From the Louisville Lip to the Champ: The Muhammad Ali Center and Planning with Memory Politics

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1   Muhammad Ali enjoys prolific national, even international, affection. Celebrated as an athlete, a humanitarian, and a leader, he was chosen to carry the inaugurating flame for the 1996 Olympics. The movie *Ali* earned both money and Oscar nominations in 2001. In 2000, the Kentucky legislature honored Ali as the "greatest athlete of all time."[1] His home city of Louisville named Ali as its most illustrious "native son."[2] All these honors and hundreds of others demonstrate the adoration of Ali and suggest his impact. Locally in Louisville and Kentucky, nationally in the United States, and globally, Ali has become one of the world's most famous figures of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[3]

2   In the Fall of 2005, the Muhammad Ali Center is to grace downtown Louisville as the foremost in a series of new attractions. The Center describes its focus as promoting peace and social responsibility. Its website proclaims that, "Headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, the city where Muhammad Ali's story began, the Muhammad Ali Center will serve as a place to celebrate the deeply rooted values and worldwide influence of Ali."[4] For Louisville, the Ali Center is to be a nexus of history, politics, culture, and social ideas.

3   This essay investigates Ali's civic popularity as manifest in the production of the Muhammad Ali Center. Its discursive construction of the Ali history elides elements of his and the city's past to drive social, economic, and urban "development." The center has tremendous potential for Louisville, yet the potential remains ironically underdeveloped. In mobilizing only a few aspects of Ali's manifold figure, the Center strips his history of its current political and cultural capital.[5]

Louisville as a Liminal City

4   Ali's figure in Louisville hinges on how Louisville positions itself as a certain kind of space for racial relations. Often Louisville has been addressed as a city divided, particularly between blacks and whites. In *Life Behind a Veil*, historian George C. Wright provides stories of African Americans in Louisville from 1865 to 1930. Wright argues that Louisville was a border city, placed physically and socially between the South and the North. In other words, Louisville occupied a liminal space between the ideologies of the South and the North. For Wright, such border cities often were more racist than cities deep in the South. But he argues that this increased racism was "polite."[6] As long as blacks remained in "their place," whites would have no reason to remind them of the place that blacks *should* occupy. The implication is that African Americans in Louisville as an American border city knew their place from Reconstruction to the Great Depression. This division kept Louisville's racial negotiations polite.

5   Indeed Wright explains economic, educational, occupational, and political structures of Louisville as providing for give-and-take between African Americans and Caucasian Americans. Citing the Louisville *Post* of May 22, 1893, Wright notes the story of an ex-slave, "Aunt Mildy," who reinforces this positioning of African Americans. She "knew her place" as an ex-slave and abhorred "highfalutin niggers."[7] Through such stories, Wright suggests that race relations were polite and conciliatory not only between whites and blacks but among blacks themselves. In this border city, racial positioning functioned to privilege the comforts of proper places.

6   Wright pictures Louisville as a place where race relations were performed as a kind of waltz. The dancers knew the proper steps, and they might frown on others for stepping on their toes. The dance formally recognizes only two kinds of performers, black and white. As Cassius Clay, Muhammad Ali was raised in Louisville to note such negotiations between these two races. His authorized biography suggests that he was quite aware of where his place was in Louisville, even before he became "the Louisville Lip." Courtesy of Wright, Ali could be seen then as a dancer well before he brought dazzling steps into the boxing ring. Yet the dance of race relations in Louisville may have been less linear, polite, and controlled than Wright implies. Perhaps it was not so much a waltz, however dull or pleasurable, as a dance contest with many competing steps. Or maybe it was not so much a dance contest, full of polite touching and passing, as a boxing match complete with agonal barrages of fists and words. In any event, tales of Louisville and Ali are not limited to polite promenades.

7   More recently, Houston A. Baker Jr., a scholar of African-American literature, notes that his own youth as an African American in Louisville was beset by abiding fear of "the Blue Man."[8] Baker reports that the Blue Man was a monster of urban legend in Louisville, where he raged in pursuit of young black men. While growing up, Baker began to realize that the Blue Man existed only in the minds of young black men. Yet "the Blue Man was always, already, everywhere in our everyday black male southern lives."[9] This insistent imagined force is, for Baker, a performance of the "mythically codified . . . realization of our black male place in confining spaces, framed by the shape-shifting and ever threatening apparatuses designed to harm the black body."[10] Baker argues that this imagined monster makes visible the place of the black male body in the South. This body is not merely a dancer in race relations, as for Wright, but a subject who performs his position through bodily endangerment and imagined monstrosities.

8   These two descriptions of black subject positions in Louisville articulate the city's race relations. This articulation marks the place and movement available for both (but solely) black and white bodies. Baker could visualize this placement through the imagined monster of the Blue Man, who apparently policed racial divides. My argument is that Muhammad Ali is a comparable figure for demarcating race relations in Louisville. Ali is not just another dancer but a boxer who reconfigures Louisville's network of racial relations for feeling, memory, and politics. The stories by Wright and Baker leave out how race relations ground and manifest themselves in actual physical places. Grounding and manifestation become visible in the uses of Ali's figure to produce the Muhammad Ali Center as a particular kind of place that remodels Louisville's downtown and the city as a whole. The Center articulates telling relations among discourses and practices of race, planning, and urban development.

