



Ghosts of Manila: The Fateful Blood Feud Between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier

By Mark Kram Jr.

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Mark Kram covered that fight for *Sports Illustrated* in an award-winning article. Now his riveting book reappraises the boxers -- who they are and who they were. And in a voice as powerful as a heavyweight punch, Kram explodes the myths surrounding each fighter, particularly Ali. A controversial, no-holds-barred account, *Ghosts of Manila* ranks with the finest boxing books ever written.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Muhammad Ali once admitted to former *Sports Illustrated* writer Mark Kram that he and Joe Frazier went to Manila for the third of their three epic fights "as champions and we came back as old men." Boxing is a particularly unforgiving sport for old men, especially those--as Kram tells us in *Ghosts of Manila*, his thoroughly riveting account of one of the Sweet Science's greatest rivalries--"with too much pride, heart, and unexamined confidence for their own well-being." Which defines Ali and Frazier's essential characters in a nutshell.

Kram begins his saga in the present, looking at the different kinds of isolation that currently surround each man's life, then dances back and forth through time to spar with just who these warriors have been and how they came to be the icons, for better or worse, they became. *Ghosts of Manila* is more than a twin biography, though; it is an often haunting meditation on how much we project onto our athletes, and how destructive the projections can be. As much as any punishment sustained in three of the most brutal title fights in heavyweight history, the baggage--personal and societal--that Ali and Frazier carried into and out of the ring changed them physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Did Ali earn all the love? Did Frazier deserve all the scorn? To answer the questions, Kram bravely goes toe to toe with Ali worship and Ali's myth. His daring rewards us with knockout profiles of two legends more complex and real than mere iconography might allow. --Jeff Silverman

From Publishers Weekly

Kram, who covered boxing for *Sports Illustrated* for more than a decade, tells the story of Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali's epic 1975 Manila fight, and the bitter and complex rivalry between the two men that preceded it. He begins his story when the men, both black Southerners, are isolated and in retirement. Ali calls Manila "the greatest fight" of his life, while Frazier remains obsessively consumed by his hatred of Ali. Kram is intent on undoing the media "romance history" of Ali as civil rights hero; "hagiographers," he writes, "never tire of trying to persuade us that he ranked second only to Martin Luther King, but... Ali was not a social force." Frazier and Ali began as friends, but professional competition and divergent views on race turned theirs into a rivalry that had a lasting effect on professional sport and perhaps changed the meaning of race, especially for African-Americans, in postwar America. Kram explores the fighters' serial wives and mixed-up families, as well as their shifting, hunting packs of managers and assistants Ali's Black Muslim handlers in particular ("They were into profit and running things like Papa Doc was running Haiti"). Describing the powerful title event, Kram's prose is heavy with metaphors, not all of them helpful ("Ali's legs searched for the floor like one of Baudelaire's lost balloons"), and some of the narrative reads like his earlier accounts of the fights pasted together. Still, overall this is a daring, intelligent and well-observed piece of sportswriting. (May)Forecast: Boxing is reclaiming its popularity. Author appearances in New York and Washington, D.C., along with a 50-city radio campaign, should help this fine book attract attention.

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From Library Journal

Kram, a former *Sports Illustrated* writer whose account of the 1975 Ali-Frazier "Thrilla in Manila" is acknowledged as the finest deadline boxing piece ever turned in, has watched Muhammad Ali's painful deterioration and sanctification by the press ever since. The book is built around the celebrated Ali-Frazier

rivalry and its costs to both men. Kram's accounts of their three great battles are terrific literary set pieces that call on all his old skills. In between, though, Ali fans must wade through one ugly anecdote after another specifically selected to counter Ali "hagiography" and David Remnick's 1999 portrait of him as a kind of Civil Rights figure. Kram's Ali a racial ideologue, Muslim dupe, and chronic philanderer is not a guy you'd have light the Olympic Torch, and however true the book's simple thesis decent country boy Frazier scarred by the manipulative, cruel, name-calling Champ it was already advanced in Frazier's autobiography. Kram's book is alternately elegiac about the contests themselves and sourly dismissive of the surrounding goofy pageant of 1970s America. When Kram is not trading in dark gossip but reporting first-hand on their youthful ring clashes or his conflicted visits with the fighters since, his joy in writing resurfaces and his accumulated baggage is safely stowed away. For Frazier fans and all sports collections. Nathan Ward, "Library Journal"

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