



Bouts of Mania: Ali, Frazier, and Foreman--and an America on the Ropes

Richard Hoffer

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The fights resonate still: The Fight of the Century, Down Goes Frazier!, The Rumble in the Jungle, The Thrilla in Manila. And the fighters, too—MUHAMMAD ALI, JOE FRAZIER, GEORGE FOREMAN—three complicated and competitive men who happened to be vying for sport's biggest prize when boxing was still a national reassurance and its champion a cultural resource. They fought five times for that title, from 1971 to 1975, ranging across the globe, and their struggles, triumphs, and defeats echo through the years as well.

At the time, however accidental their convergence, it was an irreproducible pandemonium. Three of them? At once? Those fights made for a roiling and convulsive tournament, all the more striking against a backdrop of national dysfunction. Their competition—fighting each other in every possible combination, on nearly every possible continent, to nearly every possible outcome—mattered as much for the country's confidence as it did for deciding the titles at stake. In fact, their heroic efforts—global spectacles that offered brief glimpses of clarity and confidence—may have been the only thing that made sense back home during the social and political morass of the 1970s. This golden age of boxing reassured a shattered country that such fundamental, if sometimes elusive, qualities as courage and determination still mattered. And when it was all over, neither the contenders nor the rest of the world would ever be the same.

In *Bouts of Mania*, longtime *Sports Illustrated* writer Richard Hoffer evokes all the hopes and hoopla, the hype and hysteria of boxing's last and best "golden age."

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