
When Malakas Met “The Greatest”

Marcos’ Philippines and the Thrilla in Manila

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”I’m the king of the world, I am the greatest, I’m Muhammad Ali. I shook up the world. I am the greatest; I’m king of the world!”¹

Muhammad Ali—born Cassius Clay and then changing his name early in his professional career—was undeniably one of the greatest self-promoters to occupy the stage of American sports. Often dubbed “The Mouth” or “The Louisville Lip” by the press, Ali never backed down from bold statements about his own importance and his place in the pantheon of boxing, athletic and societal heroes. Ali provided countless journalists with a constant supply of fresh material as he was politically outspoken, proud of his African-American heritage and devoted to his new faith of Islam. His critics, too, never lacked ammunition in lambasting Ali for a myriad of his perceived shortcomings. In short, Ali was a one-man propaganda machine.

More than 8,000 miles away from Ali’s hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, Ferdinand Marcos, President of the Philippines, had begun an equally promising career as a polarizing public figure and shameless self-promoter. Elected to office in 1966, Marcos would preside over the Philippines for almost 20 years. He commissioned portraits of himself and his wife, Imelda, portraying the couple as *Malakas at Maganda* (Strength and Beauty)—the mythical first parents of the

Philippine nation. Never averse to making bold pronouncements, Marcos claimed, falsely, to have been the head of a daring and successful guerilla unit which fought against the Japanese in the Philippines during World War II. For his efforts, Marcos insisted he had been decorated for valor by no less a figure than Douglas MacArthur.² Upon becoming president of the Philippines, Marcos spoke of having been endowed with a “mandate for greatness.”³ As such, Marcos ordered a huge bust of himself to be carved into a mountain in Northern Luzon.

Though their homes were separated by the world’s largest body of water, Marcos and Ali were set on a collision course in 1974 when Ali, fresh off a bout with George Foreman in Malaysia, announced his intention to defend his heavyweight crown. His title defense against challenger Joe Frazier—one of his greatest rivals—would be held on October 1, 1975 in the Philippines capital of Manila. The “Thrilla in Manila,” as it would come to be called, would become one of the legendary boxing matches of the twentieth century and one of the defining victories of Ali’s storied career as a pugilist. Equally as fascinating as the boxing match, however, was the unprecedented interaction between American sport’s greatest self-promoter and the equally outspoken President of the Philippines. For several weeks leading up to the match in the fall of

1975, the Marcos propaganda machine had the Louisville Lip at its service. Grand pronouncements about the skill and wisdom of Marcos, the greatness of his regime, and the glory of the Philippines filled airwaves and newspaper columns. Both men and their public relations entourages never seemed to lack for an energetic sound-byte about the importance of themselves and the other.

A look at newspaper coverage in the Philippines of the Thrilla in Manila provides a particularly clear window into the Marcos presidency and the Marcos vision of the Philippines. Having declared Martial Law in 1972, Marcos was able to curtail the freedom of the press in the Philippines. The major English language dailies from before the time of Martial Law ceased publishing, replaced by a group of English language papers over which the Marcos machine had more or less complete control.⁴

With the arrival of Ali, the heavyweight champion of the world, in September 1975, the Philippine press, ever loyal to Marcos, had a unique opportunity to gush over a visiting celebrity and praise the presidential administration. The coverage of the preparations for the title bout and the reporting on the fight itself provided many excellent illustrations of the image of a progressive Philippines, as well as the self-image of a dedicated leader that Marcos wished to project to both a domestic and international audience.

The Setting

The projection of a positive image was of critical importance to Marcos in 1975. Three years earlier, his declaration of Martial Law had brought participatory democracy in the Philippines to an abrupt halt. Citing internal security concerns of Marxist as well as Islamist insurgencies, Marcos suspended the democratic process, curtailed civil liberties, jailed opposition leaders and put a vice grip on the once free press. Prominent opposition figure Benigno Aquino was whisked out of his Manila hotel suite and imprisoned.⁵

A curfew was put in place and the armed forces and Philippine National Police wielded previously unheard of levels of power. Marcos enjoyed the support of the United States, having cited concerns with a communist insurgency as a cause for the martial law declaration. United States officials and the American media, fresh off a humiliation in Indochina, showered praise on

Marcos as a strong ally in the cold war struggle to check the spread of communism and prevent the developing world from falling under Moscow's sway.⁶