9   To appreciate these implications, a brief history of Ali's life in Louisville is in order. It shows how Ali's relationship to Louisville could (and perhaps should) be seen as part of the impact of the legacy of racial discrimination. The next section considers the Center's geographical placement, financial backing, and media portrayal. More recent planning efforts in downtown Louisville must be understood in light of earlier efforts.   Planning for the Ali Center connects portions of this past with our presents and possible futures. As a material place, the Ali Center is important for what it indicates about networks of relations in Louisville

including race, space, memory, economy, and polity.[11]

History of Louisville via Muhammad Ali

10   How did a boxer from the segregated black section of Louisville become the beloved humanitarian son of the present moment? Some of Ali's efforts might have helped, possibly including his development of *HEALIING: A Journal of Tolerance and Understanding* and his status as a United Nations Ambassador of Peace.[12] Yet the story goes deeper. Considering that such recent devices as Louisville-specific websites, books by local authors, and centers for tolerance were not always in vogue, how has it been possible for the figure of Ali to move from "the Louisville Lip" to "the Champ?"

11   Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. was born on January 17, 1942.[13] His parents, Odessa Clay and Cassius Marcellus Clay Sr., raised Cassius in Louisville. Ali's father supported the family by painting signs.[14] Louisville was a segregated city, and the Clay family resided in the black neighborhood of the West End. Blacks were the servant class, employed to clean up after whites, while Ali was growing up.[15] Blacks were kept in service positions and in particular neighborhoods by segregationist laws and conventions.[16]

12   In 1960, the young Cassius Clay first caught the attention of the city through amateur fights on WAVE TV's weekly boxing program.[17] Excellence in boxing was a matter of some civic pride in Louisville. By September of 1960, Clay had received a gold medal in the Rome Olympics. Then in October of 1960, he began his professional boxing career in Louisville. His first professional bout pitted Clay against Tunney Hunsacker.[18]

13   What is remarkable about this time period, according to a recent Louisville's *Courier-Journal*, is that Clay was considered a local hero by Louisville newspapers and acclaimed "all over town," even while he was still a student at the local high school.[19] Ali's story is often told in discourses *today* as a heroic tale of triumph. Still the segregationist tendencies and Jim Crow laws in Louisville suggest another story. This is a tale where Clay as a black fighter suffered from racist surroundings.

14   Both Muhammad Ali's own biography, *The Greatest*, and David Remnick's *King of The World* note that Ali knew the torment of racism from early in his life. Ali claims that his life in Louisville

was one spent in "semi-poverty."[20] After his homecoming from the 1960 Olympics, he says, he had been refused service at a Louisville restaurant because of his color. Then he and a friend were chased and confronted by young white men. After the confrontation, in anger and frustration, Clay threw his Olympic medal into the river.[21] In Ali's words, "His holiday as a White Hope was over."[22] Ali's statement reflects his belief that he often felt reduced to a tool of the white millionaires in Louisville who backed his career. But this is far from his only story of early racism.

15 As both Ali and Remnick explain, the murder of Emmitt Till had a huge impact on Ali. Till was a fourteen-year-old from Chicago who had been visiting relatives in Mississippi when he was beaten, pistol-whipped, and shot in the head for saying "bye baby" to a white woman.[23] Remnick observes that this murder helped to spark the civil rights movement, and Ali claims that this incident was formative for his youth: "Emmett Till and I were about the same age. A week after he was murdered in Sunflower County, Mississippi, I stood on the corner with a gang of boys, looking at pictures of him in the black newspapers and magazines. In one he was laughing and happy. In the other, his head was swollen and bashed in, his eyes bulging out of their sockets and his mouth twisted and broken. . . . I felt a deep kinship to him when I learned he was born the same year and day that I was."[24] The brutal murder of Till was one of the incidents that shaped racial relations in the nation and marked Ali deeply. Such stories suggest that Ali grew up in difficult times and learned early the limits of his color in a racist society.

16 Some people claim that Clay was well known and loved *despite* segregation in Louisville, but this is not clear. Others claim that Clay was well loved *until* he became political in response to events in America. That, too, is debatable. It *is* clear that many in Louisville and America became uncomfortable with Clay as he became more vocally political: hence his moniker as "the Louisville Lip."[25] The response dramatically shifted when Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali on March 6, 1964, less than two weeks after defeating Sonny Liston for the heavyweight title.[26] As if to assuage white fears of black militancy, many newspaper articles continued to call him Clay. Yet his politics had come into prominence well before that. *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* even argues that many former fans only went to the Liston fight to see Ali lose.[27] As Clay or Ali, he may have been a celebrated son of the city to some people, but he was a dangerous

black man to others. Early and often, he was vilified and ostracized for his political statements.[28] The Louisville Lip was then a favorite son of no city father or mother.

