

***Muhammad Speaks* and Muhammad Ali: Intersections of the Nation of Islam and Sport in the 1960s**

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America, more than any other country, offers our people opportunities to engage in sports and play, which cause delinquency, murder, theft, and other forms of wicked and immoral crimes. This is due to this country's display of filthy temptations in this world of sport and play.¹

With the advent of their first issue, *Muhammad Speaks* established itself as the voice of the Nation of Islam's Messenger, Elijah Muhammad. Dedicated to 'Freedom, Justice, and Equality for the Black Man', the first issue was printed in October 1961 and the newspaper's circulation increased at a rate comparable to the discontent of African Americans in the United States during the freedom struggle of the civil rights movement.² Advocating freedom and separation from whites, the newspaper served a critical role in promoting race pride, as well as ministering the beliefs and teachings of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam.

The Nation of Islam, according to Wallace D. Muhammad, was both a religion and a social movement.³ It was a Black 'nation' within the United States and 'believed that African-Americans must free themselves physically and psychologically'. The organization 'commenced' in the 1930s when the Moorish Science Temple broke into a number of separate 'warring factions' and echoed sentiments familiar to those who had followed Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. The Nation of Islam was a new Black Islamic movement that established their own temples, created their own bureaucracy, assigned their own officials, started their own schools and even trained their own paramilitary, the Fruit of Islam. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad had been selected by Master Farad Muhammad (also known as W.D. Fard) to lead the Nation and return the people to the 'old time religion of African Americans'. Elijah Muhammad claimed that African Americans were 'royals of the Original People from the holy city of Mecca' and that the white man was the devil. He taught that God was a Black man and that ancient Black civilization was the original site of divine culture.⁴ Muhammad empowered African Americans through the religion of Islam and set forth guidelines and economic and moral codes of behavior to follow. He ordered, 'Muslims pray five times a day, eat once a day, and abstain from pork, alcohol, tobacco, narcotics, gambling, sports, long vacations from work, and sleeping more than is necessary for health'.⁵

The Muslim teachings were detailed in several Nation of Islam publications, including Muhammad's book, *Message to the Blackman in America*.⁶ As part of this message, Muhammad addressed the role of sport in Black culture in the United States. Despite his admonishment of Black athletes and their decision to pursue a professional sport career, the leader and his newspaper changed their position on sport after one of their disciples rose to the top of his sporting field. When Cassius Clay wrested the heavyweight championship of the world title from Sonny Liston, Clay had already been attending meetings of the Nation of Islam. Within days of his victory, Clay announced his conversion to the Muslim religion and his subsequent name change from Cassius Clay, his slave name, to Muhammad Ali, a name bestowed upon him by the religion's leader, Elijah Muhammad.⁷ The career of Ali is chronicled in the pages of *Muhammad Speaks*. This article explores the meaning of sport in the Muslim religion, specifically the Nation of Islam in the United States, and the role of Muhammad Ali in promoting sport and his religion during the 1960s. Tensions and dilemmas arise for both Ali and the Nation of Islam and these are directly related to the Nation's contradictory philosophy of sport. As a result, further tensions developed between Ali's religious and sporting identities. This paper examines these tensions and provides insight into the various ways that sport, and specifically the sporting achievements of Muhammad Ali, are used to symbolize religious identity as well as define communities, in the USA and internationally. Moreover, Ali's sporting achievements served significant political purposes for the Nation of Islam, as the young boxer became an international sporting figure, enabling him to establish relationships with Islamic communities worldwide. Within the pages of the newspaper, a drama bound with contradictions unfolds. Sport is criticized for the problems it causes, Ali claims Islam as his religion, the Nation of Islam embraces Ali as their own, they use Ali as a commodity to sell their newspaper and their ideas about Black oppression, and when he no longer serves the intended purpose, or perhaps he becomes too popular, Ali is denounced as is sport once again. Within a matter of five years, the political, religious, and sporting landscapes were drastically altered. The country experienced a shift in philosophies and race relations, and the Nation of Islam reached a zenith in their popularity with the help of a 'loudmouthed' fighter.

The first reference to sport in *Muhammad Speaks* was in the December 1961 issue, with an advertisement for Joe Louis Milk and a picture of boxer Archie Moore at a Baltimore luncheon. Published monthly until July 1962, and then semi-monthly in August 1962, each issue contained at least one article or picture of professional male athletics in America, always in the last pages of the issue. Beginning in 1963, the publication schedule of the newspaper shifted to weekly. The topic of sport in the paper was non-controversial and more informational, such as 'Baseball's Top NL Negroes',⁸ or a profile of heavyweight champion Sonny Liston.⁹ The paper did begin to print articles that asked critical questions regarding race in America within the sport setting, with a three part series on the absence of Black quarterbacks in the

NFL¹⁰ and an article entitled, 'Recreation vs. Wreckreation: Expert Defines Role of Physical Culture in Big City Ghetto'.¹¹ In the 15 October 1962 issue, Elijah Muhammad wrote a column that warned against the evils of sport and play. This column served as the crux of an essay on the same topic published in Muhammad's book, *Message to the Black Man in America*. Despite mentioning Ali's name in the book four times and touting the champion for his religious conversion, Muhammad dedicates a chapter to his thoughts concerning the destructive role of sport in America, specifically how it affects the Black man.¹² In the column, Muhammad proclaimed the evils of sport and linked the practice of Christianity to the growing popularity of sport and the damage the games caused. 'Hundreds of millions of dollars change hands for the benefit of a few to the hurt of millions, and suffering from the lack of good education, with their last few pennies they help the already helped to try winning with these gambling 'scientists' who have prepared a game of chance that the poor suckers have only one chance out of nine hundred to win. Therefore, the world of sports is causing tremendous evils'. Beyond the gambling, Muhammad attributed the 'the destruction of homes and families, the disgrace, the shame, the filling up of jails . . . with the victims of sports and play, the loss of friendship, the loss of beautiful wives and husbands, the loss of sons and daughters to these penal institutions' to Christianity. He also believed that 'the poor so-called Negroes are the worst victims in this world of sport and play because they are trying to learn the white man's games of civilization'. He stated that 'sport and play (games of chance) take away the remembrance of Allah (God) and the doing of good'.¹³ He concluded his column with an invitation for new members.

