

The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis vs. Schmeling

Pages: 288

Publisher: Oxford University Press (October 14, 2005)

Format: pdf, epub

Language: English

[DOWNLOAD FULL EBOOK PDF]

THE GREATEST FIGHT OF OUR GENERATION
The Greatest Fight of Our Generation

Louis vs. Schmeling

LEWIS A. ERENBERG

2006

Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further Oxford University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education.

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi

Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi

New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece

Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore

South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Copyright © 2006 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.

198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Erenberg, Lewis A., 1944–

The greatest fight of our generation : Louis vs. Schmeling / Lewis A. Erenberg.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-19-517774-9

ISBN-10: 0-19-517774-6

1. Boxing—Social aspects—History. 2. Nationalism and sports—History. 3. Louis, Joe, 1914– 4. Schmeling, Max, 1905– 5. Sports rivalries—History. I. Title.

GV1136.8.E74 2005

796.83'09043—dc22 2002048981

Excerpts from *Joe Louis: My Life*, copyright © 1978 by Jeffrey Hoffman, reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Inc.

Excerpts from *Max Schmeling: An Autobiography*, by permission of Bonus Books.

This book is dedicated to Berndt Ostendorf

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As this project has developed over several years, I have drawn on the help and support of many different friends, colleagues, and scholars as well as several important institutions. The staff of the Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., made my research in the Julian Black Collection of Joe Louis Scrapbooks both efficient and enjoyable. The Interlibrary Loan Librarians at Loyola University made my task so much easier with their fast work in filling my orders for the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and numerous other books and periodicals. In Germany, the Amerika-Institut, at the University of Munich, under the direction of my old friend Berndt Ostendorf, was gracious enough to provide me with research assistants who helped me comb through the newspaper collections at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. One of those research assistants, Miriam Held, deserves special thanks for assisting me in gathering essential material from the Nazi press. I also want to thank the staff at the Institute for Newspaper Research in Dortmund for allowing me to use their vast collection of German newspapers. Equally important, the staff of the library at the Sporthochschule in Cologne was most helpful in assisting me in locating the invaluable German boxing magazine, *Box-Sport* and various clipping files on Max Schmeling. Unfortunately, the only year missing in the library's run of *Box-Sport* was the crucial year 1938. Similarly, the staff at the Bundesfilmarchiv in Berlin helped me locate the film *Max Schmeling's Sieg—ein Deutscher Sieg*.

At critical stages, various leaves and fellowships have made the arduous task of research and

writing much easier. When I was first beginning the project, Loyola University provided me with a Research Stimulation Grant, which enabled me to travel to the Museum of American History. At another crucial phase, I was awarded a Fulbright Distinguished Fellowship to the University of Salzburg, Austria, where I had the opportunity to pore over my sources and improve my German language skills. I want to thank the Fulbright Commission of the United States and Austria for this wonderful opportunity. Loyola was helpful here too, awarding me a Faculty Research leave that allowed me to stay on in Europe after my Fulbright was over so that I could complete a huge chunk of my German research and continue to improve my facility—such as it is—in the German language. My colleagues and students at the University of Salzburg, especially Dorothea Steiner and Reinhold Wagnleitner and his wife Elisabeth, made my stay in that beautiful city an absolute delight.

This project would have taken much longer had I not received a Fellowship to the National Humanities Center, Research Triangle Park, in North Carolina for the academic year 2003–2004. The opportunity to devote full attention to my research and writing without the distractions of everyday academic life was truly a blessing. I want to thank the director Geoffrey Harpham and the assistant director Kent Mullikin for inviting me to the Center. In addition, I want to thank the entire staff of the Center for making my stay so productive and rewarding. Librarians Betsy Dain, Jean Houston, and Eliza Robertson did a marvelous job of retrieving all types of source materials related to boxing. Marie Brubaker also went beyond the call of duty by volunteering to do microfilm research for me. Karen Carroll also deserves thanks for her fine job of copyediting the entire first draft of the manuscript with a fine-tooth comb. In addition, the Center provides excellent computer support for novices like me. I want to thank Joel Elliott and Philip Barron for their superior help and for treating me as if I knew what I was doing. Corbett Capps, Bernice Patterson, Pat Schreiber, Lois Whittington, and Marianne Wason, among too many to mention, made my stay at the Center a real pleasure. My landlords, Don and Marilyn Hartman, welcomed me with open arms and offered me a residence amidst the natural wonders of Chapel Hill and its “magic creek.”

My work also benefited from participation in two seminars at the Center, the Seminar on Gender and Sexuality, and the Seminar on Race, Nation, and Diaspora. Being surrounded by so many bright people was particularly stimulating. While I have fond memories of all the fellows at the Center, I want to thank several (and their spouses and/or partners) in particular for their friendship and support: Wendy Allanbrook, Lee Baker, Daniel and Jane Bornstein, John Carson, Chris Celenza, Tom and Carol Cogswell, Esther Cohen, Francis Ferguson, Sam Floyd, Brian and Jennifer Kelly, Jeffrey Kerr-Richtie, Elizabeth Kennedy and Bobbi Prebis, Stephen Murray, Theda Perdue and Michael Green, David and Kathy Ringrose, Carol Summers, and Barbara Will and Michael Ermath. While at the Center, I also had the opportunity to present my work in lectures for the Friends of the Center, the Duke University Americanist Seminar, and the Jewish Study group.

A number of other people deserve special mention. While I was in Munich I began the lengthy process of translating German materials into English. When I was at my wit's end, Kristiane Deska, the secretary of the Amerika-Institut cheerfully came to my rescue on more than one occasion. Back in the United States I relied on various translators to help speed the project along. Without the dedication of Michael Andre, Josh Davis, and Eric Schroeder this book could not have been completed. Numerous colleagues helped in other ways, some by alerting me to special sources and others by sharing their work. I thank a number of these people in the footnotes, but Michael Ermath deserves special mention for sharing with me his work on German history. Jeff Schutts was very generous in sharing source materials and the findings of his own research. My colleague at Loyola, David Dennis, answered my questions about German history, provided me with material from the German press, and taught me how to make an umlaut on the computer. Tom Knapp was equally forthcoming when I appealed to him for basic facts of German history. The comments on research leave proposals by members of Loyola University's History Department Advisory

Committee, especially those by Barbara Rosenwein and Ted Karamanski, were very helpful. Elliot Gorn, Steve Riess, and Patrick Miller invited me to present an overview of my project at the Newberry Library Sports History Seminar in Chicago, as did Michael Ebner who asked me to the Urban History Seminar at the Chicago Historical Society. J. Fred MacDonald of Macdonald and Associates in Chicago came through with films of Joe Louis's fights. My research assistant at Loyola, Elizabeth Myers, has done a tremendous job of securing photographs, permissions, and library material at a moment's notice. Lillian Hardison's help was invaluable. I also want to thank Athena Angelos for doing photo research at the Library of Congress, and Frank Driggs for supplying me with photographic material. Margot Conk and Steve Meyer were wonderful hosts when I did my research in *Ring* magazine at the Milwaukee Public Library, as were Bonnie and Randy Beers in Washington, D.C.