17   Controversies over Ali reached fever pitch when, on April 28, 1967, he cited religious beliefs in refusing induction into the Army. The clamor in the press was deafening.[29] Much of the national reaction is well known, including the public backlash against Ali and the move by professional boxing world to strip Ali of his license and title. We do well to notice also how some local black newspapers doubted Ali. *The Independent* recently observed that "The black press, generally supportive of the war, was no more sympathetic [to Ali]. But there, at least, some reporters questioned the government's motives in drafting Ali. 'Clay should serve his time in the Army just like any other young, healthy, all-American boy,' wrote James Hicks in the black newspaper, the *Louisville Defender*. 'But what better vehicle to use to put an uppity Negro back in his place than the United States Army.'"[30] Ali was defying the duties of a celebrated son. By dancing outside his prescribed position as "Negro," he was stepping on the white and black toes of Louisville's citizenry. Ali could box and win as a black man, but he also had to go war in service to America. His denouncing combat in Vietnam as a "white man's war" only further marked Ali as uppity or impudent.

18   Ali returned to boxing in 1970 to fight Jerry Quarry.[31] Four months later, Ali lost to a Joe Frazier who appropriated the American flag as his personal symbol in a pointed contrast to Ali. But soon Ali had won the heavyweight championship of the world twice, and he kept boxing into the late 1970s. Step by step, Ali regained public respect and celebration. Ali's diagnosis at an early age with a form of Parkinson's disease lessened demands for public pronouncements and appearances, but it added to his legend even as it led him toward the wing of the public stage. In recent decades, he has figured in campaigns for public service and commercial advertising. He carried the Olympic torch in 1984 as well as 1996. As with Ronald Reagan and Alzheimer's disease, public concern with Parkinson's disease often puts Ali at the center of discussion. In myriad connections, Ali continues to be heralded as an awesome athlete, a crusading sage, and a great humanitarian. He is an international icon. In 1998, to consummate his lasting celebration in Louisville, plans were unveiled for the Ali Center.

Planning with Memory Politics

19   The Muhammad Ali Center hopes to "share the legacy and ideals of Muhammad Ali" to inspire everyone to be "as great as they can be."[32] The Center mobilizes Ali as a figure of great optimism just as it omits more troubling or political elements of Ali's past. But this omission is not simply a strategic choice for public relations; it is part of a more general deployment of Ali's popularity. Film scholar Grant Farred argues that Ali's popularity continues in ironical part because Parkinson's disease mutes Ali's voice. Extending to political issues, the imposed silence attracts public sympathy and keeps Ali uncontroversial.[33] Yet the Louisville history of the Center is more complicated than these considerations suggest. Discourses specific to the Center rarely mention Ali's disease. Instead they focus on Ali as a "son" of Louisville who is a beloved humanitarian. This is the third time since the 1970s that a space dedicated to Ali has been attempted. Why has the third time been the charm? I argue that linking the Ali Center to downtown redevelopment has let Louisville cover over several sticky issues: its economic strife, its history of racism, and the earlier legacy of urban planning in the downtown area. To explain this, I turn to the politics of collective memory.

20   Individual memory reconstructs pieces of experience and history.[34] But social storytelling as a mode of collective imagination can constitute publics.[35] Collective memory is what scholars call this collaboration of social memory with imagination.[36] As stories circulate in public, people are asked to identify with them, treating them as collective memories.[37] These memories are not just what we think about the past; they are what we use in the present, and the purposes are often political. In studying visual rhetoric, Barbie Zelizer argues that "Collective memories allow for the fabrication, rearrangement, elaboration, and omission of details about the past, often pushing aside accuracy and authenticity so as to accommodate broader issues of identity formation, power and authority, and political affiliation."[38] Zelizer shows memory and forgetting at work on current projects that include forming collective identities. Thus public remembrance of D-Day can inflect American experiences of campaigns meant to "shock and awe" Iraqis.[39] Collective memory, then, is our current political articulation of stories about the past.

21   Planning scholar Leonie Sandercock treats collective memory as crucial for the power of city planning.[40] She argues that the language of planning currently avoids realms of emotion or

memory and that it must take into account "memory, desire, spirit, playfulness, eroticism, and fantasy."[41] She advocates a therapeutic approach to negotiate the affective and practical realms of planning. Part of this process for Sandercock is having the planner mediate memories. Thus the planner should address a collective's layers of history.[42] For her, "stories are telling;" they are integral to developing sustainable places.[43]

22   The politics of memory differ from one situation to the next. Therefore the project here is to interrogate the Louisville uses of Ali stories. How is Ali deployed a figure for some memories but not others in the Center's creation and work?[44] And how do stories of the past change for different publics across time or within the region? Because Ali was not always seen as a beloved son of Louisville, the Center's uses of his figure can be revealing.

The Muhammad Ali Center

23   Located on West Main Street, the Muhammad Ali Center expects to attract thousands of tourists a year and increase the cultural resources of Louisville's downtown.[45] This third attempt to construct a "celebration" of Ali's life has better financial backing, organization, and timing than its predecessors. It has been positioned by planners, politicians, and developers as part of Louisville's redevelopment to attract more tourism to the downtown area and the greater metropolis.[46] The Center, with an accompanying parking garage, is to occupy a two-acre lot off Sixth Street and River Road. Lonnie Ali calls the design a "great addition to this community."[47] Publicity touts the Center's addition to downtown aesthetics and the parking garage as a resource for workers as well as tourists.[48] The Center links economically to the City, the University of Louisville, and the Parking Authority of River City. It is claimed as integral to redevelopment of the downtown waterfront.