Malcolm X, in his acclaimed autobiography, recounted his first introduction to Muhammad Ali, who was, at that time, still known as Cassius Clay. Clay, with his brother Rudolph, attended a rally at a Detroit Mosque in 1962. Clay introduced himself to Malcolm X before the rally and in a manner that indicated the militant Muslim Malcolm X should recognize the young fighter. Malcolm X recalled that Up to that moment, though, I had never even heard of him. Ours were two entirely different worlds. In fact, Elijah Muhammad instructed us Muslims against all forms of sports'.¹⁴

Malcolm X accompanied Clay to Miami for his challenge of Sonny Liston. At this time, Malcolm X was under suspension in the Nation of Islam for comments he had made regarding the assassination of President Kennedy and his presence at Clay's training camp further displeased Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm X had 'emerged as the major voice of the Nation of Islam' and was preaching a similar doctrine of race separation, freedom, and fight for justice as a younger Elijah Muhammad had in the 1930s.¹⁵ Recalling the pre-fight chances of a Clay upset, Malcolm X said, 'They felt that Cassius hadn't a prayer of a chance to win. They felt the Nation would be embarrassed through my linking the Muslim image with him'. He noted proof of the Nation of Islam's feeling that Clay would be defeated by their failure to have a representative from *Muhammad Speaks* at the fight. 'Even though Cassius was a Muslim brother, the Muslim newspaper didn't consider his fight

worth covering'. Malcolm X claimed that despite this lack of faith the Muslims had in Clay, he knew that Clay would emerge victorious. 'I flew back to Miami feeling it was Allah's intent for me to help Cassius prove Islam's superiority before the world -through proving that mind can win over brawn'. Malcolm X appealed to Clay through religion and his role as a part of the larger struggle between Muslims and Christians. Malcolm X saw the fight as 'the truth'. He called it a 'modern crusade', with the 'Cross and the Crescent fighting in the prize ring – for the first time'. He asked, 'Do you think Allah has brought all this intending for you to leave the ring anything but the champion?'¹⁶

The first mention of Clay as champion came in the 13 March 1964 issue and was actually an article about a message of thanks that he sent through his brother to a rally held at Savior's Day in Chicago. In response, Elijah Muhammad said, 'I'm so glad that Cassius Clay admits he is a Muslim. He was able, by confessing that Allah was the God and by following Muhammad, to whip a much tougher man. Clay had confidence in Allah, and in me as his only Messenger. This assured his victory and left him unscarred'.¹⁷ It was also at this Savior's Day meeting that Elijah Muhammad predicted that his newest member 'would develop into a major world figure'.¹⁸

After his victory, Ali begins to appear in the paper on a weekly basis, sometimes related to his boxing, but more often as a spokesman for the group. He did this in several ways: traveling internationally as a representative of the Nation of Islam, entering the ring as a representative of the Nation of Islam, speaking with Black leaders across America and the world, and acting as a disciple of Elijah Muhammad. Literally, in each of the hundreds of articles about his boxing over the course of six years, Ali attributed his success to Elijah Muhammad, his membership in the Nation of Islam and to Allah. Ali's first cover was on 10 April 1964 with a bold print headline that read 'Walk the Way of Free Men!' The caption underneath the picture of Ali with Elijah Muhammad read 'The Honorable Elijah Muhammad through his teachings of the Nation of Islam, has made him strong both morally and spiritually, says new Heavyweight Boxing Champion Muhammad Ali'.

Two weeks later, in another cover story, Elijah Muhammad authored an article 'They Hate the Champ' that was the beginning of a campaign to promote Ali as a Muslim and as a Black man who did not need white America for his success, and was in fact, a source of discontent for white America.¹⁹ Sport historian David Wiggins views Ali as 'the movement's most important symbol of black masculinity, a man of heroic stature who came to represent the struggle for civil rights'.²⁰ This theme of Ali as a target of discrimination by white America was consistent over the next five years, with much of it serving to fuel the aims of the Nation of Islam. Wiggins credits Elijah Muhammad with recognizing the symbolic importance of Ali as a Muslim heavyweight champion and his subsequent orchestration of 'a public relations campaign that transformed Ali into the movement's leading example of black pride'. Moreover, Muhammad 'used the controversy surrounding Ali to his own advantage, branding criticism of the heavyweight champion as religious

persecution and hatred of Muslims'. Wiggins notes that around the time of Ali's entrance into the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X had been suspended and then removed from the organization, making it perfect timing for a young, charismatic leader to continue spreading the message. Muhammad used Ali as an 'example of righteousness for blacks who had been instilled with a false sense of racial inferiority by white Christian Americans'.²¹ Muhammad's newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, was a prominent means of using Ali in such a way.

Ali's public image was shaped by the newspaper and was in sharp contrast to the images that white writers were presenting of the fighter. *Muhammad Speaks* documents Ali's donations, his work with children, with his community, his black pride, and his politics regarding race and religion. Under a picture of Ali playing with outside with children, the caption read:

World's Heavyweight Champion playfully spars with group of children on one of the afternoons which the Champ devoted entirely to the entertainment and inspiration of Negro youths. . . . No boxer in modern times has concerned himself with the plight of Negro youth. Muhammad's appearance evokes an instant identity and response from Negro youth across the nation as the young Muslim champion . . . sets an example of clean, healthy and purposeful living.²²

He visited public schools at the request of 'Negro teachers' who 'felt the need to present a real-live black hero to their children to offset the daily 'white heroes' they see and hear on television and radio'.²³ Simultaneously, white mainstream newspapers referred to him as Cassius Clay, discredited him based on his religion and his call for the separation of the races, as well as his pre-fight predictions of knockouts and otherwise boastful and bragging manners.