There are more usual suspects. My good friend Lary May, fight fan extraordinaire, read through several drafts of an article that served as the basis of this book, as well as several chapters of the book itself. His insightful suggestions have made this work much stronger. Susan Hirsch helped immensely by suggesting an organizing framework for the first two chapters of the book and by offering her firm editorial eye on the last revision. Susan Ferber of Oxford University Press made critical editorial suggestions on the first draft that much improved the organization and narrative flow of the book. Doug Mitchell of the University of Chicago Press deserves special thanks for his encouragement and support at a critical stage of this project. The late John Higham served as a model historian until the end of his life. Of course, the errors are my own. I also want to thank other people for their enduring friendship: Malcolm Bush, Bucky and Toni Halker, Lary and Elaine May, Mary O'Connell, Harold Platt, Carol Woodworth. Above all, there are Susan Hirsch and our son and daughter, Jesse and Joanna. They know how I feel.

This book is dedicated to Berndt Ostendorf, director of the Amerika-Institut at the University of Munich. There would not be a book of this sort had he not invited me to Munich as a Fulbright Fellow in 1990–91. He and his wife Jutta welcomed my family and me to many delightful dinners and engaged us in insightful conversations about the differences between German and American society, politics, and culture. I have especially fond memories of team teaching a course with Berndt on the 1960s. Also enjoyable were our forays to delightful restaurants in Munich and the United States, and our many discussions of jazz while listening to his formidable record collection. Ten years later in Spring–Summer 2001, he and Jutta hosted us again, this time when Susan held the Fulbright at the Amerika-Institut. They made our stay thoroughly enjoyable. Having the opportunity to live and work in Germany and Austria opened my eyes to the long-standing relationship between Germany and the United States, and fostered in me an awareness of the possibilities of transatlantic scholarship. Through his friendship and scholarship, Berndt has served as a model of a transatlantic scholar.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

["MORE THAN A PRIZEFIGHT"](#)

1

[DOWN BUT NOT OUT:](#)

[BOXING IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION](#)

2

[COMING OFF THE CANVAS:](#)

THE RENAISSANCE OF BOXING IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

3

MAX SCHMELING'S SIEG—EIN DEUTSCHER SIEG (MAX SCHMELING'S VICTORY—A GERMAN VICTORY)

4

THE BRADDOCK AFFAIR AND THE COLOR LINE

5

THE GREATEST FIGHT OF OUR GENERATION

6

THIS IS THE ARMY

7

LAST ROUNDS

EPILOGUE

WINNERS AND LOSERS

NOTES

INDEX

THE GREATEST FIGHT OF OUR GENERATION INTRODUCTION "MORE THAN A PRIZEFIGHT"

On the evening of Wednesday, June 22, 1938, German boxer Max Schmeling, a former heavyweight champion, clashed with the sensational young American titleholder Joe Louis for the Heavyweight Championship of the World. This second Louis-Schmeling fight proved to be one of the most dramatic boxing matches on record. As a rematch, the bout brought together two foes who had fought to a thrilling climax two years before in the same stadium. In 1936 Schmeling handed Louis his only defeat, but now the African American fighter was champion, having won the title from James J. Braddock in an eight-round slugfest in 1937. With the title at stake, could Schmeling repeat his victory and achieve what no heavyweight champion in history had managed to do: come back and retake the title? Could Louis erase the one blot on his record? For both boxers, their careers and their reputations were on the line. The ensuing battle would prove to be the most memorable fight of their lives and a fight that boxing fans across the globe have never forgotten.

There was intense international interest surrounding the event because, as liberal journalist Heywood Broun observed, this was "more than a prizefight." Louis was only the second African American heavyweight champion in United States history, and Schmeling, Germany's most successful boxer, "came into the ring as a symbol of a political philosophy" and "was expected to dramatize the new German anthropological theories and demonstrate Nordic superiority." The fact that his opponent was a Negro "emphasized this phase of the contest." For months German and American sportswriters and cultural commentators had speculated about the political, racial, and

social implications of the big fight. While many Germans fervently hoped that a victory by “unser (our) Max” would vindicate their nation in the eyes of the world, black Americans eagerly put their faith in “our Joe” to knock out this hero of Aryan Supremacy. Many other Americans, terrified by the rise of Nazism, also rooted for the black boxer as an all-American hero vying against a symbol of aggressive military conquest.¹

Filled with anticipation, 70,000 spectators jammed Yankee Stadium almost to capacity. Record numbers of newspaper and radio reporters from across the country and around the globe applied for press passes to cover a bout that seemed the sporting equivalent of a war. The rich, the powerful, and the celebrated assembled in the ringside seats, while in the upper reaches of the grandstand, a large group of African Americans, many from as far away as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit, anxiously waited to root for their hero. Seventy million other fans gathered about their radios to listen to the match at home and in taverns, restaurants, and nightclubs. In Germany sports fans, ordinary citizens, and the elite of the National Socialist regime stayed up until 3:30 A.M. to hear the transatlantic broadcast, while a select contingent of hard-core German fans took advantage of special excursion fares to support their man in person.²

In many ways, the protagonists in this fight were central figures in a form of international political theater. Contemporary black historian, sports commentator, and avid Joe Louis fan C. L. R. James noted that “the state of the . . . nation or the world can invest a sporting event with dramatic intensity such as is reached in few theatres. When the democrat Joe Louis fought the Nazi Schmeling the bout became a focus of approaching world conflict.” By their very nature, boxing matches are dramatic. As unscripted events, the battles in the ring encapsulate the struggle between life and death, good and evil, craft and power, brain and brawn, youth and age that many fans experience in their own lives. The Louis-Schmeling bout, however, went beyond the drama of two individual sportsmen.³

The elevation of the fight to nationalist drama on the international stage is a powerful indication of the politicization of international sport during the 1930s and 1940s. Historians usually think that the rise of globalism occurred after World War II, but even before that conflagration, American sports and entertainment had an enormous influence on the rest of the world. In Weimar Germany, many prizefight analysts acknowledged that boxing had an Americanizing effect on German sporting culture. But the internationalization of sport was not a one-way street. In fact, during the 1930s America’s relationship with the world also influenced events at home. The struggle against Nazi Germany began in the boxing ring and at the Berlin Olympics of 1936. The German National Socialist regime was determined to increase its national prestige and international respect through victories in the realm of sport. Because the Louis-Schmeling fights raised issues of political values and racial ideologies and beliefs, they had a fundamental impact on the nature of liberty and freedom in the United States. By posing a white “Nazi” against a black American, this international battle outlined the Nazis’ master race philosophy in the starkest terms and began the challenge to an American national identity firmly rooted in a racial hierarchy of whiteness. As an arena of white male power, boxing in the United States had displayed deep hostility toward prizefighters of color. Under the influence of international events, however, this picture began to change.⁴