24   Entertainment, economic, and cultural venues will accompany the Center in the West Main Cultural District. The *Courier-Journal* reports that many of these are private ventures, a departure from previous downtown developments in Louisville.[49] These include converting the Galleria (a local mall) into an entertainment facility, developing high-end condos and apartments for the downtown, planning a new Marriott hotel and renovations to the historic Galt House Hotel, building art galleries and the Owsley Brown Frazier Historical Arms Museum, and creating restaurants along with further entertainments.[50] For all these elements of the West Main

Cultural District, the City of Louisville Development Plan promotes the Muhammad Ali Center as the main attraction for tourists and additional developments in the area.

25   Financing for the Ali Center stems from several sponsors. The parking garage comes from the Parking Authority of River City, which is to sell bonds to pay for the construction.[51] The garage has been designed by the same lead architects as the Center: Bravura Design Firm (based in Louisville) in consultation with Beyer Blinder Belle (based in New York City). Breaking ground for the parking garage launched financing for the Center.[52] Unusual for a cultural center, the parking garage is to provide base income for the Center in an effort to stabilize the Center's budgets. The construction budget for the Center itself is roughly $40 million.[53] Donors have been numerous. The City of Louisville has provided $10 million.[54] Ford Motor Company has given $5 million.[55] The most publicized donor remains anonymous but has matched the largest private donation of $5 million to provide special annual funds for the Center through a foundation.[56] Given these large donations and many smaller ones, the Center has finally reached its funding goals, marking this effort as decidedly more successful than earlier efforts to build a site devoted to Ali.

26   The Ali Center will have five galleries with many interactive exhibits, an outdoor garden, a theater, a gift store, classrooms, and a café.[57] It hopes to tap Ali's popularity to promote "peace, social responsibility, respect and personal growth."[58] The Center summarizes its goals as community involvement, humanitarianism, and peacemaking. To serve them, it is running outreach programs for small children, teens, and other local students.[59] Together with the University of Louisville, the Center is developing an Institute for Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution. The Institute envisions relationships with the United Nations and multicultural programs for grade schools. "Since the vision of the Center is to become a 'global gathering place' for people to meet online and in person to learn about and celebrate the strength of the human spirit and the interconnectedness of our lives," says Michael J. Fox, President and CEO of the Center, "we plan to utilize 93,000 square feet of public space with every possible forum to encourage that outcome."[60]

27   The Institute for Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution emerged from planning for the Center soon after September 11, 2001. A project for "global gatherings" already had been announced for the Center, but the name came after the terrorist attacks of that day.

The name change signals a greater commitment to make the Center a space where peacemaking and other negotiations between various cultures *might* occur. It publicly adopts an international framework for the Center's efforts. Urban theorist Michael P. Smith notes that global cities may articulate for themselves spaces that construct different transnational boundaries. Smith argues that these are crossed by capital but also by social, cultural, and political transactions.[61] Thus the Institute's name change marks the Center and Louisville as spaces for globalization and conciliating its discontents.

28   The name change also evokes a host of discourses surrounding September 11, including concerns of terrorism, homeland security, al Qaeda, and the Middle East. The Center offers itself to Louisville as a nexus for connecting to world events. It is a local embodiment of the transnational, not only for tourists, but especially for the people of Louisville. The Muhammad Ali Center is the place where residents and visitors understand and interrogate problems throughout the world.

29   Third, the name change marks racial relations in Louisville as something other than the international relations tied to September 11. Negotiations between Louisville blacks and whites can seem calm and constructive compared to international terrorism. This helps the Center stand for multi-racial solidarity within a Louisville untainted by the violent troubles of international relations. Even the Center's website gives greater attention to racial and cultural problems abroad while virtually ignoring such problems in Louisville and the United States. The name change does not do all this by itself, but it highlights how the Center's explicit goals are coming to downplay the domestic troubles of racism apparent in Ali's life in Louisville.

30   The Center's implicit goals focus on increasing tourism for Louisville and revitalizing the downtown. The City of Louisville lists the Ali Center as a "Downtown Activity Generator," and it describes the Center as "key to critical mass attainment."[62] It positions the Center as pivotal for the entertainment and tourism industry and regards the resulting investment as crucial. This puts a lot of weight on the Center as the city's main tool for economic rejuvenation and linking with the globe. Yet this talk appears elsewhere. The Minneapolis *Star Tribune* acknowledges the Ali Center as an added attraction that helps make Louisville into an "affordable city vacation."[63] Many newspaper articles tout the Center as attracting people to live and work in downtown

Louisville.[64]

31   These hopes for the Center echo an earlier event, recirculating stories connected with the 1978 renaming of Walnut Street as Muhammad Ali Boulevard.[65] That name change is now taken as a marker of long-standing hometown pride in Louisville's celebrated son. The *Courier-Journal* claims that renaming as part of an increased awareness of African-American history in Louisville.[66] Before urban renewal, Walnut Street had been heralded by local authors and columnists as *the* space for African-American business, society, and culture.[67] Yet changing the street name passed only by a slim margin in the city council. Either the increasing cultural awareness now celebrated did not coalesce in 1978, or it was not desired by much of the city at the time. By now, though, collective memories are shifting. The Ali Center marks but also spurs the new commemoration. Earlier difficulties, failures, and oppositions are forgotten.