In May 1964, Ali began a tour of several African nations. As a Muslim and as the heavyweight champion of the world, Ali's trip to Africa was significant for several reasons. As a representative of Elijah Muhammad, Ali was welcomed as a 'prodigal son' and even commented that he had not been 'home' in over 400 years. The theme of pan-Africanism and the religious ties between the two continents was clear in the reporting of his trip. The rise of black nationalism in the 1960s and the Nation of Islam was a major factor in this rise, occurred 'during the escalation of the Vietnam War and liberation struggles in Colonial Africa . . . nationalist leaders perceived the African-American struggle in world solidarity as a struggle against colonialism, racism, and capitalist expansionism'.²⁴ Ali's trips to Africa were not without symbolism. Seeing the advancement of the countries, Ali mentioned that he had been exposed to phony allegations by the United States concerning the civilization of African nations. With all his travels and later, his fights in other countries (such as Canada, Great Britain, West Germany), they proclaimed Ali as the first true world champion, giving the title new meaning. Moreover,

they could claim him as the first Muslim world champion. According to *Muhammad Speaks*, Ali had the strongest international backing of any previous champion.²⁵ They established an international fan club and on occasion would print letters of support for the Champ in their ages, from faraway places such as Pakistan, Ireland, Ghana, and Sweden.²⁶ Though Ali was exiled from the American boxing ring, the rest of the world welcomed the 'world champion' with open arms.

The uproar about Ali's draft status and his subsequent comments were another dominant issue in the weekly and articles detailed the support of Black leaders and international figures, including SNCC's Stokely Carmichael, CORE's Floyd McKissick, Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, activist Dick Gregory, A Philip Randolph of the AFL-CIO, Director of the National Urban League Whitney Young, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell. I F Stone wrote, 'Cassius Clay's reaction to becoming eligible for the draft was characteristically candid...We suspect he voiced the sentiment of most Negroes. But boxing groups found the remark "unpatriotic" and "disgusting"'.²⁷ Ali commented frequently on the contradictions of a black American fighting for the freedom of another country when he was not free in his own, asking 'Why should they ask me and other so-called Negroes to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets in brown people in Viet Nam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights'.²⁸ On another occasion, Ali clarified his stance, stating 'If I thought my joining the war and possible dying would bring peace, freedom, justice and equality to the 22 million black men in America, they would not have to draft me. I would join!'²⁹ Letters, articles and editorial cartoons criticized the draft, the war, and the issue of black soldiers dying on the front line. The discrimination Ali faced by the white press and public, as well as from other black Americans, played into the theme of Ali as a Black Muslim victim of white Christian persecution.

While other articles related to sport appeared in the newspaper, they all served the central purpose of promoting Black athletes who had gone against the white establishment and who supported Black Muslims, or at least the ideals of the Muslims. On several occasions the newspaper would publish an article that focused on other Black athletes who were sympathetic to the goals of the Nation of Islam, even if they were not members themselves. Two athletes that fit into this category were Bill Russell and Jim Brown.³⁰

Often Black athletes were pictured with Ali. His influence on other Black athletes was one example of expectations the Nation of Islam had of the fighter. Under a picture of Ali in a non-sport setting, with the fighter dressed in a suit and tie, the caption noted that one mission of the Champ was to help 'in building a new image for Black athletes in America'.³¹ When he defended his heavyweight title against challenger Floyd Patterson, who represented Christianity and assimilation, Ali promised Patterson a copy of Muhammad's *Message to the Black Man in America* after the fight, as well as making a gentlemen's agreement that stated should Ali beat Patterson, Patterson would spend 48 hours with the Muslim champion to be exposed to his lifestyle

and religion and 'get a better understanding of the followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad'.³²

Ali's impact on other Black athletes was tremendous and evident by the increased activism of Black college athletes in 1968, including the New York Athletic Club boycott, and the proposed Olympic boycott. Much of this was due to Ali's refusal to fight in the Vietnam War, a subject that dominated the newspaper, as well as the mainstream American press. Ali met with other prominent Black athletes to discuss his decision to refuse military induction, including Jim Brown, Bill Russell, and Lew Alcindor. Alcindor would later boycott the Olympic basketball team and attribute part of his raised consciousness to Ali.³³ During the months preceding the 1968 Olympics, a number of articles appeared that addressed the proposed boycott by Black athletes, as well as the inclusion of South Africa in the Games. After the Olympic stand protest by Tommie Smith and John Carlos, articles were printed supporting the two athletes, as well as advertisements for medallions commemorating the victory stand protest.³⁴ Articles that addressed the increased activism of athletes appeared more often and tennis player, Arthur Ashe, joined the likes of Russell and Brown as Black athletes who merited attention and praise for their Black activism.³⁵

In another example set for Black athletes and orchestrated by the Nation of Islam, was the selection of Herbert Muhammad as Ali's manager and the creation of Main Bout, Inc., 'the first and only Negro-led boxing promotions company owned and operated Ali and company. The creation of such a company was consistent with the recent events, such as Ali's draft status, the creation of Jim Brown's economic union, and the increased awareness of Black athletes being exploited by white owners and managers. It also promoted the Nation of Islam's call for economic self-reliance. One article made it very clear that the Nation of Islam was not affiliated with the promotions company, but that two Muslims, Herbert Muhammad and John Ali, were involved. Former champ Joe Louis said 'Muhammad is surrounded by talented and unselfish friends and advisers – and they spare no effort in seeing that he ends up not simply a winner in the ring – but a winner in cash receipts'.³⁶ In fact, in his fight with Zora Folley, the championship bout cashed in a record gate of \$244,471.³⁷ Herbert Muhammad was Ali's personal and business manager and the newspaper highlighted the influence the Messenger's son with Ali.³⁸ Herbert Muhammad worked to help in the shaping of Ali's public image as the Muslim World Heavyweight Champion. He 'projected a series of programmatic developments which would not only enhance his ring reputation, but will assure his historic role in domestic and world affairs'.³⁹ Ali's service to his community was at the forefront of creating his public persona, including his work as a minister for the Nation of Islam. The newspaper noted that 'every phase of the champion's activities has touched directly on the welfare of the black community'.⁴⁰ The issue of money as the goal of Ali's fight career was disputed by one prominent Black doctor, who said, 'Everyone knows that if Muhammad was interested in money he could make millions by simply bowing to the practices of so many ex-fighters

before him'. He mentioned the fighter's faith in Allah and the example the boxer set. He claimed that money had not changed the fighter, but that 'he has maintained principles, has maintained faith in his religion and his teacher and has become a new example to all the peoples of Africa and Asia. This is not the road to making money – it's the road to history and greatness'.⁴¹ Still, another noted that Ali's joining the Nation of Islam has 'surely been the road to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow'.⁴² Despite the money the champ earned, issue after issue detailed his generous donations of time, effort, and money for worthy community causes.

