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“... And Still Heavyweight Champion of the World, . . .”

In 1949, I guess it was, at the age of 5, I noticed a curious construction at the corner of Second and Floyd in downtown Louisville. It was a television tower going up, my father told me, and I was at once tickled to see acrobats doing somersaults and head stands at the top of the tower many meters in the air. WAVE TV was trying to interest people in the new phenomenon that was television.

It wasn't that long until we had our own television set, only a few weeks after dad's older brother Joe got his. And it wasn't much longer before I was planted before the huge TV console in our living room, every Saturday evening from 6 to 7 o'clock, my dinner on a TV tray. Originating from Columbia Gym in downtown Louisville was a live amateur boxing show, "Tomorrow's Champions". Whoever devised the name of the show was much more prescient than he could have realized as two eventual champions emerged from the show, which featured young boys of Golden Glove age exercising their pugilistic skills for the cameras.

Of course, the star of the show was a handsome youngster named Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. Young Cassius had become interested in boxing at the age of 12 when he complained to a local cop about someone stealing his bike. When he told policeman Joe Martin that he wanted to whoop the thief, the enterprising Martin, who ran an amateur boxing program, encouraged Cassius to learn something about boxing. And he did. Cassius won over a hundred fights as a Golden Glover, losing only 5, and by the age of 22, he was the world heavyweight champion.

Like many others in the Louisville of the 1950s and 60s, I followed the career of Cassius Clay assiduously. Sports wise and in many other respects, the Louisville of those days had little to recommend it beyond the Kentucky Derby, and Cassius was refreshingly big time. It made us

giddy with civic delight. Cassius not only was a Golden Glove Champion, he was the light heavyweight Olympic Champion, winning the Gold Medal at the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome.

Once Cassius came home from the 1960 Olympics, it was time to turn professional. It is interesting to note that he was originally sponsored by something called the Louisville Sponsoring Group. This was a group of 11 wealthy benefactors, all white, most young, who bankrolled Cassius and attempted to manage his money for him under the aegis of lawyer Gordon Davidson, at one point managing partner of the firm that eventually became Wyatt, Tarrant and Combs. However, even then, to this 16 year old observer, the whole arrangement was redolent of the racial paternalism of the plantation South. Despite what some call the unusual optics of a group of affluent white men backing a black teenager embarking on a boxing career, there are those, including people associated with the Louisville Sponsoring Group, who feel that they had Clay's best interests at heart.

And there were many of us Louisvillians who had Clay's best interests at heart in those days. Cassius was brought along slowly, making his professional debut on October 29, 1960, winning a six-round decision over a journeyman named Tunney Hunsaker. From then until the end of 1963, Cassius and his handlers embarked on what Ring Magazine might have called a "bum of the month club" as he racked up 19 straight wins, 15 of them by KO. He defeated many otherwise un-noteworthy boxers, but also a few names that I had heard as a young boxing fan, including Alonzo Johnson, Willi Besmanoff, and Henry Cooper. I will never forget listening to the Henry Cooper fight which took place in the exotic town of London, England, hearing the strange accents of the English announcers referring to Clay as that "terrible man" as he pounded Cooper into a pulp after early difficulties, the Englishman's blood streaming everywhere.

At the time, Clay was not a terribly popular fighter outside Louisville. He habitually belittled his opponents and vaunted his own abilities. Despite the fact that he had a very tough fight with Doug Jones in 1963, almost losing, he had noted that Jones was “an ugly little man”. He described veteran boxer Henry Cooper as a “bum” and stated that he was embarrassed to get into the ring with Argentine Alex Miteff, nevertheless a boxer of some distinction. He habitually called the round in which he would knock his opponent out, and often got it right.

But even at that stage, and despite his lack of universal popularity, Clay attracted a host of interesting people from varied backgrounds who were totally devoted to him. We will stop to examine a few of these notable specimens as we go through this paper. It is time right here for the first.

