you did it their way. Young Clay did it his way - with little more than an Olympic gold medal to his credit, he danced into Sonny Liston's baleful view and provoked the terrifying champ into accepting him as his next challenger. The rest is history. Muhammad Ali has become a mythic hero, an American icon, a self-invented legend. As both a mirror and a molder of his times, Ali became the most recognizable face on the planet, a key figure in the cultural battles of the times. This is the story of his self-creation, and his rise to glory, told by a master storyteller.

## Rey del mundo: Muhammad Ali y el nacimiento de un héroe americano Details

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## **From Reader Review Rey del mundo: Muhammad Ali y el nacimiento de un héroe americano for online ebook**

### **Marc says**

While Muhammad Ali is the main focus, this lively book is in effect a triple biography of the three dominant heavyweight boxers of the first half of the 1960s: Ali, Floyd Patterson, and Sonny Liston, each of whom fought the other two once or twice between 1961 and 1965.

The first quarter of the book focuses on Patterson and Liston, their backgrounds, key events in their lives, and detailed accounts of their two matches, in 1962 and 1963. Then Ali arrives on the scene, and the narrative really picks up; Ali is a fascinating character, and a gold mine of material for a good writer.

The book provides colorful biographical sketches of all three boxers, and it covers their boxing matches, and the events leading up to the matches, very capably. It also provides vividly evocative details of the turbulent socio-cultural context of the times: the civil rights movement, Ali's conversion to Islam, and his friendship with and later estrangement from Malcolm X.

The main narrative ends, somewhat abruptly, in late 1965, and the book wraps up with accounts of the 1970 death of Liston and with present-day glimpses of Patterson and Ali, both of whom were still alive, but severely mentally diminished, when the book was written (Patterson died in 2006).

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### **Eric\_W says**

David Remnick is perhaps best known for his award-winning work on Russia since the collapse of Communism (Lenin's Tomb and Resurrection: The Struggle for a New Russia). His most recent book deals with Cassius Clay and his transformation into Mohammed Ali. "Boxing in America was born of slavery." Southern plantation owners would often pit their strongest slaves against each other, sometimes to near death. Frederick Douglass objected to the sport because he believed it "muffled the spirit of insurrection. Mohammad Ali had mixed feelings about the sport that made him a public figure, too. Two black men beating up on each other was too intense a reminder of other times. Few who lived through the turbulent sixties have lukewarm feelings about Ali. He became a symbol of rebellion against the oppression of a white society that was reluctant to change. He invented not just a new style of boxing, but spoke loudly to his black brothers when he embraced Elijah Muhammad's black separatist nation. His message to the white community was powerful: "I don't have to be what you want me to be" — a message many in the white community still haven't grasped yet.

The Vietnam War provided the justification for both sides of the issue to love or hate Ali after he refused the draft on religious grounds, thereby sacrificing millions of dollars in defense of the championship he had won. His decision was made when virtually no other celebrity was taking a similar stance, yet he was willing to stand up and represent his black brothers who were giving their lives in Vietnam in disproportionate numbers.

The boxing world contamination of the fifties and sixties was spread beyond the boxers and their managers.

The mob had always enjoyed a monopoly on boxing because they, like the boxers themselves, were outsiders. Only a fool or a desperate man would make his living getting hit in the head. Boxers were easy targets. It was not uncommon for sportswriters to receive envelopes filled with cash in order to receive more favorable treatment. Boxing was not unique. Baseball columnists were wined and dined and supplied with all sorts of perquisites to influence their stories. The writers themselves were not investigated during the Kefauver investigations into the boxing world of crime because the senator knew how important it was to keep journalists on his side. As it was the newspaper world took a dim view of the investigations, perhaps because they threatened to derail their gravy train.