32   The continued focus on the downtown still ignores working-class and African-American neighborhoods. One adjacent neighborhood, the Walnut Street district, was often discussed in previous city planning efforts as a blighted area that required development. The Waterfront and the West End also were said to need redevelopment. All were places of disrepair, with disrepair seen by city officials and planners as the effect of ghettoizing minority populations who could not counter the blight of their neighborhoods.[68] Thus the whole "downtown" became a marker for areas in need of drastic change to save them from the minority inhabitants. But the location of actual redevelopment in Louisville often stays away from the most needy neighborhoods, and the Ali Center is no exception.

33   How renewal projects for the downtown will help the city as a whole is often absent from development conversations, and how they might benefit the West End is wholly forgotten. The West End is a predominantly black community where Ali grew up. It is often disregarded in Louisville planning, and it seems unlikely to benefit from any downtown development spurred by the Ali Center. In 1999, the West End had triple the rate of unemployment and less than half the salary for the region.[69] In that year, 42.9 % of West Louisvillians lived below the poverty level, compared to 14.3% for the rest of the region.[70] In selecting the downtown for the Center, Louisville continues to marginalize the West End.

34 The Ali Center is not the first development project for the waterfront. Others have tried, with erratic success, to invigorate that area. In the 1960s, corporations like General Electric and Reynolds began to revamp the waterfront, but they stopped in only a few years.[71] In the 1970s, the Waterfront Commission and the Urban Renewal Agency picked up the pace. The historic Galt House hotel, parking garages, and cultural centers appeared the early 1980s.[72] In 1996, the downtown welcomed a new parking garage and refashioned public parks.[73] *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* reports some success for these efforts, but the *Courier-Journal* tells a different story. It argues that government investment has dominated yet proved insufficient, so that effective downtown development requires private investment. Otherwise parts of the downtown will continue to be "ghost towns."[74] Louisville plans depict the Ali Center as an economic generator for the city as well as for developing the area into a cultural center. Occluded memories of earlier projects might suggest instead that the Center is likely to entrench troubles in other areas of the city.

35 Discourses of economy, culture, politics, and commemoration are driving the Ali Center. They present it as a way to transform the downtown and perhaps the city as a whole. Plans for the Center emphasize developing the downtown by making it an international gathering place.   Making all these articulations possible is the figure of Muhammad Ali.

From the Louisville Lip to the Champ

36 Websites, newspaper articles, and books associated with the Center suggest that Ali has always been popular. Yet this allegedly timeless popularity of Ali obscures unhappy aspects of Louisville's past and present. There was a time that Ali was considered an "uppity Negro." The Center in his name depends for its possibility and success on shifting Ali's figure in Louisville from "the Lip" to "the Champ." How has this proceeded?

37 The *Courier-Journal* has devoted much space to Ali's image and social investments. It provides a website dedicated to Ali's history in Louisville and his ongoing projects.[75] For Louisvillians, and many others, the *Courier-Journal* has positioned itself as the source for Ali's hometown history. Such moves have made the newspaper central to the rhetorical (re)configuration of Ali for Louisville.

38 The rhetoric of the *Courier-Journal's* website on Ali relies on repeating images and words. "Remembering" and "legend" appear insistently. Such words claim a status for Ali that is beyond reproach: not only is he a living figure in the life of the city, he is immortal. Likewise the images suggest an iconic standing for Ali in Louisville. The symbolism begins with the stills of Ali shown on the website's homepage. Such images elide his politics in favor of his legendary status.

39 The primary photo on this page is a well-known image of Ali and is repeated throughout the website: he is standing, ready to punch. This image focuses on Ali as a teenage boxer. Yet his fists are almost out of this frame. The image has been modified to eliminate the background and focus on Ali's face. Indeed his youthful face has been superimposed next to the image of the boxer. His eyes looking upward, light reflecting off his skin. His face is the synechdochal image of the hope that Ali (re)presents. This image positions Ali as always already the great hero of the future. The image of his face shows the greatness to come.

40 The second group of pictures is pasted at the bottom of the webpage. Smaller, they serve as links to stories and photos from the *Courier-Journal* archives. They might be seen as political images, because there are some of Ali in clothing recognizable as Black Nationalist and some of him at a lectern, except that their size and repetition eliminate any focus on a particular image. All these images have been cropped to eliminate any background; and the caption, pointing to "moments in time," puts such aspects of Ali's story into the past. The caption says nothing Ali's religion or his contested status as a political figure. Again, all these images center Ali's face. The face is legendary, mythic, iconic. Neither the image nor the caption opens onto questions about Ali's history or his reception by particular publics.[76] Sepia tinges these images. The hue evokes old tin-type pictures and delimits these photos as history. The rhetoric of such coloring is that old pictures don't lie. This is how Ali was; and Ali apparently was not religious, political, or otherwise contestable.