This attention to sport and to athletes was essentially contradictory to the philosophy of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam regarding sport. Occasionally, the newspaper would mention the contradiction, which did not go unnoticed to many in the sporting world. In a five-part series for *Sports Illustrated* that looked at Muhammad Ali's rise in boxing and his participation in the Nation of Islam, Jack Olsen noted the contradiction of the acceptance by the Black Muslims' of Muhammad Ali and 'their bestowal upon him of the supraholy name, Muhammad Ali'. He wondered how a religion which had regarded sport as a 'filthy temptation' could 'manage to embrace the world's best-known athletic figure'. He asked Ali, whom he referred to as Clay throughout the series, about the contradiction. Ali's response was that he had already been 'an established pro before he became a member. Boxing was 'the onliest way' he had making his 'livelihood'. He also mentioned that 'some of our leaders mentioned that it would be bad for the public to say that my religion caused me to be financially hurt and stopped from boxing'. Others saw the sect's embracing of the Champ as more of a financial move of their part, noting that when the movement was forced to 'choose between accounts receivable and the Scriptures, they vote for accounts receivable every time'. One relative of Ali's called the Black Muslim religion 'the most bendable religion in the world, and mused that the religious group had 'thought sports was a mortal sin till Cassius came along. Now they're all running around in jockstraps'. He even expressed surprise that they could hold his relative, Ali, in such high regard as a Muslim when the athlete clearly broke many of the religion's tenets, such as eating more than once a day, using foul language, and making a living from sport. The value of Ali to the group was clear to this man. 'They're getting a lot of mileage out of him now, but they'll drop him like a hot potato when he's outlived his usefulness to them'.⁴³

After Ali's first defense of his title against Sonny Liston ended in the first round, the newspaper addressed the opposition of the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad to sport and made a justification as to how Ali could be a Muslim and be a professional boxer. 'It is a well-known fact that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad does not advocate the pursuit of professional sports for our people – particularly boxing, because it is an especially unnecessary display of brutality and savagery, usually pitting one black person against the other for the entertainment of white audiences'. Still, the newspaper admitted that Elijah Muhammad was 'solidly behind those of our

people who are forced through circumstances or necessity to engage in such activities for their livelihood'.⁴⁴

On another occasion, their opposition to sport was made clear. After Ali soundly defeated George Chuvalo, the newspaper printed an article that publicly rebuked Ali's efforts in the ring. Complaining that Chuvalo had fought below the belt and that this illegal behavior was allowed by the referee, the article urged Muslims to view Ali's reactions as a result of 'his dependence upon his own "natural ability" to overcome a hate-filled and vicious opponent – instead of upon his previous open acknowledgement and dependence upon Allah and His messenger'. They felt that Ali was 'guilty of allowing his opponent to test him for the sport of it; absorbing needless blows to the body simply to "show off" his pugilistic prowess'. They were adamantly opposed to what they interpreted as Ali's lack of faith and they stated in clear terms, 'We cannot back one who will not acknowledge the Divine Guidance of Allah and His messenger from which all strength derives which has made such success possible.'⁴⁵ Next to this article, Ali, himself, authored an apology for his failure to put Allah and the Messenger in front of all else.⁴⁶

Despite its admonition of sport, the newspaper keenly utilized Ali as a popular figure in American society and as a victim of racial and religious persecution to advertise the religion, to sell more newspapers, and to help increase the awareness of the Nation of Islam. In an issue that detailed Ali's return to the United States and his first appearance at a Harlem rally held for Elijah Muhammad, a picture of Ali and Muhammad appeared, with a headline that read 'How Harlem Hailed the Messenger of Allah'. There is no mention of Ali in the article and from the picture one might wonder which messenger is being hailed, but the article clarifies any confusion and reaffirms that the day was about Elijah Muhammad.⁴⁷ This was a common use of Ali's picture, placed strategically next to an article that made no mention of the fighter.

Other promotional items appeared in the newspaper. There was a half page advertisement for an exhibition bout between Ali and Cody Jones, with tickets ranging from a donation price of \$1.50 for bleacher seats to \$10. Tickets were sold at four locations, conveniently all businesses owned and operated by members of the Nation of Islam, such as Temple No. 2 Cleaners and Shabazz Restaurant.⁴⁸ There were trips to Ali's fights, which included transportation, tickets, and dinner. One issue offered a challenge to all readers, who ever could sell the most subscriptions to the newspaper over the month long contest would earn a free trip to Ali's bout with Floyd Patterson in Las Vegas.⁴⁹ In March 1965, a new column appeared for the first time and would run for the next four years. 'From the Camp of the Champ' detailed the routines and daily activities of the boxer, from personal details about his life, to his training routines, to his speaking engagements and philosophies of the champion. The newspaper promised readers 'the exclusive news of the world's champion's plans and programs for 1966'.⁵⁰ Fan letters and poems soon appeared, establishing another regular feature, 'Poetry Corner', poetry written by his fight fans and by Ali. Ali's poetry fell into two categories: poems about his fights and poems about his religion.⁵¹ His

devotion to his faith, Allah, and Elijah Muhammad were clear and had been clear for the five years the fighter dominated the pages of *Muhammad Speaks*.