Round 1 – Angelo Dundee. Born Angelo Mirena, Angelo Dundee was an expert boxing trainer and astute corner man. He worked with 16 world boxing champions, including Sugar Ray Leonard, George Foreman, Jimmy Ellis, Carmen Basilio, and Willie Pastrano. Of course, his most famous client was Cassius Clay. Dundee traveled the world with Clay, later Ali, and was his corner man in all but two of his fights. Throughout his career, Dundee was widely respected as a decent, honorable man in a corrupt sport. Perhaps the greatest tribute to Dundee was paid by legendary sports announcer Howard Cosell, who said “If I had a son who wanted to be a fighter and I couldn’t talk him out of it, the only man I would let train him is Angelo Dundee.”

He lived to the ripe old age of 90. Long out of the fight game, he died of natural causes on February 1, 2012 in Tampa, Florida, passing peacefully in his sleep at a senior residence home. Three weeks before his death, he had attended Muhammad Ali’s 70th birthday party in Louisville. To the end, he referred to Ali as “my kid.”

The short bio of Dundee is a good teaser for our description of Clay's first big fight. By late 1963, Clay had become the top challenger for the heavyweight title. The current holder of the crown was a gentleman named Sonny Liston. An intimidating personality, Liston was a dominating fighter who had a criminal past, with ties to the mob. Only recently, Liston had destroyed former heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson in two first round knockouts, and after Clay's less than overwhelming performances against Doug Jones and Henry Cooper, Clay was a 7 to 1 underdog for the Liston matchup. Despite this, Clay taunted Liston, calling him a "big ugly bear" and declared that "After I beat him, I am going to donate him to the zoo." For the first time he declared that he would "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee". Clay turned the pre-fight weigh-in into a circus. Back home in Louisville, listening to the radio reports of the weigh in, I was worried. All of us were stunned by Clay's antics. He shouted at Liston that someone was going to die at ringside that night. During the weigh in, his pulse rate raced to 120, more than double his usual 54. Anti-Clay commentators opined that Clay was paralyzed with fear and wondered if he would bother showing up for the bout.

Of course, he did. The outcome was a major upset. As with many of Clay's big fights, there was plenty of controversy generated by questionable activity in the ring. After two see-saw opening rounds, in Round 3 Clay landed a combination on Liston, buckling his knees, and opening a cut under his left eye, the first cut that Liston had ever suffered in the ring. However, at the end of Round 4, as Clay returned to his corner, he began experiencing what he described as blinding pain. It has been speculated that the problem was due to ointment used to seal Liston's cuts, perhaps deliberately applied by his corner to his gloves. Clay panicked. He asked Dundee to cut off his gloves. Dundee refused. As the bell rang for Round 5, Clay refused to get up. Dundee had to push him off his chair into the ring. Clay was able to survive the fifth round by dancing around

with his superior mobility and speed until sweat and tears rinsed the irritation from his eyes. He landed good combinations at the end of the round. In the sixth, Clay dominated, hitting Liston repeatedly. Surprisingly, Liston did not answer the bell for the seventh round, and Clay was the winner by TKO.

After a hysterical performance in the ring at fight's end, including repeated proclamation that "I am the Greatest," all was well. Cassius Clay was world heavyweight Champion. But the dream lasted only a few weeks. All of white Louisville was shocked and surprised to learn that Clay had changed his name to Muhammad Ali, converted to Islam and affiliated with an anti-white group called The Nation of Islam. I can remember my father, seldom a prejudiced or unfair man, angrily declaring that Clay and The Nation of Islam were a bunch of stupid fools.

At any rate, a re-match between Liston and newly christened Muhammad Ali was eventually scheduled for the unlikely venue of Lewiston, Maine. First postponed for Ali's emergency appendicitis, the fight eventually took place. Only two minutes into the first round, Liston went down. Referee former champion Jersey Joe Walcott was so surprised when Liston fell that he didn't begin the count. Liston rose after he had been on the mat for 20 seconds, and the fight momentarily continued. But a few seconds later, Walcott stopped the match, declaring Ali the winner by knock out. Legendary boxing writer Red Smith opined that he hadn't seen a punch from Ali that could squash a grape, much less knock Liston out. Slow motion does show a punch landing, but it is impossible to tell how heavy it actually was.