In 1960, as Cassius Clay, he became famous as the U.S. Olympic boxing champ. He was so proud he wore the medal to bed. He returned to Louisville a hero and to a parade. When he tried to get a sandwich at a local Woolworth's, however, he was refused service. (Even in 1978 at the height of his fame, renaming a street after him only just barely passed the city council by one vote.) A group of prominent white businessmen put together a promotional package. Most of them knew nothing about boxing, but thought it would be fun. The poetic doggerel that became synonymous with Ali was part of the "great American tradition of narcissistic self-promotion, a descendant of Davy Crockett and Buffalo Bill by way of the dozens." Ali was fully aware of what he was doing. A meeting with Gorgeous George, a forty-six-year-old wrestler who engaged in vitriol against his opponents, had impressed him. Ali was astute enough to see how it filled the arenas with people. "I saw fifteen thousand people coming to see this man get beat. And his talking did it. I said, this is a good idea!" He said later, "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."

Perhaps Ali's greatest achievement was his disavowal of the white world's expectations. Remnick contrasts Patterson and Liston with Ali. Floyd Patterson was the great conciliator, the white black man, if you will. Sonny Liston was the stereotypic bad black man. Importantly, both showed deference to white society and were expected to remain aloof from the racial upheaval going on around them. The principled stand on Vietnam had profound implications. During his exile he lost his speed. He learned that he could take punches, though, and he absorbed many in the fights that followed. He won a lot but took incredible punishment. Soon his kidneys were affected and his brain was damaged, leading eventually to Parkinson's Disease. Today he is but a mere shadow of his former ebullient self. It says a great deal for America's need to mythologize and to eulogize its athletic heroes that Ali is now mostly regarded with "misty affection." Perhaps that's sad, for it trivializes the accomplishments of an authentic American hero.

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## **David Hollingsworth says**

This book isn't a normal biography. It gives you the story of Muhammad Ali, but also gives you the story of the two previous heavyweight champions before him and puts them into the historical, cultural, and sociological context of their time and place in boxing history. It reads like a case study almost as much as it does a narrative.

The writing itself is very well done. Remnick has a talent for balancing personal drama, social dynamics, and historical narratives to create a book that is as engaging as it is informative.

The book spends a fair amount of time talking about boxing before Ali became big, focusing on Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston, the two heavyweight champions before Ali. The book explores their personal backstories, their personalities, what they meant for boxing, and how they each represented an archetype-

Patterson was the "good" black boxer and Liston the "bad" black boxer.

As someone who loves boxing, history, and sociology, this book is easily one of my favorite books on my shelf. To anyone who shares these interests, you won't be disappointed with "King of the World"

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### **Sofía says**

"Rey del mundo" o "Razones para amar a Alí". Interesantísimo y recomendable.

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### **Mitchell says**

Wow, this has to be one of my favorite all-time sports biographies. The prose is pure butter: elegant, but also smooth and riveting. One does not need to be knowledgeable about the sport of boxing, nor a particular fan of boxing, to find this book entertaining and enlightening.

This book covers Ali's childhood through his Patterson/Liston fights. The book starts out by describing Patterson's and Liston's tough childhoods, and their rise to fame in the chaotic boxing world. Both of these opponents go on to play significant roles in Ali's life, and both left indelible marks on Ali's career.

Ali's was a product of his time. His membership in the Nation of Islam, his friendship, and then estrangement to Malcolm X, his refusal to be drafted in Vietnam, his scathing lip, all clearly defined Ali during his early days.

I admire Ali. His refusal to be drafted was an inspiration to many African Americans. During this time, there was talk of getting Ali a cushy non-combat job, but he still refused. He paid a dear price for his recalcitrance - a forfeiture of his title, and millions of dollars in revenue from prospective fights/endorsements. In addition, his refusal came before the war lost support at home, and Ali's reputation suffered as a well. He was a man of convictions and I find the honorable and courageous.

