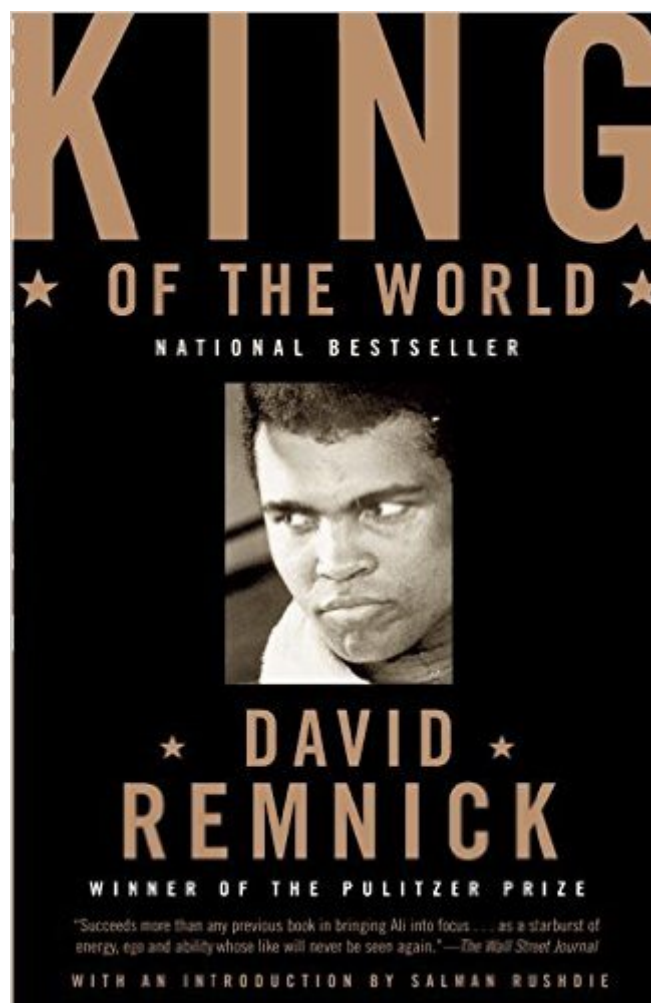


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King Of The World: Muhammad Ali And The Rise Of An American Hero



Synopsis

With an Introduction by Salman Rushdie On the night in 1964 that Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) stepped into the ring with Sonny Liston, he was widely regarded as an irritating freak who danced and talked way too much. Six rounds later Ali was not only the new world heavyweight boxing champion: He was "a new kind of black man" who would shortly transform America's racial politics, its popular culture, and its notions of heroism. No one has captured Ali--and the era that he exhilarated and sometimes infuriated--with greater vibrancy, drama, and astuteness than David Remnick, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Lenin's Tomb* (and editor of *The New Yorker*). In charting Ali's rise from the gyms of Louisville, Kentucky, to his epochal fights against Liston and Floyd Patterson, Remnick creates a canvas of unparalleled richness. He gives us empathetic portraits of wisecracking sportswriters and bone-breaking mobsters; of the baleful Liston and the haunted Patterson; of an audacious Norman Mailer and an enigmatic Malcolm X. Most of all, *King of the World* does justice to the speed, grace, courage, humor, and ebullience of one of the greatest athletes and irresistibly dynamic personalities of our time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

David Remnick delivers a terrific biography of Muhammad Ali with "King of the World," but this book should never be mistaken for a conventional sports biography. It is also social history and a compassionate yet realistic portrait of America's guiltiest pleasure: the seamy, yet somehow sometimes heroic world of professional boxing. The first thing that struck me when I read the book is

that its first section discusses Muhammad Ali (or Cassius Clay) very little. Instead, Remnick focuses on the two boxers who helped to give shape to Ali's legend: Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston. The former was a reluctant champion from the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, and Remnick brings Patterson's reticence and self-doubt into full view. The latter was a street thug from an impoverished rural background, a vision of America's deepest fears about African-Americans. Remnick details Liston's two devastating first-round demolitions of Patterson and illuminates the complicated relationship the public had with Liston. On the one hand, he was despised because of his criminal background and ties to the mob; on the other, Remnick makes clear, he was comforting because he confirmed stereotyped perceptions of black men. One of Remnick's great accomplishments in the book is to humanize Liston without in the least diminishing his surly and even hateful demeanor. With Liston the controversial heavyweight champ, the loud, abrasive, seemingly self-confident Cassius Clay, of Louisville, Kentucky, stepped into the national spotlight.

Pivoting on the Ali-Liston fight, Remnick shapes a narrative that comes very close to rising to the transcendental dimensions that Ali's heroic and mythical life requires. It is a story of such poetic proportions that we all know it well: It is the story of a little black boy from Louisville, Kentucky who got his bike stolen, and as a result ended up in a boxing gym so that he could learn to fight well enough to be able to take his bike back from the bully that had stolen it. This little black boy would go on to become the King of the world. It turns out that the bully in question was not just your familiar neighborhood bike thief, but Ali's own racist nation. Ali's life has become nothing if not a living metaphor of how a single moral individual should fight a thief and rapist as big and as formidable as one's own country. And racist America was a thief and a rapist -- not just one trying to steal Cassius Clay's bike -- it was trying to steal something much more important and valuable. America tried desperately, as it has succeeded doing with most black men, to steal Ali's manhood too. But try as it might -- stripping him of his chance at the title during his best years, of his means of economic survival, in trying to jail him -- it failed. Sadly, the part of the story that Remnick got wrong was the only important part: claiming that it was Ali who had re-created himself to suit the requirements of racist America instead of the other way around? Ali did no such thing! To suggest so, is not just an implicit lie; it is an explicit lie as well.

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