Wiggins analyzed the rift that developed between Muhammad Ali and Elijah Muhammad that surfaced in the pages of *Muhammad Speaks*. As a result of a comment Ali made to Howard Cosell on ABC Sports, specifically that he would return to the ring because he needed to make money, Elijah Muhammad responded by suspending the Champion from the movement and by removing his holy name, Muhammad Ali. Muhammad explained that by making such statements to Cosell, Ali had 'stepped down off the spiritual platform of Islam to go and see if he can make money in the sport world'. Ali's words indicated to the Messenger that the fighter had placed 'his hopes and trust in the enemy of Allah (God) for survival', and also revealed his love for 'sport and play', which the Holy Quran and the Nation of Islam clearly opposed, and which Muhammad had warned him about following his victory over George Chuvalo.⁵² He accused the Champion of wasting his money and was supported in this claim by two of Ali's business managers and fellow Muslims, Herbert Muhammad and John Ali. Oddly enough though, throughout their use of Ali in selling the newspaper and their religion, the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad certainly had to have resulted in a profit for them, exploiting the fighter for their needs. Ali had been acclaimed for donations he made, for services he rendered, for serving his people, but his claim to need the money angered Muhammad. Muhammad again reverted to his former philosophy of the evils of sport. His need for Ali no longer as great, or perhaps as effective, Ali was dismissed as a fighter and as a Muslim. After Ali's suspension from the Nation of Islam, the newspaper's coverage of sports returned to the previous patterns from the earlier issues, with a brief article in every issue at the last pages of the weekly and rarely anything of substance. Ultimately what led to the dismissal of Ali from the Nation of Islam at the dawn of a new decade was the issue of power; the power of a young, charismatic, popular Black athlete versus the power of an aging leader of a politically charged religious organization.

Gardell states that 'Besides Malcolm X, none of Elijah Muhammad's disciples gave the nation more visibility than Muhammad Ali'.⁵³ This sentiment is supported by Jeremiah Shabazz, who commented on the far-reaching power of Muhammad Ali as a member of the Nation of Islam:

When Elijah Muhammad spoke, his words were confined to whatever city he had spoken in. But Ali was a sports hero, and people wanted to know what he had to say, so his visibility and prominence were of great benefit to the Nation. His voice carried throughout the world, and that was a true blessing for us. There's no doubt, our following increased enormously, maybe a hundred percent, after he joined the Nation.⁵⁴

Muhammad Ali was instrumental in championing the growth of the Nation of Islam and 'had it not been for the Messenger's ability to raise dedicated champions for the cause, the Nation would probably have remained an obscure organization at the margins of the black community'.⁵⁵ Instead, Muhammad Ali became an international figure as a result of both his skills in the boxing ring, but almost as much for his membership in an organization that proudly touted him as one of their own on the international stage. Ali remained an international figure without the support of the Nation of Islam and ironically, his second coming as the heavyweight champion of the world would occur in Zaire, Africa where he was viewed as the 'home favorite' against another Black fighter, George Foreman.

NOTES:

1. From Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Black Man in America* (Newport News, VA: United Brothers Communications Systems, 1992), 246; *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 October 1962.

2. *Muhammad Speaks*, October 1961, p. 1. Circulation figures were published for a seven-month period on the front page of the newspaper. January 1962 – 150,000 circulation; February 1962 – 175,000 circulation; March 1962 – 200,000 circulation with 800,000 readers; April 1962 – 225,000 circulation with 900,000 readers; May 1962 – 300,000 circulation with 1.2 million readers; June 1962 – 310,000 circulation with 1.25 million readers; July 1962 – 360,000 circulation with 1.4 million readers. For more on the newspaper, see Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996) 64. Gardell states that the newspaper offered 'high-quality coverage of news relevant to African-American community, both domestic and international'. *Muhammad Speaks* became the 'most widely read paper in black America' with a circulation of over 600,000 a week. Gardell cites John Woodford, *Voices From the Underground*, 1990, p. 92 as claiming the circulation was actually 650,000 when Woodford was editor in chief. An even higher circulation figure of 850,000 a week was claimed in the mid-1970s (Abass Rassoull, 'National Secretary Cites Accomplishments', *Muhammad Speaks*, August 23, 1974 cited in Gardell). Gardell concluded that *Muhammad Speaks* was 'simply one of the best contemporary black weeklies in the United States'.

3. Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930-1980* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 51. For more on the history and philosophy of the Nation of Islam, see Louis A. Caro, *Malcolm and the Cross The Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, and Christianity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); John George, *Nazis, Communists, Klansmen, and Others on the Fringe: Political Extremism in America* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992); Martha F. Lee, *A Nation of Islam, An American Millenarian Movement* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988); C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994); Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930-1995* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996); Adib Rashad, *Islam, Black Nationalism and Slavery: A Detailed History* (Beltsville, MD: Writers' Inc. International, 1995).

4. Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 50, 52, 54.

5. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, 58.

6. For other publications by Elijah Muhammad that detail the ideology of the Nation of Islam, see *The Supreme Wisdom: Solution to the So-Called NEGROES' Problems* (1957); *The Supreme Wisdom, Volume Two* (undated); *Message to the Blackman* (1965); *How to Eat to Live* (1967); *How to Eat to Live, Part Two* (1972); *The Fall of America* (1973); *Our Saviour Has Arrived* (1974); *The Flag of Islam* (1974).

7. One practice of the Nation of Islam was the bestowing of a new name on the member. The shedding of the old name and subsequent adoption of the new name was symbolic of a 'mental emancipation' from their slavename.

8. *Muhammad Speaks*, 4 February 1962, p. 22.

9. *Muhammad Speaks*, 18 February 1962, p. 22.