This book isn't a hagiography. Ali was far from perfect; he was completely human. While Martin Luther King Jr was fighting for integration and equality, Ali joined the militant, separatist sect of the Nation Of Islam. For some, their behavior was a set back to progress made by King and others. Ali also disowned Malcolm X after Malcolm X fell out of favor with the Nation of Islam. Later in life, Ali himself admitted he regretted that situation. Ali also had a very turbulent relationship with his first wife, which ended in divorce over her refusal to dress as a proper Muslim woman, even though she didn't adhere to that code to begin with. Also, Ali's treatment of Patterson during their follow up fight after the two Liston fights, in my view, was a low blow.

To his credit, Ali's views evolved as he aged. And he left a strong legacy in the sport, political, and religious realms. He also ultimately helped move forward Civil Rights for African Americans by his political stands, his unwavering confidence in himself, and his example of a successful, strong, independent minority. His persona in interviews, his poetry, his confidence, are all very charming intricacies of his personality. I never found those intricacies arrogant. I think most of it was an act to mess with his opponent. It also was a brilliant marketing move. Ultimately, it's classic Ali.

I also found this book sad. Both Patterson and Liston had tough childhoods. Both had limited access to education. Ultimately, Liston's life came to a tragic, possibly drug overdosed, end. For boxers, this was a common refrain. Boxing was the one thing that could propel them out of poverty and desolation. After boxing, many ended up with severe brain damage; dementia and confusion are common symptoms of too many blows to head. For ones who made a ton of money, there is at least a small consolation of security. But for the majority of boxers, poverty and waywardness awaited them post boxing.

I recommend this book. It's more than a small slice of Muhammad Ali's life. Its more than exciting title fights. It's a look into the turbulent 60's and of men finding their way.

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### **Mike says**

*Liston is still rising  
And the ref wears a frown,  
For he can't start counting,  
Till Sonny comes down.  
Now Liston disappears from view.  
The crowd is getting frantic,  
But our radar stations have picked him up  
He's somewhere over the Atlantic.  
Who would have thought  
When they came to the fight  
That they'd witness the launching  
Of a human satellite?*

- excerpt from poem by Cassius Clay

Like Norman Mailer's *The Fight*, this book reminds me of the somewhat confusing fact that I like to read about boxing more than I actually like to watch it. David Remnick, whom I'm familiar with from his two excellent books about Russia (*Lenin's Tomb* and *Resurrection*- I'm hopeful that someday he'll complete a trilogy, but I guess editing the New Yorker keeps him pretty busy), is an impeccable writer, although he and Mailer are very different. Mailer's neurotic energy and affinity for combat drive the tension in *The Fight*, while Remnick is what I'd like to call "the editor-writer." He betrays no neuroses, no enchantment with violence, and writes the kinds of sentences you might find in a manual somewhere: "On the night of the fight, the second anniversary of the assassination of John Kennedy, it rained in the desert, torrential rains that cut down on the walk-up trade at the Convention Center." The book is notable for its memorable descriptions of even bit players ("...he was the sort of basketball star who practiced *missing* foul shots, should the need ever arise to shave a point..."), for its erudition about early boxing history, the Mafia and the Nation of Islam, but above all for its depictions of Muhammad Ali, Sonny Liston and Floyd Patterson; each trapped in his own way, each seen briefly on top of the world and then eroded by violence and time, drawn to the endless night.

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### **Darwin8u says**

*"It's just a job. Grass grows, birds fly, waves pound the sand. I beat people up."*

-- Muhammad Ali

### **Pre-Review Smack Talk:**

I will review this sucker tomorrow. David Remnick better quake. I'm coming for this book. I read it from cover to cover. I know the words better than Remnick could hope to ever know it. Of course he wrote it, because the words ran from him. I know Remick's words better than his mamma knows him.

Tomorrow. Yes. I'll give this book till tomorrow. And then I'm coming. I'm coming with a pen. I'm coming with poetry. I'm coming with the majesty of Muhammad Ali. The G.O.A.T.. The Greatest. The man who fought a nation. The man who fought for a people. A pretty man. So pretty. He was a butterfly that Nabokov couldn't catch or pin. Tomorrow I will take on this book and take my piece in three rounds. But the Man and the book will have to wait for tomorrow. Tonight I've got a bed to contend with. And I'm the greatest sleeper of all time.