41 Many stories about Ali and the Center corroborate this impression. The figure of Ali is the great hope who *might* have had some difficulties but *always* has been Louisville's beloved son. Ali is an American hero, even as a Muslim. He is "a genuine American symbol of Islam."[77] argues Hunt Helm, writing for the *Courier-Journal*.[78] *The Courier-Journal* depicts Ali as "history's greatest boxer" as well as a "benevolent humanitarian."[79] Its website

notices little else.

42   The Center's websitedevelops another discourse that contributes to this heroic figure of Ali. It, too, features words like "hero," "legacy," "spirit," and "dream." The innovation is not in the words of praise but in how the site positions Ali as a particular kind of hero *through the Center.* An aerial photograph of the site for the museum is located in the website and labeled as "The Heart of the Center." The implication is that the heart of the Center is also the heart of the downtown. The site shows viewers where the museum will be and what Ali means to Louisville. The Center inspirits the city from the downtown, *not* from the West End or anyplace else. The Center is the hope that revitalizes the downtown and links Louisville to the world.

43   To promote the Center as simply an economic engine for the downtown is to ignore how the project might aggravate troubles already suffered by the West End and other sites far from the city's center. From their perspectives, such a development centers the jobs, resources, and economic activity someplace else. When these are not available in the West End or elsewhere, residents continue to be put in their place through unemployment, poverty, and lack of respect. This time, however, leaving the West End to stew in its race problems is to be promoted through the heroic figure of Ali. He is the new face for disavowing the racist past and present, for developing the downtown, and for engaging international affairs.

44   To present the Center as an economic generator is to forget its humanitarian and memorial purposes. As far as the homepage is concerned, the project of the Center is downtown *development.* The same goes for the city, which promotes the Center primarily as an economic endeavor.[80] Plans for downtown redevelopment and articles about the Center advance it as a huge economic boost for Louisville. They omit how the Center might take up domestic issues of intolerance and humanitarianism.

45   The Center treats issues of race and culture as international. Documents from the Center direct peacekeeping appeals almost exclusively to international issues. They ignore domestic problems. When Ali refused military service in Vietnam, he cited racism in America: "No Vietcong ever called me 'nigger.'"[81] Yet the Center's collective memory for Louisville and the country leave out most of these domestic "moments" while stressing the Center's interest in international conflicts as vehicles for the economic development of Louisville. The city planners and newspaper

reporters, too, focus on the Center as an economic initiative.

46   Currently in the United States, racial profiling, hate crimes and racially motivated attacks, "polite" racism, and comparable issues surface in Louisville and elsewhere.[82] The Center is set to ignore them all, save for its grade-school programs in multiculturalism. Adults do not figure in the Center's express hope to help end racism. Moreover the Center forgets the past of racism by turning to current issues of "diversity." In the discourses of the Center, "diversity" promotes simple acceptance of others by individuals rather than sustained interrogation of racist systems by the Center, the city, or the country. For example, the Center has hired three "minority owned" contractors to construct the building. Such hires, the newsletter argues, show the Center devoted to promoting diversity. But this diversity becomes a simple embrace of otherness, not a deep interrogation of systemic problems. The contracting of minority-owned construction crews supposedly enacts the ethics of American multiculturalism. Spotlighting Ali's contributions to the causes of the city and world, the Center strangely can omit past and current racism in Louisville and America. Its cropped memories of Ali would teach "peace and tolerance" worldwide without recollecting the continuing troubles of race evident in Ali's own life.

47   Stories from the Center and the *Courier-Journal* define Ali as a figure of hope, heroism, and legacy. Not just a renowned boxer, Ali is the harbinger of a wonderful future for Louisville and the world. The parking garage that supports the Center and Ali's involvement will transform the area into a bright, vital site to "generate downtown activity." But the history of race relations in Louisville has disappeared. Stories from Ali evoke times of racial oppression, but these tales are missing from Ali's Center. Somehow unspecified "difficulties" beset the lives of Ali and underprivileged people in a segregated Louisville. Yet the point is that, if Ali could succeed, so can others. Or so the website suggests: when patrons leave the Center, "they will be able to live their own dreams." The Champ has gloriously pulled himself up by his bootstraps, and so can everyone else. Elided by these stories are the tales of people who could not overcome, who were segregated, beaten, killed, or otherwise "put in their place." These stories, some of them Ali's own, deserve telling *with* the stories of Ali's "success."

48   Instead the Center helps make Ali a figure for marking the places that particular races *should* occupy. Through the Center, the

figure of Ali helps relegate poverty-stricken blacks to the West End and other areas far from financial empowerment by the city's center. Ali becomes a tool for politicians and developers to obscure race relations in the city. This figure of Ali dances between whites and blacks. For those who would oppose the Center as a step in downtown development, this Ali floats like a signifier and stings like a memory.

49 There is no necessity in this. "Stories about the past have power and bestow power," writes Sandercock.[83] The positioning might change as the Ali Center operates, making different plans and telling different stories. The Center *might* help bring attention to *current* conditions in the West End and other dimensions of racism in Louisville. Domestic connections *could* arise from Center activities that engage international issues. The Center is to advocate tolerance as well as understanding. Its newsletter laments that, "EACH AND EVERY DAY **,** thousands of our world's children and youth are murdered, mutilated, raped, tortured, orphaned, left homeless, and enslaved as tolerated acts of war."[84] These are urgent troubles, and they arise in America too. The Ali Center *might* help people in Louisville recognize and resist them. Then it would articulate more truly the goals of Muhammad Ali, the man. So far, though, this is merely a hope and not the plan.