The international politicization of boxing has had a long history. The heavyweight title match between American titleholder John C. Heenan and the British champion Tom Sayers in England in 1860 attracted more transatlantic public attention than any other sporting event from 1830 to 1870. Fought on the eve of the Civil War, the bout turned into a major nationalist event, with championship boxers standing in for national virility. The penny press in the United States published special editions to keep up with local interest, and even Currier and Ives, a bastion of Victorian virtues, chipped in with cheap lithographs of both heroes. As domestic conflict threatened to split the nation, this international event was filled with intense patriotic fervor. In

the twentieth century, with the shift to the United States as the capital of the sport, and the invention of the fast ocean liner, international matches became a regular part of the sport. During the 1920s, Jack Dempsey fought Georges Carpentier from France and Luis Firpo from Argentina for the heavyweight title, while Dempsey's successor, Gene Tunney, held his last title defense in 1928 against the New Zealander Tom Heeney. With the rise of the million-dollar gate in the 1920s, boxers from around the world, among them a young Max Schmeling, traveled to New York City, the epicenter of prize fighting, for big paydays and international respect. While all of these bouts excited a measure of nationalist fervor, it was in the 1930s that rising international tensions transformed boxing into a central arena for competing nationalisms on an unprecedented scale.⁵

As male sporting heroes, boxers imparted a gendered dimension to nationalism on both sides of the Atlantic. Louis and Schmeling framed male power as essential to national identity. The Great Depression threw millions of men out of work in two of the most industrialized countries of the world. Outlets for breadwinning were few, and images of impotence abounded. In this atmosphere, boxers with knockout power like Schmeling and Louis served as powerful male heroes. Louis became a superman at first for African Americans and eventually for whites in America in a period when superheroes and tough guys multiplied across the American cultural landscape. Schmeling, meanwhile, was transformed into an Aryan superman by the National Socialist regime, bent on remilitarization and German expansion to offset a persistent German culture of defeat. Overcoming the experience of weakness and humiliation, Americans and Germans transformed "unser Max" and "our Joe" into heroic masculine national symbols in a time of Depression and war.⁶

While Schmeling became a German national hero, Louis first symbolized an African American political and cultural awakening that followed the Great Migration of blacks from rural oppression and southern segregation to what they hoped would be the promised land of northern freedom and opportunity. After he won the championship and thereby broke the color line in boxing that had reserved the greatest symbol of male strength for the "white" race, Louis became the biggest popular hero African Americans had ever had. As the Germans attempted to restore national strength after a period of national humiliation, African Americans were in a process of de-colonization, which consisted of rethinking the racial hierarchy that placed them at the bottom and whites at the top of the American social order by virtue of race alone. A successful and powerful black superhero offered a new myth of masculine fighting strength to wipe out memories of slavery, lynching, and dependence on whites. As black athletes began to dominate track and field and the boxing ring in the 1930s, they contributed to a dream of the future that included strong black men on the public stage fighting back against white supremacy in athletics and everyday life. But Louis also became a hero to a growing number of white Americans who were wrestling with a new civic nationalism, one that was far more inclusive than previous American self-definitions rooted in Anglo-Saxon white supremacy. Indeed, the racial nationalism that remained, especially but not exclusively in the South, deepened awareness that American racial ideas bore a striking similarity to those of the Nazis. The Louis-Schmeling bouts serve as windows showing the effects that international tensions had on the views of race and nationalism held by white Americans as they were forced to choose between rooting for a black American or a white German.⁷ In an atmosphere of growing global conflict, Louis became one of the first black heroes that many white Americans saw as a standard-bearer for American national values. Spurred by international conflict, this development proved a power stimulus to the fight for African American rights even before World War II.⁸

In writing about the role of Joe Louis and Max Schmeling in the politicization of international sport, my goal is to give each boxer comparable weight. Rather than aiming at a full-scale dual biography, my intention is to demonstrate how global affairs and national developments transformed their interactions inside and outside the ring. In the many American books and

articles about Louis, Schmeling assumes a secondary role. Few Americans understand the iconic importance that “unser Max” played in German society from the 1920s to the present or the stature of boxing in German life. Their epic ring battles transformed each man into the symbolic representative of his nation’s values and aspirations. To provide some measure of comparable treatment, each chapter develops the relationship of the two fighters to each other, to the political and cultural tensions of their respective nations, and to their symbolic importance in world affairs.

This book opens with the Great Depression, the most powerful factor in the careers of both combatants and in the political and cultural history of Germany and the United States. As the older of the two, Max Schmeling had taken German boxing to its heights when he became World Heavyweight Champion in 1930, and then saw his career and the sport of boxing decline in Germany and the United States under the impact of the economic disaster. For his part, the young Joe Louis faced dim prospects as he began his amateur and professional career during the nadir of the Depression. The obstacles he faced on the way to the title appeared daunting: the economic depression, the overwhelming poverty of African Americans, and the racism in prizefighting. Yet in the middle of the Depression boxing experienced a renaissance in both the United States and Germany. My focus is on the factors that made it possible for Louis to contend for the heavyweight title despite the intense racism that surrounded American prizefighting. Similarly, I explore how Schmeling’s career took another of its many unexpected turns as the leaders of the new Nazi regime transformed boxing to make it accord with their political philosophy of Aryan supremacy.

By the time of their first spectacular bout in June 1936, Schmeling and Louis had both become cultural and political symbols. His career seemingly over, Schmeling was taken up by the National Socialist regime and transformed by the propaganda ministry into a Nazi hero after his dramatic upset of his young opponent. Despite his loss to Schmeling, by the mid-1930s Joe Louis already had become an African American folk hero as blacks wrote about his victories, celebrated his wins, and lionized him in music and folklore. The continuing battles in America and Germany over who was the rightful champion, the role of Jewish Americans in boxing, and the influence of the radical left also helped make Louis an anti-fascist hero.