After these interesting but somewhat questionable matches, Ali fought and humiliated former champ Floyd Patterson. He toyed with him for an interminable 12 rounds before winning by decision hitting Patterson continually, enough to torture him, but not knock him out. His clowning and taunting of the popular Patterson was criticized by many in the sports media.

In February, 1966, draft board 43 in Louisville, the same draft board that almost managed to nab me for service in Vietnam, changed Ali's classification to 1A from 1Y. Ali indicated that he would refuse to serve, commenting to the press, "I ain't got nothing against no Viet Cong; no Viet Cong never called me nigger."

Feeling the public heat, Ali fought abroad in Europe and Canada, but returned late in the year to fight again in the USA. In 1967, after several more title defenses, he was summarily stripped of his title due to his refusal to be drafted into Army service. His boxing license was suspended by New York State. He was convicted of draft evasion in June of that year and sentenced to five years in prison and a ten thousand dollar fine. He remained free on bail while appealing the verdict. As a result, he didn't fight from March, 1967 to October, 1970 – that is from the age of 25 to almost 29. Angelo Dundee and others commented that because of this he lost his best years in the ring.

Eventually, his case worked its way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. His conviction was overturned in a unanimous 8-0 ruling and he regained his license. He was not any more popular then than he had been before he lost it. I can well remember watching his first fight back in the ring. By this time, I was an English professor at Skidmore in Saratoga Springs, New York. I am told that I had a huge picture of Ali on the wall of my office, although I must confess that I have no recollection of that whatsoever.

At any rate, at the end of his first fight back, which Ali won convincingly, I went downtown to the news stand where I had an account with the local book maker and overheard a local Saratoga citizen state that in the fight "Ali didn't show me nothin". However, Ali had a couple of other impressive tune-ups, and a fight was scheduled for him with then heavyweight champion Smokin' Joe Frazier. The first of the three almost mythical Ali-Frazier fights was held at Madison Square

Garden on March 8, 1971. I saw the fight via closed circuit TV at The Palace Theater in Albany, New York along with two other young Skidmore College colleagues. We three shaggy would be intellectuals made our way into the Palace Theater along with an almost hysterical mob of whites and blacks and watched what many have considered the fight of the century, a judgment with which I cannot disagree.

Of course, pre-fight Ali had taunted Frazier stating that he was too dumb to be champ and referring to him as an Uncle Tom. We listened to what we could hear over the roar of the crowd – that is, very little - of the call of the fight by Don Dunfey with color commentary by actor Burt Lancaster and saw a wing ding thriller that went the full 15 rounds. In the final round, Frazier sealed the victory, knocking Ali down with a vicious left hook. Referee Arthur Mercante later said that the shot was as hard as a man can be hit. Ali was back on his feet in 3 seconds, but it was too late. Frazier clearly won by unanimous decision. It was Ali's first professional defeat.

Round 2 - Drew Bundini Brown. Along with Dundee, in Ali's corner that night, as in almost all of his fights, was Drew Bundini Brown. Born in 1928, Brown joined the Navy as a mess boy at age 13 in 1941. He was discharged two years later and spent 12 years in the United States Merchant Marine knocking around the globe. Later he hooked on with Sugar Ray Robinson as a corner man. In 1963, he joined the Ali entourage and he remained with Ali throughout his career. Bundini was also Ali's principal shaman and speechwriter. It was he who coined the famous and often quoted "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, your hands can't hit what your eyes can't see". At each of Ali's fights, Bundini could be seen in the corner immediately behind the champ, massaging his shoulders and whispering in his ear. It was he who helped put Ali into the focus, the trance in which he fought his fights. Much later, after a desultory career in the

movies, Bundini Brown died in 1987 from the after effects of a car accident. He was 59. Ali visited him on his deathbed.