### **Weight in:**

I read the hardback version of Remnick's book, which was 306 pages (326 with acknowledgement, sources, and index). My edition was a 4th printing, 1st Edition from 1998. I also had the Audible/audio version which I debated about listening to because it was abridged and I really hate abridged books (in any format). No. Hate is far too simple a word. I despise abridgments. I abhor them. I abase and disdain them. It is a lazy and cheap way to do an audio-recording and all you end up with is an ugly, deformed homunculus of the original. Go all the way or go home David.

I mean for GOD's sake Remnick. Why would you let people abridge the audio version? Your audio choice was just stupid. It was a 6-hour abridgment which usually translates into cutting 1/3 to 1/2 of this book. So, I ended up listening while I did work around the house and at points where it jumped, I'd run over to the book and read the gaps. Seriously. I had to read the gaps because you couldn't pay for Dick Hill to read the whole thing or Brilliance Audio thought it was only going to sell if you cut it from 12 hours to 6? Stupid. Reckless. Chump. IT wasn't like this was some William T. Vollmann 3000+ word book on Violence. This was a 300 page book on Muhammad Ali. The Greatest. Do you not respect yourself or do you not resect Ali? Or did you just let the producers talk you down?

And yes Remnick, I know you are the editor of the New Yorker, but really man. Besides a nice bio of Obama and your Russia books, what have you done for me lately? Get out there and write something more. Or hell, don't write. Just stop cutting. Stop leaving the bloody body of your own work on the audio floor.

### **Round 1: Poem by Ali**

*Clay comes out to meet Liston  
And Liston starts to retreat  
If Liston goes back an inch farther*

*He'll end up in a ringside seat.  
Clay swings with his left,  
Clay swings with his right,  
Look at young Cassius  
Carry the fight.  
Liston keeps backing  
But there's not enough room  
It's a matter of time  
Till Clay lowers the boom.  
Now Clay lands with a right,  
What a beautiful swing,  
And the punch raises the Bear  
Clean out of the ring.  
Liston is still rising  
And the ref wears a frown,  
For he can't start counting,  
Till Sonny goes down.  
Now Liston is disappearing from view.  
The crowd is going frantic,  
But radar stations have picked him up  
Somewhere over the Atlantic.  
Who would have thought  
When they came to the fight?  
That they'd witness the launching  
Of a human satellite.  
Yes the crowd did not dream  
When they put up the money  
That they would see  
A total eclipse of the Sonny!  
I am the greatest!*

### **Round 2: The Greatest!**

The book does a nice job of painting a broad picture of Muhammad Ali (and young Cassius Clay) while focusing primarily on the Liston - Clay fight that made him famous. It touches on a lot of the major points of Clay's life: Growing up in Kentucky, Finding Boxing, High School, the Olympics, The Louisville Syndicate, First Fights, the Liston Fight #1 (FL), the Liston Fight #2 (ME), the Nation of Islam, the Women of Ali (or the Pelvic Missionary) Malcolm X, the Vietnam War, Floyd Patterson, Later Years, Parkinson's Disease.

Some of these were new things, but many were just told well and told with details that were both surprising and intimate. I loved the whole early relationship between Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali. It is hard to walk away from this type of book without loving the subject a bit more, no matter where you started from.

### **Round 3: The Knock-out**

The end of the book was sad and beautiful. Remnick talking with an Ali that is saddled with age and disease. The Man, however, is also at peace. Remnick does a good job of exploring not just the limits of boxing, but the largeness of man:

*There is a beauty in it--there is terrible beauty in battle, too, particularly for the noncombatant--but if you meet enough former boxers, if you try to decipher their punch-drunk talk, you begin to wonder. What beauty is worth this?*

*Ali is an American myth who has come to mean many things to many people: a symbol of faith, a symbol of conviction and defiance, a symbol of beauty and skill and courage, a symbol of racial pride, of wit and love. Ali's physical condition is shocking not least because it is an accelerated form of what we all fear, the progression of aging, the unpredictability and danger of life. In Ali we see the frailty even of a man whose job it was to be the most fearsome figure on the globe.*