When Louis beat Schmeling in their climactic rematch in 1938, he was no longer just a black hero; he stood atop the American world. In contrast, just as quickly as they had built him into a national and international symbol of Nordic supremacy, the Nazis attempted to undermine Schmeling’s role as a public figure because of his defeat. At the same time, many whites were forced by global events to choose between nationalism and racism. By aligning themselves with Louis, they opened the door to a wider, more cosmopolitan sense of American national identity. The 1938 fight took on even greater importance after the match, becoming an American metaphor for the goals of the United States in World War II, a conflict in which Louis cemented his role as all-American hero. While the Nazis initially sought to utilize Schmeling’s army service to promote the German war effort, his experience led to an irreparable break with the National Socialists and left him charged with treason. Ironically, the fighters experienced a last reversal of fortune after the war. Initially an American hero, Louis was increasingly tortured by a life badly out of control. Schmeling, on the other hand, went from being a suspected Nazi sympathizer to a wealthy Coca-Cola executive in the new Germany. By the time he and Louis renewed their relationship in the 1950s, racial and economic realities had overtaken the Brown Bomber, and the new economic miracle and Cold War alliances had made Schmeling a hero again in Germany and the United States. Inside the ring and out, international events and domestic realities continued to have a profound effect on the relationship of the two men.

[1 DOWN BUT NOT OUT: BOXING IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION](#)

“Is boxing dying?”

In July 1935, a year before the first bout between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, and three years before the battle that defined their careers, sports cartoonist Burriss Jenkins, Jr., caricatured the two future combatants in the *New York Evening Journal*. Entitled "Carrying the 'Males,'" the cartoon depicted "The Brown Bomber" facing off against "The Black Uhlan." These two strong, well-proportioned specimens, their muscles rippling and their eyes intent on each other, appear in the sky like two ascending gods above a speeding locomotive labeled "20th Century S.C."—the Twentieth Century Sporting Club, the corporation that would promote the bout. Their naked torsos in fighting poses and their sense of fierce determination make Louis and Schmeling outsized heroes coming together in a battle to determine the future. The streamlined engine conveys the role of a new, more powerful promotion company to replace the old antiquated Madison Square Garden Corporation situated murkily in the background. The powerful locomotive, situated between the two fighters, also conveys the importance of male phallic power during this Depression decade when masculinity itself was imperiled by the economic catastrophe. That there was a national and racial angle any sports fan could see. The designation for Schmeling, "Black Uhlan of the Rhine," was a made-up name to link him to a heroic German past, while Louis's nickname, the "Brown Bomber," referred not only to the dynamite in both fists but also to the color of his skin.¹

Carrying the "Males," *New York Evening Journal*, July 15, 1935, by Burriss Jenkins, Jr., predicted the eventual clash between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling a year before they first fought. (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center)

"Carrying the 'Males'" turned out to be accurate in its predictive power. In June 1936, Louis and Schmeling fought round one of their two famous international battles in front of a large audience. Two years later, on June 22, 1938, the hottest ticket in the sports world was their rematch. In the United States and Germany, the homelands of the two combatants, fan interest was intense for a battle that brought together the national champions of Democracy and Nazism, African American self-assertion and German pride, American Pluralism and Aryan Supremacy. The match assumed the aura of a major international event as boxing fans around the globe awaited the results of the biggest fight since the late 1920s. In the annals of boxing, the two Louis-Schmeling bouts are considered among the most exciting and intense sporting dramas of the Great Depression era, and of the entire twentieth century. These matches defined the careers of the two combatants and transformed them from individual athletes into national icons.

Just a few short years earlier, in the dark days of the early 1930s, however, no sports cartoonist as prominent as Burriss Jenkins would have predicted that these two improbable athletes would have represented their respective nations in such widely anticipated international battles. Nor would most sports fans have assumed that boxing itself would be able to generate enough excitement to fill huge outdoor stadiums the size of New York's Yankee Stadium and Chicago's Soldier Field, or substantial indoor arenas such as Berlin's Sportpalast and Manhattan's Madison Square Garden. From 1930 to 1934, most observers assumed that the Great Depression had wreaked profound havoc on boxing, just as it had on the automobile, steel, rubber, housing, and motion picture industries. In the early 1930s, boxing, according to one sportswriter, was suffering "its own private depression." Attendance at matches fell off drastically and even heavyweight championship bouts, traditionally the biggest moneymakers in sports, drew only lackluster interest. Dreams of million-dollar fights, so common during the 1920s, seemed preposterous. In the pit of such a dire economic catastrophe, the veteran German heavyweight slugger Max Schmeling and Joe Louis Barrow, the shy African American youngster just entering the amateur ranks, were battling in a sport that offered few opportunities for rewarding careers. At the moment, their prospects could

not have been worse.[2](#)

As the two most industrialized countries in the world, Germany and the United States were hit hardest by the economic collapse of the 1930s. In the United States the stock market crash of 1929 set off a destructive ripple effect through the economy. By the winter of 1932–1933, the *nadir* of the Great Depression, 25 percent of non-farmworkers officially, and perhaps 33 percent unofficially, were unemployed, another huge number of workers labored fewer hours, and new workers had few opportunities to enter the economy at all. Among those industrial and agricultural workers who lost their jobs because of the lay-offs and slow-downs, African Americans were hit the hardest. More than 50 percent of urban African Americans were unemployed, and they made up the highest percentage of applicants for relief. While all young people suffered in the Depression, black youth were the least likely to find a job. With his family on relief, food hard to come by, and economic prospects nil, young Joe Louis Barrow, like other young African Americans, seemed destined for a life of poverty, crime, or dissolution.

The Depression's effects on Germany were even more devastating. While the economic catastrophe led to a profound change in political direction for the United States, in Germany, by contrast, it caused the abandonment of any semblance of a democratic system and the triumph of fascism. As workers lost their jobs at rates equal to or greater than those of the United States and the lower-middle classes faced the loss of their savings, their homes, and what little property they had managed to accumulate, the future appeared bleak. The disillusion of the vast majority of the German population, moreover, was compounded by a series of prior political and economic disasters. For most Germans, the Depression recalled horrible memories of the great hunger during World War I, and the inflation that rocked Germany after the nation's defeat. With the nation devastated by war and its economy in ruins, German currency had proved worthless. Heavy reparation payments demanded by the allies drove prices up dramatically, and savings and national confidence were wiped out. Germans connected the inflation to the humiliating defeat on the battlefield and the Treaty of Versailles that blamed them for starting the war. In 1924, the Dawes Plan, initiated by the United States, spread out the reparation payments and helped reorganize the currency. Five short years of prosperity followed, a period when Max Schmeling and German boxing flourished as never before. The Great Depression, however, wiped out these years of prosperity and made them seem merely a short interval between periods of economic chaos and national crisis. The Depression resurrected old fears of starvation, national humiliation, and a crushing sense of loss that historians have called a Culture of Defeat. It was in that period that Max Schmeling found himself at the lowest stage of his career, mirroring for a nation the shock and despair of constant defeat as he lost his heavyweight title and suffered through a series of ignominious losses from 1932 through most of 1934. He was faced with the possibility that his long career had ended.[3](#)