Notes

[1] Rick McDonough, "Ali Quietly Charms Senators and Scores Points for Center," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 26, 2000.

[2] Darla Carter, "Ali to Be Honored for Greatness in and out of Ring," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, February 25, 2000.

[3] As a United Nations ambassador of peace, Ali has garnered much international attention. This role has only added to the image his work in the global south has produced.

[4] *Muhammad Ali Center*, Website, 2002, available from http://www. alicenter.org/home _flash.shtml.

[5] I am not suggesting that there is an ostensible history to be found or unearthed as an absolute Truth. I am claiming, however, that certain events, once understood as important, could be

redeployed for political purposes in the present. The disavowal of these events problematizes the Ali Center's goals.

6   George C. Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky 1865-1930*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1985, pp. 4-5.

7   *Ibid.*, p . 48.

8   Houston A. Baker Jr., *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism / Re-Reading Booker T*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2001, pp. 2-4.

9   *Ibid.*, p. 4.

10   *Ibid.*, p. 6.

11   My accounts of these networks borrow from Michel Foucault's ideas about discursive formations as grids of rules for intelligibility that govern the mode of the subject. This formation is constructed by a nexus of statements that make the rules visible and that serve to delimit the place of subjects, their discourses, and practices. See *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *the Discourse on Language*, A. M. Sheridan Smith, tr., New York, Pantheon Books, 1972; "Space, Knowledge, and Power," *Michel Foucault: Power*, James D. Faubion, ed., New York, New Press, 1994, pp. 326-348; *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, Sylvere Lotringer, ed., New York, Semiotext(e), 1996.

12   See Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali and Company*, Norwalk, CT, Hastings House, 1998.

13   See Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: In Perspective*, San Francisco, Collins, 1996.

14   See Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: In Perspective.*

15   See Wright, *Life Behind a Veil.*

16   David Morgan and Richard Jett, *Jefferson County History and Timeline*, Website, Jefferson County, 1999, available from http://www.co.jefferson.ky.us/ AboutHistory.html.

17   *Louisville Courier-Journal, The Making of a Champ: Muhammad Ali*, August 7, 2000, http://www. courier-journal.com/ali/.

[18]   *Ibid.*

[19]   Hunt Helm, "Louisville Remembers the Shy Kid from Central High," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 14, 1997.

[20]   Muhammad Ali and Richard Durham. *The Greatest: My Own Story*, New York, Random House, 1975.

[21]   *Ibid.*, pp. 69-77.

[22]   *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[23]   David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero*, New York, Random House, 1998.

[24]   Ali and Durham, *The Greatest*, pp. 34-35. For another reading of this incident, see Elizabeth Alexander, "'Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?' Reading the Rodney King Video(s)," *The Black Public Sphere*, Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 81-98.

[25]   Robert Lipsyte, *Clay Discusses His Future, Liston and Black Muslims*, February 27, 1964, available from www.nytimes.com.

[26]   See Hauser, *Muhammad Ali*.

[27]   See John E. Kleber, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, Louisville, University Press of Kentucky, 2001, p. 22.

[28]   See Grant Farred, "Feasting on Foreman: The Problematics of Postcolonial Identification," *Camera Obscura*, 39, September, 1996, pp. 52-77; Thomas Holtgraves and Jeffrey Dulin, "The Muhammad Ali Effect: Differences between African Americans and European Americans in Their Perceptions of a Truthful Bragger," *Language & Communication*, 14, 3, 1994, pp. 275-285.

[29]   See Hauser, *Muhammad Ali*.

[30]   Howard L. Bingham and Max Wallace Black. "The American Who Wouldn't Go to War," *The Independent*, October 6, 2001, pp. 1-2.

[31]   See Hauser, *Muhammad Ali*.

[32]   *Muhammad Ali Center*, website.

[33]   Farrad, "Feasting on Foreman," p. 60.

[34]   General ideas about the definition of these terms are taken from *The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, Pleasantville, NY, Reader's Digest Association, 3d edition, 1969; *OED Online*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2d edition, 1989, http://80-dictionary. oed.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/entrance.dtl.

[35]   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, New York, Verso Press, revised edition, 1991; Bruce Gronbeck, "The Rhetorics of the Past: History, Argument, and Collective Memory," *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, Kathleen J. Turner, ed., Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1998, pp. 47-60.

[36]   "Collective memory" is not a new phenomenon, but the phrase became common among scholars in the 1990s and signals distinct ways to study such occurrences.

[37]   Stephen H. Browne, "Book Review: Reading, Rhetoric and the Texture of Public Memory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 81, 3, 1995, pp. 237-265; Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past against the Grain: The Space of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12, 2, 1995, pp. 214-239.

[38]   Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 3.