### **Coda: RIP!**

Asked how he would like to be remembered Muhammad Ali once remarked:

*"I'll tell you how I'd like to be remembered: as a black man who won the heavyweight title and who was humorous and who treated everyone right. As a man who never looked down on those who looked up at him and who helped as many of his people as he could--financial and also in their fight for freedom, justice, and equality. As a man who wouldn't embarrass them. As a man who tried to unite his people through the faith of Islam that he found when he listened to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. And if all that's asking too much, then I'd guess I'd settle for being remembered only as a great boxing champion who became a preacher and a champion of his people. And I wouldn't even mind if folks forgot how pretty I was."*

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### **Steve Kettmann says**

My S.F. Chronicle review from 1998:

David Remnick deserves a nod of thanks for, among other things, helping us associate the words ``King of the World'' with something other than a pop movie director so awash in Oscar-night self-congratulation that he seemed intent on drawing sniper fire.

Remnick, who is editor of the New Yorker, is a writer to watch, and he and the greatest sports figure of the century are an excellent match. Some will complain that this compact study of Cassius Clay's evolution into Muhammad Ali lacks the scope and originality to justify yet another book on so famous a man, but such complaints won't give Remnick enough credit.

Though not yet 40, he has established himself as one of the most prominent literary nonfiction writers of his time. He never forgets the value of a great quote, and he has John McPhee's gift for pared-down prose and for letting a story tell itself. But Remnick never fades from the narrative entirely; he's always a presence, and has a knack for picking just the right moment to let you know where he stands.

His strengths as a writer are a knack for psychological insight and the patience and confidence to wait for the chance to assert himself. As it happens, those are two of the qualities that made the young fighter Clay so

great, even when the cabal of sportswriters rendered so unforgettably here insisted he was nothing but a clown and a nuisance. Clay's verbal dancing kept him out of his critics' range, much as his dancing in the ring bewildered his opponents. And as Remnick understands so well, Clay's brilliant reimagining of the role of public sports hero has shaped our century.

Remnick won the Pulitzer Prize in 1994 for "Lenin's Tomb," which was loaded with insight and good, tasty bits that made the insight go down as easily as potato chips. This knack of his comes through best in "King of the World" with his masterful portrait of the two archetypal heavyweight champions who preceded Clay, neurotic Floyd Patterson and menacing Sonny Liston. Remnick almost goes too far in showing you how lame Patterson could be, actually taking fake whiskers to title fights so he could escape incognito if he lost.

"That was always the way it was with Floyd," Remnick writes. "Fear, especially the fear of losing, ate at him. He was entitled to call himself the toughest man on the planet, yet he didn't much believe it. He was champion in the sense that Chester A. Arthur had been president."

Much later, Patterson makes the mistake of enraging Ali by bad-mouthing the Nation of Islam. Ali retaliates by torturing Patterson in a ludicrously one-sided Vegas title fight, which Ali drags out painfully. Afterward Patterson seeks out Frank Sinatra, who earlier that day had been urging him on, obviously eager to have Ali silenced: "Patterson visited Frank Sinatra in his suite and apologized for his performance," Remnick writes. "No heavyweight champion had ever done more apologizing in his life. The singer was having none of it."

The portrait of Liston is even more affecting. Remnick offers a novelist's approach to characterization, rich in atmosphere and balanced around a telling detail or two. But his real genius arises from one very simple insight: The famous people whose struggles make history are a lot more like everyone else than might at first seem obvious. This was true of Gorbachev in "Lenin's Tomb" and it's true of Liston, too, no matter how deadly a left jab he had, no matter how intimidating his stare could be.

It's almost painful to read Remnick's description of Liston's plane ride home to Philadelphia just after he has defeated Patterson and become heavyweight champ. Liston had been telling a friendly sportswriter, Jack McKinney, all about his high-minded plans for his time as champ, but McKinney was "at the point of tears," knowing Liston was going to be snubbed because of his image as an intimidating African American man.