Ali fought a number of fights after the loss to Frazier, looking for another shot at the title. Unfortunately, at the end of 1973 Frazier had lost his title to a younger fighter named George Foreman. This set up a lucrative re-match between Frazier and Ali, with the winner to get the shot at Foreman. After another see-saw struggle, Ali this time came away with a unanimous decision after 12 rounds of hand to hand combat.

The defeat of Frazier set the stage for a title fight against Foreman. The fight was to take place in Kinshasa, Zaire on October 30, 1974. Always with an ear for alliteration, Ali and one guesses Bundini Brown, dubbed the fight the “Rumble in the Jungle.” While George Foreman is now quite a happy and benign pitchman for Invent Help and electric grills, at the time he was a brooding and forbidding presence. He was favored to beat Ali, who by this time was 32 and had clearly lost the speed and reflexes that had served him well in his 20’s.

After Ali opened the fight moving and scoring with right crosses to Foreman’s head, beginning in the second round, to the consternation of Dundee, Bundini and the others in his corner, Ali retreated to the ropes and invited Foreman to pound him while he covered up. This move which Ali dubbed the “Rope-a-Dope”, was a direct violation of conventional boxing wisdom. Not knowing what was going on, Foreman became increasingly angry and threw punches indiscriminately. Midway through the fight, Foreman began to tire. At that point, sensing an opening, Ali countered more frequently and effectively with counterpunches and flurries. In the eighth round, Ali dropped the exhausted Foreman at mid-center ring with a combination. Foreman didn’t make the count. Ali had regained the title by knock out. I must admit that I heard the news of this surprising victory over the radio while entwined on her living room floor with Susan who

is now my wife of 40 years. The sports report interrupting our mood music capped what was already a perfect evening. As Foreman later admitted about that night, “Muhammad outthought me and outfought me”. There is an entertaining and informative movie about this fight that you can catch on Netflix – “When We Were Kings.” I recommend it.

After three more bum of the month style fights, Ali agreed to a third match with Joe Frazier. This bout, known as the “Thrilla in Manila” was held on October 1, 1975 in sweltering heat in the Philippines. Ali adopted the Rope-a-Dope again and did some effective counterpunching, for the most part absorbing punishment in the middle rounds from a relentlessly attacking Frazier. However, like Foreman, Frazier began to tire. In the 12th round Ali commenced to conduct target practice on Frazier’s head. At the end of the 14th round, Frazier’s trainer, Eddie Futch, refused to allow Frazier to answer the bell for the last round, despite Frazier’s protests. Smokin’ Joe’s eyes were both swollen shut. In his corner, Ali slumped on a stool, clearly spent. After the fight, Ali said the fight was the “closest thing to dying that I know.” Later, asked if he wanted to view the fight on video tape, he reportedly said, “Why would I want to go back and see hell.”

In 41 rounds of furious combat, neither Frazier nor Ali had ever knocked the other out. It was one of the greatest series of fights of all time. Neither ever achieved that level of prowess again.

Round 3 - Howard Cosell. Born Howard William Cohen on March 25, 1918, Howard Cosell was as he said of himself “Arrogant, pompous, obnoxious, vain, cruel, verbose, a showoff. There is no question that I am all of those things.” He was, perhaps, the primary sports announcer of his age, and he was never afraid, as he said, to call things as he saw them, although as one critic noted, “Here was a man who changed his name from Cohen to Cosell and always wore a toupee, and yet he was busy telling it like it is.”

Unlike many in the boxing community and the sports world in general, Cosell always stood by Ali. Cosell always called him Ali, even when some refused to recognize his name change from the “slave name of Clay” to the name he wanted, “Ali”. Cosell rose to prominence covering Ali. Despite having markedly different personalities, the two had an affinity. Cosell called most of Ali’s fights immediately before and after Ali returned from his three-year exile in October 1970. Cosell earned his greatest interest from the public when he backed Ali after Ali’s championship title was stripped from him for refusing military service. Cosell found vindication several years later when he was the one who was able to tell Muhammad that the U.S. Supreme Court had unanimously ruled in his favor in Clay v. United States.