[39]   Other authors echo this sentiment for the political purposes in memory: Bernard J. Armada, "Memorial Agon: An Interpretive Tour of the National Civil Rights Museum," *Southern Communication Journal*, 63, 3, 1998, pp. 235-243; Geoffrey Hartman, "Public Memory and Its Discontents," *Raritan*, 13, 4, 1994, pp. 24-40; Kirk Savage, "The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil War Monument," *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, J. R. Gillis, ed., Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 127-149; Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997.

[40]   Leonie Sandercock, "Dreaming the Sustainable City: Organizing Hope, Negotiating Fear, Mediating Memory," *Story and Sustainability: Planning, Practice, and Possibility for American Cities*, Barbara Eckstein and James Throgmorton, eds.,

Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2003, pp. 143-166.

[41]   *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[42]   *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[43]   *Ibid.*, p. 164.

[44]   The *figure* of Ali is an image constructed through media, discourses, etc. It is not necessarily the same as Muhammad Ali, the man.

[45]   Sheldon S. Shafer, "Private Investors Warm to Downtown's Redevelopment," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, April 15, 2002.

[46]   Larry Werner, "Louisville, the City Always Known for Churchill Downs and Louisville Sluggers, Has Changed," *Star Tribune*, June 9, 2002, p. 1G.

[47]   Associated Press, "Entertainment Briefs," *BC Cycle*, June 12, 2002.

[48]   Associated Press, "Groundbreaking for Ali Center Parking Structure," *BC Cycle*, June 8, 2002.

[49]   See Shafer, "Private Investors Warm."

[50]   See *Louisville Downtown Development Plan - Preliminary Recommendations*, City of Louisville City Development, 2, 1, Spring, 2001, http://www.louky.org/mayor/development/spring2001/page2.htm; Shafer, "Private Investors Warm."

[51]   See Associated Press, "Groundbreaking."

[52]   *Ibid.*

[53]   Dylan T. Lovan, "City Leaders Optimistic About Downtown's Future," *BC Cycle*, September 13, 2002.

[54]   Associated Press, "Anonymous Donor Gives $5 Million to Ali Center," *BC Cycle*, September 20, 2002.

[55]   Edward Klump, "Ford Donates $5 Million for Muhammad Ali Center," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 27, 2001.

[56]   Associated Press, "Anonymous Donor Gives $5 Million to Ali

Center."

57   *Muhammad Ali Center* website.

58   Associated Press, "Groundbreaking" and "Anonymous Donor."

59   "The Mentor," Louisville, Muhammad Ali Center for the Advancement of Humanity, 2002.

60   *Ibid.*

61   Michael P. Smith, *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization*, Maldan, MA, Blackwell, 2001.

62   " *Louisville Downtown Development Plan."*

63   See Werner, "Louisville, the City."

64   See Lovan, "City Leaders Optimistic."

65   See Morgan and Jett, *Jefferson County History*.

66   See Irene Mattingly, "Black-History Slide Show Weaves Old, New," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 7, 2001.

67   See Mervin Aubespin, "With Urban Renewal, a Community Vanishes," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, December 31,1999; Wright, *Life Behind a Veil.*

68   See Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*; Robert M. Fogleson, "Inventing Blight: Downtown and the Origins of Urban Development," *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 357-380; Robert A. Beauregard. "Rising from the Ashes," *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of Us Cities*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1993, pp. 219-245.

69   Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, in partnership with the City of Louisville, "West Louisville Competitive Assessment and Strategy Project: Creating Jobs, Income and Wealth in the Inner City," Boston, MA, 2001.

70   *Ibid.*

71   *The Encyclopedia of Louisville.*

72   *Ibid.*

73   *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* suggests that the older parking garages became a legal hazard for the city after patrons sued for automobile damage from corrosive materials that leaked in the structure. Parking seems to be a key issue for this area and is to be the economic basis for the Ali Center.

74   See Shafer, "Private Investors Warm."

75   See *Courier-Journal, The Making of a Champ.*

76   Roland Barthes argues that cropping, adding text, and such articulate particular meanings or functions for an image. See "The Photographic Message," *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1985, pp. 3-20.

77   Greg Hazley, "America's Muslim Uses His Image as a Call for Peace," *O'Dwyer's PR Services Report*, December, 2001, p. 1.

78   Helm, "Louisville Remembers."

79   See Klump, "Ford Donates;" Rochelle Riley, "Proposed Museum Will Honor Ali's Place in Boxing History," December 1996, 2004, http://www.courier-journal.com/ali/cominghome/home.html.

80   See Klump, "Ford Donates;" *Louisville Downtown Development Plan*; Rick McDonough, "Ali Quietly Charms Senators and Scores Points for Center," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 26, 2000; Shafer, "Private Investors Warm."

81   Farred, "Feasting on Foreman," p. 67.

82   Timothy R. Brown, "Southern Miss Investigating Possible Attack During Football Game," *BC Cycle*, September 4, 2002; Staff Editorial, "Next Police Study Should Probe Deeper," *Kentucky Kernel via U-Wire*, November 26, 2002; Ellen Sorokin, "Campus Correctness; Insensitivity Claims Restrain Expression on Fraternity Row," *Washington Times*, November 22, 2002, p. A02.

83   Sandercock, "Dreaming the Sustainable City," p. 31.

84   "The Mentor."