"The plane landed," Remnick writes. "The door opened. Liston came out first and looked down at the tarmac. McKinney saw Liston's Adam's apple move, and his shoulders shudder. There was no crowd on the tarmac, no welcome at all, only a desultory ground crew doing its job."

This is an eloquent, narrowly focused book, eager to capture a subtle and essential story for future generations. Ali lives in these pages, and not just when Remnick fights through the veil lowered by Parkinson's disease to converse with the man himself at Ali's farmhouse in Michigan.

"Ali was a beautiful warrior and he was reflecting a new posture for a black man," Remnick quotes Toni Morrison at one point. "I don't like boxing, but he was a thing apart. His grace was almost appalling."

Remnick is an honest guide through the topography of Ali's world. The idea of putting what you believe on the line instead of just talking about it seems so remote now that it's almost hard to believe that Ali spent time in jail for his principles, which forbade him to fight in Vietnam.

"Man," Ali said famously at the time, "I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong."

In a culture addicted to the titillation of scandal and the packaged revelation of trailer-trash self-caricatures, no virtue has atrophied more than moral imagination. Remnick's book exercises the moral imagination with the fervor of Sonny Liston skipping rope to James Brown's ``Night Train.''

This is, in short, a member of that dying species, the must-read book. The countdown to January 2000 will bring many tributes to Ali, an American myth who has come to mean different things to different people. Mostly, though, Ali's story is that of an American original with the courage and the knack to throw himself into the currents of his day.

There are times when Ali's anger seems off-putting, especially when he drops his great friend and mentor Malcolm X cold, prodded and manipulated by Malcolm's rivals in the Nation of Islam. But there can be no downplaying the genesis of that anger for a young man growing up black in the South. To those whose first glimpse of Ali came at the Atlanta Games, where he was treated almost as a lovable national mascot, it might be hard to remember the insane realities he faced. Remnick does his part to make sure that forgetting is not an option.

This article appeared on page RV - 3 of the San Francisco Chronicle

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Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article...>

### **Sean Wilson says**

This is my first David Remnick book and it certainly won't be my last. He writes with such fluidity and clear vision that every page is a delight to read.

This isn't really a pure biography on Muhammad Ali, rather, it is an insight into his early years leading to his championship fight (and rematch) with Sonny Liston, his conversion to Islam, his match against Floyd Patterson and his views on the Vietnam war and eventual refusal to be drafted by the Army. Amongst all of this is also a fantastic history book dealing with the US history of boxing, racism in America, the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, Sonny Liston and Floyd Patterson.

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Remnick intertwines all of this with Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali's life and career in the sixties in incredible detail. Riveting work.

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### **Samuel Bae says**

David Remnick's King of the World, tells the story of Cassius Clay, a boxing legend also known as Muhammad Ali, who faces America's segregated society and boxing politics while trying his best to become the greatest boxing champion of all time. The book is set in the U.S. during the mid and late 20th century, where the colored stand separated from the whites and boxing is a very popular source of entertainment. Surrounded by many problems, Muhammad Ali continued his path to be the greatest boxer in the world by

defeating his opponents one by one. At first Cassius Clay was known as the rookie with the loud mouth and clever rhymes. His confidence level was always very high, which irritated many people believing that he was just some cocky, self-centered rookie. After proving himself by defeating Sonny Liston, who was at that time the world's heavy weight champion, Clay became a boxing icon to the world. Later Cassius converted into Islam where he received the name Muhammad Ali, which means beloved by God. He befriended Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad, both people who inspired him throughout his boxing career. Muhammad believed that him becoming a boxing champion would help the black and Muslim communities be accepted and welcomed into the nation. With hard work and dedication, Muhammad Ali was eventually known for as the greatest boxer of all time.