Cosell also earned fame as a color commentator on Monday Night Football, regaling sports loving America on Monday night for years, dishing out acid commentary seated between the ex-football players he professed to disdain, Frank Gifford and “Dandy Don” Meredith. However, nothing in his career of notable moments in sports broadcasting surpassed his long and faithful friendship with the man who was his friend to the end, the Jew from Winston Salem, North Carolina and the Muslim from Louisville, Kentucky.

In the years that followed, Ali lost and won the title a third time and his career petered out. By the age of 40, he was finished as a boxer and it was obvious that there was something physically wrong with him. He was diagnosed with Parkinson’s syndrome in 1984. His athletic career came to an end, with all its controversial moments and the hiatus caused by his criminal conviction and the stripping of his title and boxing license. His stock with the public experienced a steady rise culminating in the antithesis that we only recently saw with his death.

I must confess that I lost track of Ali somewhere in the 80s. By this time, I was a hardworking young lawyer in Cincinnati, busy with that and raising a family. I was stunned and

reacted a tad cynically to the sight of Islamic Ali haltingly carrying the Olympic torch to its stand to start the 1996 Atlanta Olympics here in the good old USA. That sight got me thinking about some issues that have become increasingly important in American life, especially recently. As I write these words for the first time on December 14, 2016, I ask myself what changes in the struggle between Islam and the West will have occurred, for better or more probably for worse by the time you hear this paper.

I note that the December 25, 2016 issue of the New York Times Magazine had a year-end section on notable figures who had died during the year. Prefacing the short bios of the several greats, famous and infamous decedents was an iconic picture of Ali in fighting gear with no text whatsoever, while an anecdote about Ali's heroism followed. I ascribed the stark picture to the murky mist that shrouds Ali and his memory, to my mind as impenetrable as the fog of misunderstanding and hatred that shrouds the relationship of the western world and the Muslim world, now exacerbated by the ignorant pronouncements of the person disgracefully elected our 45th President.

Clay/Ali was a complex person. Like his unlikely Jewish friend Cosell, he was in his youth vain, boastful, violent, abusive. He was married four times, had nine children, including two from extramarital relationships. He refused national service (being vindicated by an unanimous U.S. Supreme Court) and affiliated with a religion now reviled by many in the U.S., hatred for it being fanned by the intemperate pronouncements emanating from the White House.

And yet one must understand the fear and hatred that infect a sizable portion, but not a majority of our fellow citizens. The current enmity between East and West is but another round in a heavy weight struggle that is now some 1,400 years old. Some snapshots follow.

Round 4 – Charles Martel. Having arisen in the deserts of Arabia in the 7th century of our era, Islam was from the beginning a proselytizing religion. It spread like a rising tidal wave across North Africa, through Spain, and even into Southern France. At the Battle of Tours near Poitiers in October, 732 Charles Martel (the “Hammer”), won the first round of the ongoing struggle, defeating a large army of Spanish Moors, which halted the Muslim advance into Western Europe. Abd-ar-Rahaman, the Muslim governor of Cordoba was killed in the fighting and the Moors retreated from Southern Gaul, never to return in such force. Western Europe north of the Pyrenees was preserved from Islamic dominance. Martel went on to father a line that included Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Emperor.

Nevertheless, the spread of Islam continued. The Turks ate away at the Eastern Roman Empire, with Constantinople, rechristened Istanbul falling in 1453. The second great defeat of the East occurred on October 7, 1571 on the northern edge of the Gulf of Corinth, off Western Greece.

Round 5 – Don John of Austria. At the Battle of Lepanto, the ships of a coalition of European Catholic maritime states, forged by Pope Pius V and led by the Spanish Admiral Don John of Austria decisively defeated the fleet of the Ottoman Empire.