In addition to his anti-communist credentials, Marcos sought to propel the Philippines towards modernity and an international standing. Martial Law was the president's instrument of choice for making sweeping changes in Philippines society. He assembled a team of western-educated technocrats tasked with bringing an economic boom to the Philippines.⁷

Together with his very visible wife Imelda, Marcos inaugurated the "New Society" movement in the Philippines. Marcos' New Society would show the world that Filipinos and the Philippines were worthy of international attention after centuries spent under the thumbs of colonial powers. Increased efficiency, law and order, and visible signs of economic growth and prestige were the key features of the New Society which the Marcos clan sought to craft. A visit from the international sporting elite and the staging of a world-class boxing match fit nicely into the overall Marcos goal of visible progress. Ringing endorsements of the positive changes wrought in the Philippines provided the Martial Law president with greater legitimacy and buttressed the administration against criticism for its heavy-handed policies.

The Guests of Honor

On September 13, 1975—almost three years into martial law—the residents of Manila, upon opening their morning copy of the *Philippines Daily Express*, discovered something that had become a common sight in the papers: a picture of first lady Imelda Marcos holding a child. Readers of the *Daily Express* that day found a large headline announcing that the challenger for the heavyweight championship, Joe Frazier, would be arriving at Manila International Airport later that day.⁸

This announcement of Frazier's arrival marked the beginning of a remarkable three weeks for English-language Manila-based newspapers. A full page advertisement later in the publication proclaimed, "Welcome to the Philippines Smokin Joe!"⁹ The excitement for his arrival was not merely a one-sided infatuation with an international star. The *Express* quoted the challenger as declaring prior to his

departure from the United States, “I am looking forward to this trip to Manila and am very eager to meet the Filipinos. I’ve heard they are a great people.”¹⁰ This theme of the greatness and hospitality of the Filipino people would become a common theme in the press coverage of the title bout. A day later, Frazier’s trainer was quoted as saying “you [the Philippines] have a very efficient organization and we’re happy about that.”¹¹

The arrival of Muhammad Ali in Manila on September 15 brought more attention to the upcoming fight. Though the soft-spoken Frazier would receive a great deal of notice from the press, the gregarious Ali was the media darling. For a Philippine press that was beholden to the Marcos clan, Ali was a particularly useful visitor owing to his international status, and, of particular interest to the Marcos regime, because of his Muslim faith. By 1975, the Armed Forces of the Philippines were heavily mired in an increasingly violent conflict with Muslim insurgents on the island of Mindanao.¹² Ali’s visible and vocal embrace of Islam provided the Marcos-loyal media with ample opportunity to show the regime’s acceptance of adherents to Islam. The *Express* declared, “Ali has uplifted Muslim people’s plight all over the world.”¹³ Prompted by a reporter, Ali gushed over the regime’s progressive views towards people of all faiths, “[In the Philippines] I see Muslims and Christians together huggin and kissin.”¹⁴ A hastily convened “Christian-Muslim Brotherhood Conference” bestowed an award on the visiting champion. A leading Manila mosque conferred upon Ali the honorable title of “Datu.”¹⁵

Ali’s unique usefulness to the Marcos regime did not entirely force Joe Frazier from the pages of Manila’s newspapers. Daily detailed accounts of his training regimen and other activities offered sportswriters plenty of material and provided opportunities to trumpet the Marcos regime’s vision of a New Society in which hard work and efficiency would bring progress and growth. Citing his early morning training routine, humility, and overall work ethic, one commentator proclaimed “Joe Frazier is worthy of emulation by the youth of our land.”¹⁶ Detailed reports of Frazier’s jogging route appeared daily along with accounts of Filipinos rising early to accompany the challenger for parts of his morning exercise.¹⁷ When polled about their feelings on the fighters, Filipinos frequently cited Frazier’s humility as the quality that they admired.¹⁸

Ali was also the recipient of lavish praise from officials and journalists. Three days before the fight, the *Express* declared, “Ali is humble and has a strong, big heart.”¹⁹ The *Baguio Midland Courier*, a weekly publication based in the northern university city of Baguio, reported exuberantly on Ali’s reception of an honorary doctorate from one of the city’s prestigious universities.²⁰ Quezon City and the nearby city of Pasay made Ali, as well as Frazier, an adopted son citing Ali’s contributions “to the promotion of the international image of Manila and of Philippine tourism.”²¹ Front page as well as sports section articles spoke daily of Ali’s compassion, energy, and extraordinary ability.