A memorable scene in the book is when David Remnick tells us about Muhammad Ali's first interest in boxing and how he dedicated his childhood to it. Muhammad Ali started boxing at the age of 12 and he would go to the local gym to train every day. After his first spar, he shouted that he would soon be the "greatest of all time." After that, his life was boxing and all he ever talked about was boxing. He woke up early in the morning to run a few miles. He would go to the gym in the afternoon and train until dawn. He even ate healthy for boxing. He put all this dedication and time to achieve his goal on becoming the greatest of all time since he was young and continued his path all the way until he achieved it. My favorite part of the scene was when Cassius had a girlfriend and after three weeks of dating Cassius asked her for a kiss which was something he did not know how to do. After the girl kissed him he "fainted." The reason I love this scene is because it makes me chuckle a bit every time and it shows that even though he had a tight schedule every day to keep up his boxing, he always had time for girls, almost like every other man in the world. Even though this book's main focus is Muhammad Ali's boxing career, I learned other things than boxing.

The main thing I learned was to set a goal and try to reach it without ever giving up and even if you fail you need to get back up and continue to persevere it. That is exactly what Muhammad Ali did. Since he was young, he loved boxing, and girls, but mainly boxing and worked hard to achieve his goal on becoming the greatest. The gym was his life. Even though he had a few defeats, he never gave up and continued to fight on. Another thing I learned was that life is very fragile. After years of boxing, Muhammad Ali got the Parkinson's disease, which makes the brain shake your body. Muhammad had to end his career and it is so shocking to see a man that was once one of the greatest athletes fall so easily.

I had many different feelings from the book, but the main feeling I had was hope. In a society where colored people are looked down upon, one man rose above the rest to prove his worth even though his skin color was different. With a lot of struggles and problems, Muhammad Ali managed to bring himself up to the top.

I recommend this book to anyone, even those who find no interest in boxing or sports because this book is not only about boxing but the life of a man who had a dream as a young kid and never gave up to achieve his goal even though there were many rough times in his life and society. It is a great book with great detail, especially in the Liston vs. Clay fight. If you're looking for a source of inspiration, this book would be a great choice.

"Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. The hands can't hit what the eyes can't see."  
-Muhammad Ali

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### **Carol Storm says**

Beautiful, thoughtful, vibrant, dynamic -- this is a biography truly worthy of its subject!

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## Patrick says

A superb biography and history by a masterful writer. This book has been described as a biography of Muhammad Ali, but it's really much more than that.

Actually, it's a story about how three men (Sonny Liston, Floyd Patterson, and Cassius Clay who renamed himself Muhammad Ali) all responded in different ways to the identity choices African Americans faced as a result of the simultaneous civil rights and the black nationalist movements in the early 1960's. At times this book reads more like an addendum to Taylor Barnch's superb historical trilogy about American In The King Years than it does as a sports book.

Up front let me declare that I find most sports books to be poorly written, and that even the well written ones are just too narrowly focused for the general reader to care about. In addition, I am not a boxing fan, as I usually find most boxing fights boring to watch.

But in the hands of a great author, any non-fiction subject can be made to be compelling, even captivating. Such is the case here with David Remnick, an editor for the New Yorker and the author of *Lenin's Tomb*. Often this book reads better than David Halberstam's best sports books.

That's mainly because the actual descriptions of the boxing matches are limited to only about 10% of the pages in this book, and are always told in the context of the overall events occurring in these three character's lives. Remnick continually goes back and forth in history and the lives of these three men to provide perspective on why these fights were so significant, both for the sport of boxing and for American culture. You don't need to know anything about boxing to appreciate this book, this story, and these three men.

That's the hardest part of this review, I think...to convince you, the general reader with no interest in boxing and who is barely aware of Muhammad Ali, why the events in this book are relevant and worth your time. Ali is becoming a sort of forgotten figure among most Americans, especially those under 40, because the sport he excelled in has been in decline for decades and has been marginalized by so many other professional sports. In addition, the issues he was a lightning rod for back in the sixties (the Nation of Islam, draft resistance to the Viet Nam war, even how African Americans should respond to changes sought by the civil rights movement) are footnotes to history now for most young Americans.