This signal defeat, as emblematic as it was physically telling thwarted Ottoman advance further along the European shore of the Mediterranean. Even though the battle was the last great clash fought entirely between galleys, it had many characteristics that we can recognize and perhaps learn from today. Things such as broken promises, betrayal, brutality, meaningless cruelty, beheading.

During the leadup to the actual battle the Turks had captured Famagusta in Cyprus. Promised safe passage off the island, the Venetian garrison was instead imprisoned. The Venetian

Commander Marco Antonio Bragadan was then flayed alive and his corpse hung on the Turkish admiral's galley along with the heads of three other Venetian commanders.

Not to be outdone, when the Spanish took the Ottoman Commander's galley during the sea battle, the Ottoman Admiral Ali Pasha was captured, killed and beheaded, against the wishes of Don John. His severed head displayed on a pike on the Spanish flagship contributed greatly to the loss of morale of the Turks, and the battle was lost. Don John, bastard brother of Phillip II of Spain, died at age 31 of typhoid. He never achieved his dream – to become a king in his own right.

Thus we see, even if we choose not to believe, that there is great cruelty to be seen on every level and both sides of this ancient struggle. We could go on for many minutes – but will not – about other great bloody clashes between East and West. Amazingly the City of Vienna was besieged by the Turks three times, in 1529, 1638, and last in 1683, when settlement of our continent was well underway.

There is plenty of precedent for what we see going on in the world around us. We can shake our heads and say (as I often have) “This violence has been going on for over a thousand years, nothing can stop it.” And yet I stop and think and see something about our modern-day struggle that differs from the long history of conflict just discussed. From Tours to Lepanto to Vienna, the Muslim world has been beaten back after its attempts to expand sparked by the proselytizing fervor of new religion.

Today's struggle has a different source. In my opinion, the Muslim world is now nursing a never healing wound, inflicted in the various battles we have described, defeat after defeat, but exacerbated by the West's outstripping the East in science and technology. Much is said about this in some of the novels of the Nobel Laureate, the Turk, Orhan Pamuk, especially in his astonishingly perceptive novel, Snow. An astute reader can get a good look at the Muslim psyche

in this one book – but in others of Pamuk’s output as well. But this feeling of social inferiority has been deepened by recent, unfortunate events.

Round 6 – George W. Bush. The current upsurge of the centuries of hatred stems from our intrusion into Muslim countries in two wars over the past 35 years, wars the Muslim countries humiliatingly lost. It was the latter incursion that will have a more lasting effect. It does not help that these countries were formed by Western decree with artificial borders after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. Of course the insulted and injured Muslims have retaliated and of course westerners are uneasy over all the senseless violence in which thousands of innocent Christians, Muslims, Jews, Coptics, Syrians have lost their homes and their lives. No wonder that some would rashly and imprudently call for bans on all Muslims, in one form or another. Yet, if so imposed, the bans will only lead to continuing cycles of violence. George W. Bush left the Presidency in 2008, after coming close to presiding over a global financial collapse. He developed skills as a fine portrait and still life painter and is now assured of never being considered the worst President of the United States.

How to stop the unstoppable? There are answers, and I propose one tonight. It is the answer to another question, that takes us back to the central figure of the paper. The question: why does not the ban on Muslims, the hatred of Muslims apply to the late Muhammad Ali? Unlike his unlucky son, he would never have been denied air passage. When Ali died he was a figure almost universally revered; a black man and a Muslim, an American who refused to fight for America against a Communist, Asiatic, though not Muslim enemy, and yet a revered hero.

I believe that a look at this iconic figure of the sports world and even of modern American life gives us some answers to the dilemmas facing us today. While Ali was a Muslim, he learned how not to be a hater. From the very beginning, he understood the true meaning of civil

disobedience as espoused by Mahatma Gandhi and later picked up by Martin Luther King, Jr. Most honor civil disobedience more in the breach than the observance. As Gandhi and King both actually taught, civil disobedience entails refusal to adhere to unjust laws, but not active resistance to them. The silent witness of the objectors to the laws whether fined, imprisoned or not eventually corrodes and breaks down the injustice of the laws themselves. We saw that successfully achieved in South Africa where apartheid amazingly melted away, with a peaceful shift from colonial to indigenous rule, thanks to the example of another subscriber to civil disobedience, Nelson Mandela. While Ali refused to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, claiming conscientious objector status, he did not actively resist the law. He was not a flame thrower. He gave the laws grudging but quiet obedience and never lost his identity as an American. Hence his ability to represent all Americans at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, without objection so far as I can recall from any quadrant.