10. 'Why No Negroes in Pro Ball?' *Muhammad Speaks*, 31 January 1962, p. 22; 'Why No Negroes in Pro Ball?: Pro Owners to Blame, says Former Great Duke Slater', *Muhammad Speaks*, 4 February 1962, p. 22; 'Why No Negroes in Pro Ball?: 'Unwritten Code', says Ex-Bear Bobby Watkins', *Muhammad Speaks*, 4 March 1962, p. 23. The newspaper continued form time to time, on average three times a year, to provide articles that looked at relevant issues in the sports world. For other articles that were published during this time, see 'Experts Say: African Athletes May Soon Dominate World of Sports', *Muhammad Speaks*, 24 September 1965, 20; 'Karate: Why the Business of Self Defense is Booming Among Negroes', *Muhammad Speaks*, 18 February 1966, 16,17; 'Doctors Claim Benefits to Youngsters Outweigh Dangers in Contact Sports', *Muhammad Speaks*, 17 June 1966, 18; 'Hints for Health: Baseball, As An Exercise, is Great Unless Overdone', *Muhammad Speaks*, 17 June 1966, 17; 'The Desperate Search for 'White Hopes' – Black Pearls in the Athletic World', *Muhammad Speaks*, 5 January 1968, 17, 22; 'Survey Reveals Conspiracy: To Block Black Quarterback Spot in Professional Football', *Muhammad Speaks*, 10 May 1968, 29; Bayyinah Sharrieff, 'Sport and Play is Not Glorified in the Sudan', *Muhammad Speaks*, 5 July 1968, 26; 'Race Dominant in Athletics – but why?' *Muhammad Speaks*, 7 February 1969, 13.

11. *Muhammad Speaks*, 13 May 1962, p. 22.

12. Elijah Muhammad refers to Muhammad Ali on four pages throughout his book. On page 43, Muhammad writes about the name change that was bestowed upon Muhammad Ali after he converted to Islam. Noting that no Black man could get international respect if they still used a 'slavename', Muhammad uses Ali as an example. 'The example was evident when I took Muhammad Ali (the Worlds Heavyweight Champion) out of the white man's name (the name itself made him a servant and slave to the white man). All Africa and Asia then acclaimed him as also being their champion. This shows you that all previous black men of America who were bestowed with the title of the worlds heavyweight champion were only exalting the white man of America, Europe and Australia'. Muhammad was a strong believer that when a Black man changed his name, it was an empowering act for the Black man, but one that frustrated and troubled white America because of their clear lack of control over the Black man. 'Watch how anxious the white man is to hold you and call you by his name. He still would like to call the champion, Cassius Clay, after himself, and he would like to call me Poole, after himself. This is to keep the blind, blind; the deaf, deaf and the dumb, dumb to the knowledge that even the name alone is sufficient to free you of this evil people (page 48)'. He makes use of the Champ's name on two other occasions in the book, pages 47 and 73. Ironically, in his essay about sport, Elijah Muhammad makes no mention of the boxer's name or participation in the very culture he is criticizing.

13. Muhammad, *Message to the Black Man*, 246-247. These same words were published

earlier in *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 October 1962, p. 9,

14. Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcom X* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), 303.

15. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, 64, 74. Malcolm X, as the Nation's spokesman, was able to generate a great deal of increased attention on the Nation of Islam, including media attention. He was interviewed in a television documentary, 'The Hate That Hate Produced', which aired nationwide. Soon after airing, articles about Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam were written in *Life*, *Look*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Reader's Digest*

16. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 306-307. Wiggins recounts a similar snubbing of the Clay-Liston fight by *Muhammad Speaks* and indicates that their not attending the fight was in fact evidence that they believed Clay had little hope of beating Liston. See David K. Wiggins, 'Victory for Allah: Muhammad Ali, the Nation of Islam, and American Society', in Elliott J. Gom, Ed., *Muhammad Ali: The People's Champ* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 92.

17. 'Cassius Sends Greetings to Saviors Day', *Muhammad Speaks*, 13 March 1964, p. 2. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, 80.

18. *Muhammad Speaks*, 24 April 1964, pp. 1-2.

19. Wiggins, 'Victory for Allah', p. 89.

20. Wiggins, 'Victory for Allah', pp. 94-95.

21. *Muhammad Speaks*, 19 March 1965, p. 23.

22. 'Muslim Champ Spends Day At Chicago School, Molds Concept of 'Black Heroes', *Muhammad Speaks*, 18 February 1966, pp. 9, 12. For other articles that detail his service to his community, see 'How Days of a Boy on Borrowed Time Were Extended by Heavyweight Champ', *Muhammad Speaks*, 22 April 1966, p. 9; 'Champ Fights to Save Children From Blighted Lives – Takes Time Out to Work with Children of the Poor', *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 July 1966, p. 7; 'Champ Ali Urges Blackstone Rangers to Practice Messenger's 'Black Unity', *Muhammad Speaks*, 2 September 1966, p. 8; 'Champ Offers Closed TV of fight to 6 Colleges', *Muhammad Speaks*, 28 October 1966, p. 9; 'Spiritual Example Displayed by Champion Overshadows Strength, Physical Prowess', *Muhammad Speaks*, 25 November 1966; 'Muhammad Ali Becomes Single Biggest Black Contributor to UNCF Charities', *Muhammad Speaks*, 3 March 1967, p. 20 ('largest single black contributor to treasury of United Negro College Fund, check for \$10,000 – President Stephen J. Wright said 'donation was indication of Honorable Elijah Muhammad's call for the creation of an atmosphere in which talented black men and women can gain an education'.); 'Bout Proceeds to Go to Starving: World Champion Offers to Fight for Mississippi Children', *Muhammad Speaks*, 21 July 1967, p. 7; 'Muhammad Ali Chosen to Head Black Watts Summer Festival in California', *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 August 1967, p. 4.

23. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, p. 76.

24. For other articles that reported on Ali's trip to Africa, see 'Before Leaving for Africa – A Champ's Day in Boston', *Muhammad Speaks*, DATE 8; Charles P. Howard, Sr, 'How Africa Greet the Champ!', *Muhammad Speaks*, 5 June 1964, pp. 1,3,9; Charles P. Howard, Sr, 'Africa Opens Arms for Return of 'Prodigal Son'', *Muhammad Speaks*, 5 June 1964, pp. 2,5; Charles P. Howard, Sr., 'On Tour With Ali: Egypt Thanks Messenger!', *Muhammad Speaks*,

3 July 1964, p. 4; 'A Stronger, Wiser Champion – World Leaders Asked Ali: 'How is Mr. Muhammad?'' *Muhammad Speaks*, 17 July 1964, p. 2.