But, if you have any interest in organized crime, civil rights, Viet Nam, the culture of the sixties, authors like Norman Mailer and James Baldwin, the historical figures of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, and journalism's response to all of the above, then this book is worth checking out. All of these figures, events, and issues appear in this book, and are a significant part of the story. In addition, I learned something new about all of these topics, because they all had an impact on the development of Muhammad Ali into an iconic world figure and an idol of millions in his prime, far better known and revered than Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods.

One thing that surprised me is how important boxing was to American culture in the early 60's, and how quickly it lost that position to other sports. Boxing was done in by the excesses of the people gained the most financially from it, and the fighters were definitely not among those people.

There are a ton of funny stories in this book, but in the end there are a lot of poignant stories as well. Right

from the start, as the author relates the fear of the champion Floyd Patterson in preparing to face the menacing challenger Sonny Liston, you can really empathize with these men who worked so hard to rise to the top of their sport and who lost everything so quickly when they lost the title. And the epilogue, describing the near total loss of memory by Patterson and motor skills by Ali is equally touching.

Bottom line, a great read. Highly recommended!

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### **Monica says**

Remnick is a wonderful storyteller. This book is about the early years of Cassius Clay and his transition to Muhammed Ali. It tells the story of boxing prior to Ali and his early impact. Prior to Ali, organized crime had quite a grip on boxing. The story ends at Ali refusing to be drafted. This tale is also about racial inequality and one talented, handsome young athlete who found himself in a unique position to successfully rattle the status quo in boxing and in America. Too young to "know his place", Ali triumphed where others would not dare to risk failure. Ali's story begins when he is 19 and the book ends when he turns 24. It is interesting to read about what propelled him towards Islam. Interesting side note, the Nation of Islam effectively shielded Ali from organized crime. His membership insulated him. His conflicted sense of loyalty and yet so brash and stubbornly defiant. Ali was amazingly disciplined and inflexible which served him well as an athlete during the early years. If I had one quibble (and it's small) I think that Remnick put a little too much of his own perceptions into the book. It is a little tainted by that bias. But it was an excellent read. I did not expect to enjoy it near as much as I did. This book was given to me to read about 8 years ago by a family friend. This friend passed away about a year ago. I wish I had read it earlier so I could have discussed it with him.

*4.5 stars*

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### **Thomas says**

majority of this book deals with the timeframe between Cassius Clay's first heavyweight title fight against Sonny Liston, and the rematch between Liston and (now) Muhammad Ali. an instructive window into a time before Ali was an internationally-known sports icon, and before his refusal to be inducted into the US Army.

well-written, and an interesting window into a time BEFORE Ali was the most polarizing figure in sports. the evolution from being just a talented black boxer to racial lightening rod when he converted to Islam; the hatred he inspired in America when he first spoke out against injustice in our society.... all captured in a fair and evenhanded manner.

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### **Steven Kent says**

Oh man did I love this book!

This book is the story of the rivalry between Ali and Sonny Liston. Yeah, yeah, everyone says it is about Ali because everyone idolizes Ali; but Liston gets equal treatment here.

So here's the deal. Today everyone talks as if they have always loved Ali, but back in the sixties, his Muslim beliefs scared people and his outspoken ways led many to hate him.

Then there was Sonny Liston, cold, menacing, the man with the largest hands of any heavyweight champion. Liston had known mob connections. he was an ex-con. One of his opponents went back to the locker room and found that Liston had knocked six of his teeth out--and the fight only went one round!

When Liston fought Floyd Patterson for the title, all of white America cheered for Patterson; but when Liston fought Ali, all of a sudden people decided Liston was not such a bad guy after all.

Remnick captures all of this in a beautiful, flowing narrative designed to educate and entertain boxing fans and newcomers alike. Your admiration and understanding of Ali will go up, but you may well shed a tear for Liston as well.

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