Furthermore, while a man who made his living in a very violent sport, he grew into a man of peace, espousing tolerance for men and women of all nations on his various junkets in later years, espousing peace and understanding. He moved away from the crude pronouncements of the Nation of Islam, becoming a Sunni Muslim for some time and then picking up the preachings of the Sufi Muslim tradition in his final years. Sufism is the inner mystical dimension of Islam. Practitioners of Sufism, Sufis, belong to different orders formed around a grand master who traces a direct chain of teachers back to Muhammad himself. The orders meet for spiritual sessions and strive for perfection of worship. They are characterized by asceticism, devoted to repetitious prayer. They espouse reaction against the worldliness of other branches of Islam, focusing on the more spiritual aspects of religion. Sufis strive to obtain direct experience of God by making use

of their intuitive and emotional faculties. Thus in his final days, Ali had affiliated himself with an interior branch of his faith not one concerned with proselytizing and conversion by fire and sword.

Such interior practice would be good for practitioners of all religions today, Muslims, Christians, Jews. There is far too much overt violence, overt vying for position and for mental and territorial control.

In another dimension, even earlier in his career, Ali showed his respect for others with the staging of his fights in such exotic locales as Kinshasa, Zaire; and Manila, the Philippines. In the run up to those titanic struggles he demonstrated his caring for and allegiance to all the peoples of the world. It was not only the high rollers of Las Vegas, Hollywood and New York who were entitled to see heavyweight fights. They were events to be shared among all humanity. As black men, Ali, and his opponents, Foreman, Frazier were taking themselves back to ancient roots showing off their muscular skill and courage to those who have had nothing but their bodies and their endurance to combat the mean lives endemic to the third world.

For all his faults, Ali related to and empathized with people from all faiths and walks of life. He was a close friend with the Catholic Dundee, with the almost animist, African tribalist Bundini Brown, with the Jew Cosell, with many others.

Despite his travels around the world, and despite his embracing of many other cultures, Ali never lost sight of or love for his roots. Born poor in Louisville, Kentucky, and moving away from the city as his career blossomed, in his later days, he bought a large farm on the eastern side of the city, hard against, I imagine, the ancestral properties of the grandees of colonial Louisville, who live in Prospect, in Anchorage and in Oldham County on the east side of town. When he died last year, after the parade of his funeral cortege through the streets of Louisville, he was laid to rest in Cave Hill Cemetery, the Louisville equivalent of our own Spring Grove, just as beautiful, although

with more magnolias and other flora appropriate to the southern city that Louisville remains. (I assure you he could not have been buried there the year he was born.)

Now we are on the verge of yet another heavy weight struggle of titanic proportions between West and East. Will we follow in the path of ignorant opposition to everything that the East stands for and espouses? Will we meet Eastern hostility and brutality with brutality and hostility of our own? Will we overlook the causes of the current hostility that can be laid at our feet, not at the feet of those we consider our enemies? What have we done ourselves to cause these problems? Like our deceased heavyweight champion, can we remain true to ourselves while accepting something of good that emanates from the other?

These are perilous times. The world is far different from the one the five-year-old boy saw from the backseat of his dad's primitive 1949 Chevrolet, with acrobats balanced on a primitive TV tower high above downtown Louisville. With technology and armaments of enormous potential for both good and ill, will the winner and still heavyweight champion of the world be the mayhem and death that has broken out so many times, too many times, over the last 1,400 years, or will we turn to a message of love and understanding espoused, even with all his imperfections, by my fellow Louisvillian, Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr. reborn Muhammad Ali?

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