If ever there was a boxer who experienced constant reversals of fortune it was Max Schmeling, whose career rose and fell along with the sport in Germany and the United States. With Schmeling as its leading proponent, German boxing should have stood at its acme. When he was born on September 28, 1905, in the small town of Klein-Luckow in the eastern part of Germany, boxing had virtually no place in German sports. Prizefighting developed under international influences in the wake of World War I, as German prisoners of war brought the sport home from their British guards. *Ring* magazine's Wilbur Wood declared it doubtful "if one out of a thousand Germans ever even saw a boxing glove until the Great War." Although no nationwide law prohibited boxing in Imperial Germany, police banned public fights and raided them continuously. As a result, the sport remained confined to small circles and had a reputation as a disreputable endeavor. Because Max and his family moved to Hamburg shortly after his birth, he was in a perfect spot to be influenced by this and other foreign imports. International shipping and travel dominated the life of the city, where Max's father worked as a merchant seaman and navigator for the Hamburg-America Line. Influenced at an early age by his father's constant journeys and the large number of emigrants to

America who flocked to Hamburg's docks, young Max hoped to follow in his father's footsteps as a seaman and live a life of adventure and international travel. He started school in 1912, but proved a poor student. His interests lay in sports. Big and strong, he preferred playing goalie for the St. Georger Fussball-Club von 1895.⁴

World War I and its aftermath hit the family hard. His father served in the navy and in his absence the family experienced periods of hunger common to other Germans during the conflict. For a time, Max was sent off to live with his grandparents in Brandenburg. For young Schmeling, as for all Germans, the end of the war ushered in a period of political chaos and economic uncertainty. Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, the youngster found himself on the streets of Hamburg, as revolutionary leftists battled fiercely but unsuccessfully with police and the army for control of the city. Eager for money in a time of economic distress, Max acceded to his parents' wish that he find a respectable job. In 1920 he began a three-year period of training as a salesman. This was not a propitious time to start such a career, nor did he much like office work. More to the point, Max longed for a job that would relieve him of the burdens of lower-middle-class existence.

⁵

Much to the dismay of his increasingly religious parents, boxing came to his rescue as he entered adolescence. After the lifting of the police bans on prizefighting in 1918 and the return of the POWs, the sport spread quickly. Young Max was alerted to the sport by another international influence—American fight films. In July 1921 he watched the movies of the championship match between the American Jack Dempsey and the Frenchman Georges Carpentier, which convinced him that boxing was a way to make something of himself far beyond his origins. In pursuit of his goal of becoming a professional fighter, he took a construction job and moved from the Lutheranism of Hamburg, which frowned on boxing as a wasteful and brutal “Anglo-American” activity, to several Rhineland towns, where Catholic culture proved more open to all forms of sport. In addition, the continued occupation of the Rhineland by British troops made the area a hotbed of boxing, with numerous clubs and the opportunity to train and fight regularly. After learning his craft in the amateur ranks during 1923 and 1924, he decided to turn professional at the age of nineteen in 1924, ten years before Joe Louis would do the same, because times remained hard and his family needed the money. The discovery that United States champions such as Jack Dempsey earned millions had a profound effect on both men. As a result, Max quit his construction job and moved to Cologne, where he undertook serious training for his professional debut. In his first professional bout on August 2, 1924, Schmeling knocked out Johann Czapp in Düsseldorf in front of 5,000 fans. Fighting as a light heavyweight, he made 80 deutsche marks (DM) and was on his way. By the end of the year, he had had ten professional bouts, winning seven by knockout and two on points; one was a disqualification. Although he still had much to learn, it became clear that the German slugger had a powerful right hand that potentially could earn him a good deal of money.⁶

Professional boxing offered more than money. As Schmeling recalled in his autobiography, boxing offered “dreams of epic battles.” Similar to other German and American men, young Max dreamed of a more exciting alternative to the factory and office routines that were commonly the only jobs for working- and lower-middle-class men during the early 1920s. Max found the sport exciting because it put “one’s own existence on the line.” In a mass society, moreover, it provided “a means to break away from the crowd to climb into the world spotlight.” As a craft, meanwhile, the sport was a way to take “my life into my own hands and make something of it.” The young man also saw a similarity between boxing and circus work. In the summer of 1925, after an injury, a disappointing loss, and a lack of matches, Schmeling spent a month with a circus teaching the owner’s son to box. There he realized that risk “made the lifestyle of the boxer, like that of the [circus] *artiste* so uncertain; but in the risk lay . . . a great attraction.” Unlike most work in the modern world, boxing required the “commitment of his entire self,” which meant “mental and spiritual commitment too.” To succeed, he willingly gave up tobacco and alcohol and followed a

strict diet. It was “a matter of attitude and will.” Already inclined by his upbringing toward rigid self-discipline, the young man found that boxing required exacting standards of behavior and self-control. It became a matter of pride that he was never out of shape.⁷

On June 15, 1926, Schmeling’s desire for an adventurous professional career brought him to Berlin, a cosmopolitan city that was then emerging as the capital of German, and some would say European, boxing, Max was completely broke and looking for a new manager who knew something about the sport. Without a place to stay or a job, the twenty-year-old Schmeling headed for the offices of *Box-Sport*, Germany’s premier weekly prizefight trade journal, which had taken notice of his power in the ring and had begun to refer to him as “Dempsey II.” There he took up with two influential men who directly shaped his career. Arthur Bülow, the publisher of *Box-Sport*, was a war hero, an important manager and referee, and a tireless promoter of amateur and professional boxing in Berlin and across northern Europe. Having refereed several of Schmeling’s bouts, Bülow recognized Max’s potential and consented to manage him and promote his career. Equally important, he agreed to pay for the young slugger’s costs at a camp in the woods run by Max Machon, who became Schmeling’s trainer and friend and remained with him for the rest of his career. For the first time, the fighter was able to focus completely on his sport, and under Machon’s guidance, he engaged in a highly disciplined exercise regimen. Starting at 6:30 A.M. he rose for his roadwork, after breakfast he engaged in discussions about ring tactics and strategy, and in the afternoon he exercised and sparred. In this Spartan environment Schmeling soon rounded into top shape.⁸

With a knowledgeable and active manager, improved boxing skills, and a better left to go with his powerful right, Schmeling rapidly ascended the ranks of the German and European prizefighting world. On August 24, 1926, he won the German Light Heavyweight Championship in Berlin, by knocking out the titleholder Max Diekmann in thirty seconds of the first round, the shortest German title match to date. A year later in June 1927 in Dortmund he took the European title at the same weight against the Belgian Fernand Delarge on a thirteenth round technical knockout (TKO), making Schmeling the first German to become a European champion. His spectacular knockout of the Italian titleholder, Michele Bonaglia, at Berlin’s Sportpalast in early 1928 made him a national hero. Since Benito Mussolini had personally supported Bonaglia as an example of Italian fascism, a number of leftists hailed Schmeling’s knockout as a victory of democracy over fascism. Even more, German fans sang the national anthem after the bout, thereby turning the event, according to *Box-Sport*, into “a national affair.” At the age of twenty-two Schmeling had become a national hero and a mass celebrity. Soon after, he moved up to the heavyweight division and won the German title on points against the champion, Fritz Diener, in the sporting event of the year.⁹