The boxers and their entourages were not the only internationally recognizable faces seen in Manila for the Thrilla. The weeks leading up to the fight saw frequent blurbs in the Manila papers announcing that an assortment of big-name celebrities would visit the city for the title bout. That the singing sensations, the Temptations, planned to attend the boxing match was news of particular excitement.²² Newspapers rejoiced that the Philippines was receiving its due international attention and an increase in foreign visitors. Of particular interest to the Manila press was the swarm of foreign sportswriters which descended upon Manila in the days leading up to the title bout. The *Daily Express* informed its readers that nearly all of the “top US sportswriters are in town.”²³ The likes of Howard Cossel, Red Smith, Ed Skyler, and Norman Mailer received much attention from the Philippine media as they arrived in Manila. Mailer’s status as an American literary icon made him the recipient of much interest from Filipino journalists. In 2007, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* remembered Mailer’s visit as the newspaper eulogized the recently deceased American writer, “There is wide eyed disbelief, the usual big ‘Wow!’, whenever it is stated that Norman Mailer was here!”²⁴

In Praise of Marcos and the Philippines

The media coverage leading up to the championship fight stressed the importance of the upcoming event and the prestige of the match’s hosts: the Marcos family. In addition to the influx of foreign money, international media exposure, and public goodwill generated by the boxing match, the title bout provided the Marcos government with numerous glowing

endorsements. Ali, Frazier, and their entourages showered the Marcos government with lavish praise and the heavily censored press dutifully reported every word of admiration expressed for the president. Several days after their arrivals, Ali and Frazier met President Marcos in the presidential palace. Ali gushed, "We accept this as a big honor, President Marcos being such a real loved man."²⁵ The heavyweight champ expressed approval of Marcos' taste in women upon seeing Imelda, "Mr. President, I respect you now more than I did at first. Looking at your wife I can tell you're not a dull man. You sure know how to pick."²⁶ Given the attention that was paid by the media and the Filipino people to every move made by Ali and Frazier, the personal rapport between Marcos and the visiting pugilists demonstrated that the president was, indeed, an internationally great man worthy of the respect of other internationally great men. In its issue covering the week of the Thrilla, the *Baguio Midland Courier* praised the administration's handling of the big event commenting that the Marcos government had "ridden [the fighters'] popularity for priceless publicity for the country."²⁷

Ali, Frazier, and those in their traveling party often endorsed Marcos and his policies for the Philippines. The timing of their visit was legendary in this regard. The day following the fighters' visit to Malacañang palace, The Philippines celebrated the three year anniversary of Marcos' declaration of Martial Law. The festivities surrounding the anniversary included a parade, a huge rally in Manila, lengthy speeches, and numerous newspaper articles vocally praising the government's policy.²⁸

The *Daily Express* serialized a book penned by a prominent Filipino historian and statesman that gave historical arguments for the benefits of Martial Law. A chapter of the work appeared every day for several weeks following the Martial Law Anniversary celebration. Following on the heels of his State of the Nation speech during the anniversary festivities, Marcos began a large scale purge of several government departments. More than 2,000 officials were sacked on September 19; 100 judges resigned on September 21; on September 23 more than 70 Customs officials were fired. Days before the fight, another 1,100 government employees were terminated.

As the government celebrated the anniversary of Martial Law and as the purges thinned the ranks of the

civil service and the judiciary, the visiting athletes provided the Marcos government with numerous ringing endorsements. Ali was particularly vocal. "Marcos is a great man...He is humble. He is peaceful. He is loving. I am sure he will lead his people always with the best decisions."²⁹ After meeting the President, Ali continued, "President Marcos knows how to solve the problems here better than we could. I'm sure he's doing something to help his people."³⁰ The champion's comments reaffirmed critical themes: The Philippines was a nation and Marcos was that nation's true and inspired leader. Reacting to the purges, Ali told a reporter, "Marcos is some man. He really is the right man for the country."³¹

Ali's lavish praise for the Marcos regime may have been upstaged only by the incomparable boxing-promoter Don King. Never one to turn down an opportunity to make grand pronouncements into a microphone, King used his arrival in the Philippines as an opportunity to offer his two cents on the administration. He praised Marcos for "taking the initiative to make [the fight] possible. When you are emerging it is the invincible spirit and indomitable courage that you display that makes little big. Where the Philippines has been little in the eyes of the world you have been a giant in our heart."³² In a separate interview, he declared emphatically, "The Philippines has emerged!"³³