25. Ali's international Fan Club is advertised for the first time in *Muhammad Speaks*, 23 April 1965, p. 4. For articles that emphasize the Nation of Islam's claim that Ali was the true world champion, see 'Thunderous Welcome: The Champ in Cairo', *Muhammad Speaks*, 3 June 1966, pp. 3-6; 'Champ Reports: Visit to Egypt', *Muhammad Speaks*, 10 June 1966, p. 5; 'Described the Messenger and America- The Champ's Report, Middle East News', *Muhammad Speaks*, 17 June 1966, p. 7; 'The First True World Champion', – Champ Would Like Title Fight in Every Nation', *Muhammad Speaks*, 22 July 1966, p. 9; Dr Joseph H. Jackson, 'In Chicago or China, He's the Only World Champion – Impact of Muhammad Ali on World Scene', *Muhammad Speaks*, 10 November 1967, pp. 9, 24; Dr Joseph H. Jackson, 'Part II: World Impact of Champ', *Muhammad Speaks*, 17 November 1967, pp. 7-8.

26. I.F. Stone's Weekly quoted in 'Famed Publisher Believes Champs View Reflected Opinions of Most Negroes', *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 April 1966, p. 5.

27. 'Champion Takes Greatest Struggle- Freedom, Justice, Equality!' *Muhammad Speaks*, 28 April 1967, p. 9.

28. 'World Wide Protest Rips Champ's Unjust Draft Call', *Muhammad Speaks*, 7 April 1967, p. 9.

29. For articles about Bill Russell, see *Muhammad Speaks*, 14 August 1964, p. 21; 'Book Reviews: Bill Russell's Autobiog Tells His Views on Life', *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 April 1966, p. 17; 'Russell's Rise Reflects Awesome Quality, Quantity of Black Athletes', *Muhammad Speaks*, 29 April 1966, p. 26. For articles about Jim Brown, see *Muhammad Speaks*, 9 October 1964, pp. 4, 22; Benjamin O. Fain, 'Believes What Brown Said Was True', *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 November 1964, p. 8; 'Portrait of the Athlete Who Says: To Hell With Integration, Just Don't Segregate Me', *Muhammad Speaks*, 26 November 1965, pp. 23,26; 'Brown of Cleveland: Portrait of the Pride, Power of the Black Athlete', *Muhammad Speaks*, 3 December 1965, p. 24; *Muhammad Speaks*, 4 February 1966, p. 9. Brief articles also appeared about John Mackey ('Black Athlete Making Way in Business', *Muhammad Speaks*, 26 March 1965, p. 22), Curt Flood, Pele (*Muhammad Speaks*, 23 August 1966, p. 22; 'Black Athletes Alter Brazil: Why They Prefer Pele to the Pope', *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 April 1966, pp. 24, 27; Troy Bey, 'World's Greatest Soccer Player Greet Muslim Champ', *Muhammad Speaks*, 23 September 1966, p. 22.

30. *Muhammad Speaks*, 2 April 1965, p. 6.

31. 'Champ Goes Into Training for Title Fight With Floyd Nov. 22 in Las Vegas', *Muhammad Speaks*, 1 October 1965, p. 9. For another article about the agreement between the two fighters, see 'Muhammad Promises Floyd Free Copy of Messenger's Book After the Fight', *Muhammad Speaks*, 29 October 1965, p. 9. Ali offered a similar invite to Joe Frazier, see 'Joe Frazier Welcome to Attend Any Muslim Mosque of Islam: Muhammad Ali', *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 March 1968, p. 31.

32. For one article that addresses the meeting of Ali and other black athletes, see 'Black Athletes Backed the Champ!' *Muhammad Speaks*, 16 June 1967, p. 7.

33. For articles leading up to the 1968 Olympic Games that addressed the issue of protest, see 'Jackie Robinson Speaks Out for Olympic Boycott', *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 December 1967, p. 10; '38 Nations May Boycott Olympics: Alcindor Heads Black Absentees in U.S.', *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 March 1968, p. 17; Skip Bossette, 'Part II: The Black Athlete Becomes a Giant', *Muhammad Speaks*, 5 April 1968, pp. 11, 26, 30; 'Sprinters Say They

Were Robbed of Races Due to Positions in Boycott', *Muhammad Speaks*, 21 June 1968, p. 26; 'Why Athletes Keep Secret Boycott Plans', *Muhammad Speaks*, 2 August 1968, p. 27; 'Why Black Athletes Should Fight For Black Humanity', *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 August 1968, pp. 7, 8, 31. For articles written after the Olympics, see 'A Salute to Tommie Smith, John Carlos & Co'.', *Muhammad Speaks*, 1 November 1968, p. 13; Lonnie Kashif, 'Return of the Black Olympic Heroes', *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 November 1968, pp. 13, 14, 28; 'Organization of Afro-Asians Salute Stand Taken by Black Athletes', *Muhammad Speaks*, 22 November 1968, p. 35; 'L.A. Councilman Says Smith and Carlos Saved Olympics', *Muhammad Speaks*, 13 December 1968, p. 36; 'Smith, Carlos Tell Youth to Take Up Golf, Swimming', *Muhammad Speaks*, 13 December 1968, p. 36; Captain Edward 2X, 'Black Firm Memorializes Heroes Smith, Carlos', *Muhammad Speaks*, 10 January 1969, p. 13; 'Trenton Mayor's Assistant Rips Olympic Ouster of Tommy Smith and John Carlos', *Muhammad Speaks*, 10 January 1969, p. 18.