In a direct parallel to his American namesake, the “German Dempsey” played a critical role in the rise of German boxing from an illegal, lower-class, disreputable activity to the pinnacle of mass spectator sports in the Weimar Republic. The urban masses and the highest social classes attended boxing matches, celebrated the sport’s champions, and followed their ring exploits in the nation’s newspapers, motion pictures, music, and literature. In fact, the sport resonated in popular culture far beyond any other, as it mixed both athletics and show business into a modern, hybrid form of popular entertainment. Under the influence of American primacy in the sport, a slew of American sporting terms such as “KO,” “training,” and “form” now entered the German language. A poem of 1925 captured boxing’s mass appeal: “A big fight beckons today . . . whether you ride or whether you sail . . . whether you flicker or foxtrot—you have to go there: there will be boxing!”¹⁰

The sport’s new social cachet reversed its earlier reputation as an illegal activity associated with brutal bloodlust and the disreputable working classes. In fact, during his career Schmeling went from fighting in amusement parks and beer gardens located in industrial suburbs, “where the price of admission was perhaps ten cents,” to Berlin’s grandiose Sportpalast, the city’s equivalent to Madison Square Garden, in front of crowds attired in tuxedos and evening gowns. The sport

was so popular in 1926, according to Nat Fleischer, editor of *Ring* magazine, that “in the elementary high schools and colleges, in the gymnasiums and in the police and military schools, boxing is the one sport which everyone must follow. . . . It is compulsory for the police of every city in Germany to take boxing lessons.” Many women, upper-class swells, working-class fans, and artists and theater folk felt compelled to attend the matches, and radio broadcasts extended the sport’s diverse audience into the countryside. In fact, Schmeling rode the remarkable boom in German boxing after World War I to the pinnacle of international accomplishment and national renown in 1930 when he won the heavyweight title against Jack Sharkey in Yankee Stadium, the first European to accomplish this momentous feat. When Schmeling defended his world title in New York in 1932, listeners across Germany stayed up late to catch the broadcast. According to one observer, in a small Berlin villa on the top floor, “an entire family in pajamas and bathrobes sits around the shrieking loudspeaker, while at the same time burglars downstairs are packing up 5,000 marks in silver and carpets unnoticed.”¹¹

The acclaim that Schmeling and other German boxers received throughout his career arose from the vital role that the sport played in Weimar culture. To some extent, its rise in popularity can be seen as a diversion after the war, part of the search for pleasure and experience long denied by the conflict. German sportswriter Willy Meisl noted: “The war was over and peace had broken out. . . . Many people had learned how transitory life is; they felt that life was there to be lived. Subconscious drives ruled them; they had returned from the land of the dead and sought life; they were open to adventure, for the old way offered them no chance. . . . The body was in . . . sport and all its ramifications were the future.” Boxing also served as a metaphor for the turbulent nature of postwar German society, but in a safe, ordered environment. In this sense, boxing counteracted the irrational violence of the war and the early 1920s in Germany by allowing fans to express their aggressive impulses in a rational and ritualized form. Schmeling seemed to agree. He maintained that boxing expressed more than physical violence. Rather, boxing was a trade, and a boxer was “in a sense a craftsman.” In order to advance his trade, the athlete had to “develop his tools—the hands, legs, and eyes—and keep them in top working order” just like an artisan. Moreover, it was not just the body that led to success. He maintained that boxing was like a chess match. He used the first few rounds to study his opponent in order to fight him correctly, claiming that “only the intelligent boxer can make major adjustments in the course of the fight.” In the ring as elsewhere, “it’s intelligence that is the decisive factor. With tactics and strategy, even a less physically gifted boxer can outmaneuver a giant.”¹²

Boxing also appealed to the powerful individualistic feelings unleashed by the war and the collapse of the legitimacy of the Wilhelmine order that had produced the devastating conflict and in the 1920s stood for stuffiness, hypocrisy, and class rigidity. In the past, respectable Germans had disdained boxing because they feared its power to foster working-class violence and rebellion against the established order. The various city bans against the sport did not target upper-class dueling and swordplay, suggesting a deep class bias against this much simpler and less expensive form of self defense. In the Weimar years, boxing provided the individual with the means to survive and succeed in a less hierarchical world. Perhaps this explains why Schmeling and other boxers were treated as American-style success stories. They were young men who had fought their way from the bottom of the social order to riches and fame, and they were admired and rewarded for their achievements. In a society still worried about the transformations in postwar Germany—the criticism of the class order, the emergence of a more assertive Modern Woman who attended the fights—boxing had the advantage of having well-defined rules and regulations for individual conduct.¹³

In Germany’s big cities, prizefighting became a dramatic arena in which new possibilities and dangers were acted out for a mass public. In his memoir, Schmeling recalled that artists and intellectuals often saw boxing as a theater of deadly individualism. The actor Fritz Kortner, one of the sport’s many avid fans in the theater world, told him, “What happens in the ring reflects life. So

unmerciful, so angry the way you go at each other, that is how we all struggle for our own existence." Actors, he told Max, could present such a scene on the stage, "but for us it's only theater. . . . But for you the matter is really one of life and death. . . . That's what's so exciting about boxing: nowhere else is the lust for fame and success so palpable, so deadly earnest! Boxing is really not a sport. It's a battle for life compressed into twelve rounds." Schmeling and other German boxers symbolized the individual who fought his way in the battle of life.¹⁴

Having successfully fought the battle of life in a realm outside modern corporations and factories, Schmeling was entitled to the rewards of the new consumer society just as he was becoming a hero of this world. The chief reward was money, which was a much more fluid medium of status than the older markers of class identity. By the end of the decade, Max had become a wealthy man, and his purses were recorded in the daily press. He first earned big money as a boxer when he received 20,000 marks for a bout against Hein Domgörgen in 1927. When he fought Johnny Risko in New York in early 1929, he took home \$25,000 or about 70,000 marks. In his championship match against Jack Sharkey in 1930 he made close to a million marks. By the end of the 1920s, Schmeling lived the life of a rich man. While he was far from ostentatious, the press showed photos of his expensive new sports car and his thoroughbred racehorse. He also was pictured in front of his rural mansion just outside Berlin, which featured idyllic grounds and a private swimming pool. The successful boxer, in other words, had an opportunity to live the life of a movie star. To top it off, on July 6, 1933, he actually married a movie actress, the Czech ingénue Anny Ondra, then at the acme of her career, an event that received considerable coverage in the German press. Like his American counterpart, Jack Dempsey, Schmeling also had the opportunity to star in movies himself. In 1929 he appeared in *Lieben im Ring* ("Love in the Ring") and actually sang "The Heart of the Boxer," which became a popular song on German radio. As historian Siegfried Gehrman has noted, Schmeling's career "touched a chord in the collective psyche; this is what in the United States came to be called the 'American Dream.'"¹⁵

Max Schmeling and fiancée Anny Ondra, the movie actress, 1933. During the 1920s and early 1930s, boxers and other athletes achieved new status as popular celebrities equivalent to movie stars in both Germany and the United States. (International News Photos, Library of Congress)

German fight fans identified with their favorites, and the personality and charisma of top boxers attracted large crowds. In fact, the public idolized boxers more than other types of celebrities. In a poll taken of fourteen-year-olds in 1930, world champion Schmeling proved better known than statesman Gustav Stresemann, popular writer Karl May, or industrialist Henry Ford. As the socialist newspaper the *Vorwärts* sniffed in distaste, "Germany, once the land of thinkers and poets, is on the fastest road to becoming the land of football players and boxers." The display of the boxer's body added to his charisma, drawing women fans and causing some dismay among boxing experts. Appearing half-clad, boxers had erotic appeal, which led various social observers and boxing commentators to warn that fighters unleashed the passions of women, who were drawn not only to bloodlust but also to the sexual possibilities of the male body.¹⁶

As the most prominent German prizefighter, Schmeling's success catapulted him into the cosmopolitan Weimar world of writers, artists, and show people for whom boxing was a modernist symbol. Berlin was the metropolis that drew ambitious young people—actors, directors, artists, musicians, and fighters from the provinces. This quality gave Berlin, much like New York City, the sense of being "a huge cultural train station," a "city of gold for anyone who wanted to make it to the top." The influx of outsiders into the capital helps explain the excitement of its urban life and the explosion of the Weimar cultural world. As he accumulated his titles, Schmeling became part of Berlin society, which, he recalled, "did not consist of the important or influential people; nor the rich or the powerful. Rather it was the people about whom everyone was talking: artists and

showgirls, actors, journalists and authors, bicycle riders and intellectuals." There were no outsiders in this world, "since all in their own way were themselves outsiders. They were *the* society; and this society was now clamoring for me." Emil Jennings and Ernst Deutsch, the great actors, opera singer Michael Bohnen, the sculptor Josef Thorak, film stars Hans Albers, Willy Fritsch, and Olga Tschechowa, along with director Josef von Sternberg all became his friends and companions. He also became a favorite of artists and sculptors like Georg Grosz, Ernesto de Fiori, Renee Sintenis, and Rudolf Belling. All of these outsiders, many sympathetic to leftist politics and artistic modernism, and a large number of them of Jewish descent, contributed to making Berlin the capital of a new, more cosmopolitan cultural life in which boxing and the body played central roles.¹⁷

In revolt against the high idealism of the grand German intellectual and cultural tradition that was exploded by the pointless mechanized horror of World War I, artists, writers, and performers turned to the cult of the body and the boxer as the irreducible element of human existence. As a fighter, Schmeling noted, "I symbolized sports." From the moment that conventional behavior lost its power, he recalled, "the natural reigned triumphant," and a cult of the physical emerged in Germany: "a glorification of the body and a cult of nakedness, which stretched from vaudeville to nudist culture." For the first time since antiquity, artists made the body in sport the subject of their art. Ernesto de Fiori, Renee Sintenis, and Rudolf Belling sculpted him, the latter in the nude. George Grosz, with whom he became friendly, painted him as "The Fighter." Outside the restrictions of social class and social custom, the boxer was a symbol of freedom, a man who dealt with the harsh realities of life without recourse to obfuscating ideas or ideals.¹⁸

Unlike later Nazi art that glorified the Greek ideal of gladiatorial power and Aryan racial perfection, Weimar artists especially valued the American boxer's body for its playfulness and natural spontaneity, its "swaying and whirling," its toughness and lack of inhibition, its ability to forget tradition and live in the present. As a student of the game, Schmeling early on modeled his bobbing and weaving on American models, and it was the links among boxing, modernity, and America that made him a cosmopolitan hero to the German intellectual and cultural avant-garde. The sport's standing with the German cultural rebels of Weimar Berlin gave the German fascination with boxing its unique place in the Western world and helps explain the mutual friendships that developed between Schmeling and various artists. Weimar's left avant-garde viewed the American connection as giving sports the power to subvert nineteenth-century Wilhelmine authoritarian and militaristic culture. American sports, many intellectuals hoped, would cause a "renewal of life feeling," buried under the vestiges of a decaying cultural order. "Americanism is the materialization of vitality." The athlete, especially the boxer, demystified art and culture, and took society out of "the realm of sensitivity into the realm of action; out of a tender and clinging world into one—if you will that is brutal and ruthless . . . real." Schmeling agreed. In a contribution to a Berlin symposium on Americanism, he hailed American sports. In his view, they offered a means to energize an older, stiffer German culture. "Americanism in sport does not take away from fairness. It does not necessarily mean the injection of the business spirit," he declared. Rather, sports were an American "national virtue," that "saves them from laziness and lethargy, gives them daily new impulses and makes them young, fresh and enterprising."¹⁹

Not all agreed, however. The popularity and success of a sport so closely associated with the United States led to criticism of prizefighting as too commercial and "Americanized." Some commentators criticized the mass audience for seeking sensation and showmanship rather than pursuing real knowledge of and appreciation for the finer points of boxing technique. It was the commercialization of sport that Socialists and National Socialists found most disturbing. They contrasted the promotion of star athletes, the creation of spectacle, and the stoking of the audience's demands for violence and sensation with the participatory nature of the worker sports movement in Germany or the older Turner tradition of gymnastic group exercise. Money and fame were the result of capitalist corruption of sport and hence were part of the new economic order

that Socialists found deeply disturbing in Weimar Germany. To the Nazis, commercialization was the product of the sport's many Jewish promoters and managers. Instead of national greatness, sporting figures were being lured toward the love of money and individual accomplishment.[20](#)

Yet as Germany's most successful fighter during the 1920s and early 1930s, Schmeling was, according to *Box-Sport*, "the embodiment of a modern national hero." His victories in the ring over opponents from former enemy countries "functioned as some kind of collective psychic compensation for the national humiliation of Versailles," asserted historian Siegfried Gehrmann. When he won the European Light Heavyweight title from the Belgian Fernand Delarge in 1927, for example, a German newspaper charted the tremendous shouts of joy by the fans at the match in Dortmund. "Schmeling! Schmeling! The Champion of Europe . . . Schmeling the first German European Champion embodies from now on Germany's dominant position in boxing." And as the band played, the crowd proudly sang the national anthem, "Deutschland, Deutschland Über Alles!"
[21](#)