34. For article about Arthur Ashe, see World Tennis Champion Arthur Ashe Declares His Militancy, Determination to Struggle for His People', *Muhammad Speaks*, 27 September 1968, p. 16; 'Arthur Ashe may Shun Pro Ranks for Work with Blacks', *Muhammad Speaks*, 3 January 1969, p. 34; 'Ashe Hopes to Unite Black Athletes in New Grouping', *Muhammad Speaks*, 28 February 1969, p. 35. For other articles that addressed Black athletes and their increased discontent with white sport, see 'Why Superstar Robinson Sees Baseball as "Dead End" for Black Players', *Muhammad Speaks*, 29 March 1968, p. 30; 'Did Jackie Robinson's New Stand Make Him "Enemy" of Old Line Whites?' *Muhammad Speaks*, 10 January 1969, p. 28; Dwight Casimere, 'The Black Art of Earl the Pearl', *Muhammad Speaks*, 14 February 1969, p. 35; Alfred Duckett, 'Robinson Adds Rustin to Roster of "Toms"', *Muhammad Speaks*, 16 May 1969, p. 30; John Woodford, 'The Money Conspiracy Against the Black Athlete', *Muhammad Speaks*, 6 June 1969, p. 35; Dwight Casimere, 'Harry Edwards: Revolt of the Black Athletes', *Muhammad Speaks*, 5 September 1969, pp. 33-34; Dwight Casimere, 'Harry Edwards: Black Student Revolt, Part II', *Muhammad Speaks*, 12 September 1969, pp. 27,30; 'White Sportswriter Relays Racist Plan to Limit Number of Black Athletes in Colleges', *Muhammad Speaks*, 5 January 1969, p. 24; 'Black College Athlete Official Hits NCAA Drive to Silence Young Athletes', *Muhammad Speaks*, 31 January 1969, p. 32.

35. 'Joe Louis Joins Heavyweight Boxing Champion: Happy I'm in His Comer, Says Joe', *Muhammad Speaks*, 21 January 1966, p. 9. For other articles that mention Main Bout, Inc. see 'Muhammad Set to Sign for 3rd Defense of Crown', *Muhammad Speaks*, 4 February 1966, p. 9; 'World Tour on Agenda of Champ Muhammad', *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 February 1966, p. 9; 'Muhammad, Main Bout, Inc., Moving on to Victory', *Muhammad Speaks*, 18 February 1966, p. 9.

36. 'Champ Seeking New World to Conquer After Folley', *Muhammad Speaks*, 31 March 1967, p. 9.

37. 'Muhammad's 5 Title Fights Closes Most Spectacular Year in Ring History', *Muhammad Speaks*, 30 December 1966, p. 7. This article is one example of the power Herbert Muhammad was given with Ali's career, saying that the fighter's affairs would be 'under the scrutiny of Herbert Muhammad'.

38. 'Champ Geared for Crucial Astrodome test With Deadly-Puncher Williams', *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 November 1966, p. 8.

39. 'Champion and New Manager Take Time Out to Offer Thanks to Worldwide Fans', *Muhammad Speaks*, 18 November 1966, p. 9. For more on Ali as a minister, see 'World Champion Moves Step Closer to Full-Time Task as Muhammad's Minister', *Muhammad*

Speaks, 3 March 1967, p. 7; 'It is the task I am best suited for and it is as a minister that I look forward, in the near future, to assume my duties in comradeship with my brothers and sisters for the remainder of my life', 'Muhammad-Terrell Fight Set World Record', *Muhammad Speaks*, 16 December 1966.

40. 'Critics Pay Homage to the Champ: Muhammad Has Praise for Chuvalo', *Muhammad Speaks*, 8 April 1966, pp. 5-6.

41. Charles P. Howard, Sr, 'On Tour With Ali: Egypt Thanks Messenger!', *Muhammad Speaks*, 3 July 1964, p. 4.

42. Jack Olsen, 'Part 4: A Case of Conscience: Learning Elijah's Lesson in Hate', *Sports Illustrated*, 2 May 1966, Vol. 24, No. 18, p. 52.

43. 'The World Salutes a Real Champ, Muhammad Ali', *Muhammad Speaks*, 4 June 1965, p. 8

44. 'Muslim View: Muhammad-Chuvalo Fight', *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 April 1966, p. 5.

45. Muhammad Ali, 'Muhammad Ali: Allah and His Messenger the True Source of My Strength, Power', *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 April 1966, p. 5.

46. 'How Harlem Hailed the Messenger of Allah', *Muhammad Speaks*, 17 July 1964, p. 3.

47. *Muhammad Speaks*, 26 February 1965, p. 4.

48. *Muhammad Speaks*, 27 October 1965, p. 9.

49. 'Muhammad Ali's Triumphs in '65 Great, But 1966 Portends Even Greater', *Muhammad Speaks*, 7 January 1966, p. 9.

50. 'From the Camp of the Champ', *Muhammad Speaks*, 25 March 1965, p. 9. The newspaper covers Ali's fights during the 1960s, including Ali and his opponents: Ali vs. Sonny Liston, 25 February 1964, Miami Beach; 25 May 1965, Lewiston, Maine; Floyd Patterson, 22 November 1965, Las Vegas; George Chuvalo, 29 March 1966, Toronto; Henry Cooper, 21 May 1966, London, England; Brian London, 6 August 1966, London, England; Karl Mildenerger, 10 September 1966, Frankfurt, Germany; Cleveland Williams, 14 November 1966, Houston; Ernie Terrell, 7 February 1967, Houston; Zora Folley, 22 March 1967, New York.

51. Elijah Muhammad, Messenger of Allah, 'We Tell the World We're Not with Muhammad Ali', *Muhammad Speaks*, 4 April 1969; 'Clarification of Actions taken by Messenger Muhammad Against Muhammad Ali's Actions', *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 April 1969, pp. 2-3; John Ali, *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 April 1969, p. 3; Herbert Muhammad, *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 April 1969, p. 3. Also, see Wiggins, 'Victory for Allah', 102-103.

52. Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad*, 67.

53. Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad*, 68. Cited in Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* (London: Robson Books, 1991) 167.

54. Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad*, 64.