During the 1920s and early 1930s, however, Schmeling's nationalist image was mitigated by his overarching cosmopolitan identity. When he traveled to New York City in May 1928 to contend for the world championship in the capital of world boxing, he continued to break boundaries as he had in Berlin. One of the first truly transatlantic athletes, he became an international figure who lived between worlds and made a name for himself in "America, my second home." From the time he first arrived in New York, the entire direction of Schmeling's career was shaped by his contacts with the United States, often to the disappointment of his many German fans who missed seeing him fight on German soil. When he discovered that success in the United States required an American manager who knew the ropes and had the right contacts in New York, he parted with Arthur Bülow, his German manager. In his place, Schmeling hired the Yiddish speaking Hungarian-born Jew, Joe "Yussel the Muscle" Jacobs. While Jacobs knew little about boxing, he did know how to negotiate a good deal. The two got along well and Jacobs worked hard to get him fights and build up his name in New York, where now Schmeling was not just a figure in society but a hero on the street. Closely tied to his Jewish American manager, Schmeling also developed associations with many German Jewish friends in New York. The German boxer also found a positive reception in the United States as a result of another Jew, *Ring* editor Nat Fleischer, who had alerted Madison Square Garden to Max's talent in 1926. In order to fight in New York, moreover, Schmeling made frequent transatlantic crossings. As a result, he was one of the best-traveled figures of the day. These factors contributed to a cosmopolitan identity that moderated his nationalist associations.[22](#)

Max Schmeling, Heavyweight Champion of the World 1930. (Library of Congress)

His willingness to gamble on his chances in the international arena quickly turned Schmeling into a serious contender for the heavyweight crown. Despite discrimination against African American boxers, New York's boxing world proved welcoming when it came to white European fighters. In part, this goes back to the long history of transatlantic openness in the sporting world of the United States. British and Irish boxers had brought the sport to the United States in the early nineteenth century, and over the years European, Australian, Canadian, and South American prizefighters had made their way to America to take advantage of the lucrative rewards and worldwide acclaim possible only in the United States. When champion Gene Tunney retired in 1928 after taking the title from and defending against Jack Dempsey in two of the million-dollar matches of the era, American boxing was desperate for a box office draw. In this atmosphere, Nat Fleischer noted, "the German Menace's" resemblance to Dempsey in and out of the ring, has "almost overnight," gained him "world-wide acclaim." To work himself into contention, Schmeling fought his way through a series of fighters in the United States, including Joe Sekyra, Pietro Corri, Johnny

Risko, and Paolino Uzcudun, the latter a well-known Basque campaigner during the late 1920s and early 1930s.[23](#) *

Held on June 22, 1938, in Yankee Stadium, the second Louis-Schmeling fight sparked excitement around the globe. For all its length--the fight lasted but two minutes--it remains one of the most memorable events in boxing history and, indeed, one of the most significant sporting events ever.

In this superb account, Lewis A. Erenberg offers a vivid portrait of Joe Louis, Max Schmeling, their individual careers, and their two epic fights, shedding light on what these fighters represented to their nations, and why their second bout took on such international importance. Erenberg shows how in the first fight Schmeling shocked everyone with a dramatic twelfth-round knockout of Louis, becoming a German national hero and a (unwilling) symbol of Aryan superiority. In fact, the second fight was seen around the world in symbolic terms--as a match between Nazism and American democracy. Erenberg discusses how Louis' dramatic first-round victory was a devastating blow to Hitler, who turned on Schmeling and, during the war, had the boxer (then serving as a paratrooper) sent on a series of dangerous missions. Louis, meanwhile, went from being a hero of his race--"Our Joe"--to the first black champion embraced by all Americans, black and white, an important step forward in United States race relations. Erenberg also describes how, after the war, the two boxers became symbols of German-American reconciliation. With Schmeling as a Coca Cola executive, and Louis down on his luck, the former foes became friends, and when Louis died, Schmeling helped pay for his funeral.

Here then is a stirring and insightful account of one of the great moments in boxing history, a confrontation that provided global theater on an epic scale.

[Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling] - In the Corner: Great Boxing Trainers Talk About Their Art. New York: New York: Ballantine Books, 2007. Erenberg, Lewis A. The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis vs. Max Schmeling, and a World on the Brink. Twenty-Five Noted Boxing Buffs Name Their Favorite Boxing - Lewis A. Erenberg Held on June 22, 1938, in Yankee Stadium, "the greatest fight of our generation" took place between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling. This was the second fight between these two men, the first having been won by Schmeling when he knocked out Loius in the twelfth round. Paul Beston "The Heavyweight Bookshelf: Joe Louis - Compre o livro "Greatest Fight Of Our Generation" de Lewis A. Erenberg em wook.pt. 20% de desconto em Fight Of Our Generation. Louis Vs. Schmeling. Crispin Jackson - Striking Blows For Freedom - Louis vs. Schmeling. Clem McCarthy and the "Greatest Fight of Our Generation" Louis (1914-1981) and Max Schmeling (1905-2005) on June 22, 1938 that he The Greatest Fight of Our

Generation: Louis Vs. Schmeling - Florio, John, 1960- author. Book , 2019. 199 pages : Place Hold. 0 holds 11 copies. Cover image of The greatest fight of our generation : Louis vs. Schmeling. Greatest Fight Of Our Generation - Livro - WOOK - Louis Vs. Schmeling Lewis A. Erenberg of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Erenberg, Lewis A., 1944â€“ The greatest fight of our generation : Louis vs. 'Beyond Glory': The Good Fight - The New York Times - Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling refers to two separate fights between the two which are among. Among the attendees at Louis' defeat was Langston Hughes, a major figure in the Harlem This thought gave me the strength to succeed in this fight... The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis v. New York: Vintage Books. On This Day: Joe Louis Knocks Out Max Schmeling - Lewis A. Erenberg describes a boxing match that transcended the sport to become an iconic event, a symbol of political tensions around the globe. Advanced Book Search & Help The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis Vs. Schmeling. Jensen on Erenberg, The Greatest Fight of Our Generation - Pdf The Greatest Fight Of Our Generation : Louis Vs. Schmeling whenever you use the interest. health submitted through the candy of links, networks, book, de Lewis A. Erenberg - IberLibro.com - Germany's Max Schmeling and Joe Louis, the â€œBrown Bomberâ€• of Detroit. In his book The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis vs. Paul Beston â€” The Heavyweight Bookshelf: Joe Louis - C-SPAN.org

Relevant Books

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Ebook Every Day Tarot: A Choice Centered Book

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Buy Book Lady of Madness & Moonlight (Rogue Ethereal Book 3) pdf

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Ebook NANA'S MAGIC TEA BERRIES free

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Ebook Letters to Ethan: Joe's Story pdf

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Download ebook Female Close Range Snipers In Vietnam free epub