The theme of advertising the Philippines to the world appears heavily in newspaper coverage of the title fight. This emphasis on the emerging Philippines was very clear to American journalists reporting on the contest. Mark Kram remembered, "That was the whole purpose of the fight, access and exposure to the rest of the world, to show that Manila was no more an outlaw city, that foreign investment was secure, that martial law, for all its connotations, was a cleansing instrument: Martial Law with a smile."³⁴ The order and efficiency that the Marcos regime so desperately wanted to demonstrate as a part of its international face appeared in many commentaries on the fight preparation. Reports in the *Daily Express* and the *Bulletin Today* praised government preparations to accommodate the traffic and other logistical demands. Marcos' right hand man, Fabian Ver, was placed in charge of logistics for the event.³⁵ On the day after the Thrilla, reports heaped praise upon the administration for the big day's efficiency. Calling the day a "triumph of the

organizational ability of the Filipino,” the *Bulletin Today* lauded the orderly traffic pattern. Even the clearly labeled busses received praise.³⁶

Building projects were a popular undertaking for the Marcos regime. As such, any praise given to the practice facilities and to the fight venue was featured prominently in press coverage.³⁷ Both Ali and Frazier were allotted practice time in the Philippines Folk Arts Theater which had been constructed for the 1974 Miss Universe Pageant. The training venue drew excellent reviews from the Ali and Frazier camps; both proclaimed that the facilities were “better than in Malaysia and Zaire.”³⁸ The international boxing community was so impressed with the training facilities in Manila that the *Daily Express* reported that other American heavyweights, including Ken Norton, had expressed a desire to fight in the Philippines.³⁹ Ali’s camp praised the Aranetta Coliseum, the fight venue, as “a great arena for a world class event.”⁴⁰ In addition to their praise for the existing facilities, Ali and Frazier endorsed and helped break ground for a large scale sports complex project in Metro Manila. Sports, according to Frazier, “contribute to economic growth,” and as a “social investment constitute a sign of progress.”⁴¹

The role played by Filipinos in the preparation for and conduct of the match were sources of national pride and figured prominently in the newspaper coverage of the title bout. The *Bulletin Today* praised Filipino technical staff and engineers who worked to make the broadcast of the fight to a record worldwide audience possible.⁴² Luis Tabuena, Chair of the Philippines Games and Amusements Board, received a nomination shortly before the fight for a “*Malakas at Maganda* Award” for his public relations efforts surrounding the match.⁴³ On the day of the fight, Manila papers proudly announced that the officials in charge of the conduct of the fight would be Filipinos. Venerated Filipino sports announcer Joe Cantada would call the fight from ringside. *Bulletin Today* explained that the American fighters, their managers, and the fight promoters had not objected to the list of all Filipino nominees to referee the bout.⁴⁴ Carlos Padilla, a veteran referee and part-time movie actor, was chosen to stand in the ring with the two fighters. He remembered the honor of being chosen, “When my name was announced, I turned and bowed to Marcos

and Imelda who were at ringside, to give them respect. I wanted him to bless me with a wave.”⁴⁵

The Fighters Were Welcome in the Philippines

The intense newspaper coverage of the daily routines of the champion and the contender stressed how well the two men were fitting into Filipino society. Frazier broke the tension at an early press conference by breaking into some pre-rehearsed Tagalog. “*Kumusta? Kumusta Kayo?*” (How are you? How are you all?) Frazier asked an assembled crowd.⁴⁶ Muhammad Ali was photographed reading the *Philippines Daily Express* in the lobby of his hotel, providing the daily with an image of the paper’s international relevance. The use of this photograph in the *Daily Express* seemed to be saying that if the paper was good enough for the visiting hero, it was worth reading. The Marcos government made grand pronouncements about how well the two boxers fit into life in the Philippines. Imelda Marcos was particularly outspoken with regards to their visitors’ race, “We have provinces here Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental. There is no racial discrimination here. We Filipinos think black is beautiful.”⁴⁷ Newspaper reports spoke of how crowds assembled for the fighters’ visit to the Malacañang Palace “oohh’d and ah’h’d” over the sight of the striking men dressed in tradition *barong Tagalog*.⁴⁸

The pugilists’ recreational activities and their budding friendships with ordinary Filipinos received much attention in the Manila dailies. Joe Frazier was photographed autographing the jeans of a female admirer. An entire article, complete with pictures, devoted to Frazier’s trip to a Manila dance hall appeared several days into the challenger’s stay in the Philippines. Ali’s participation as a judge of a Manila Beauty pageant also became the subject of a newspaper piece. The boxers’ attendance at a number of social events and parties hosted by the Manila elite also was deemed newsworthy, especially if a member of the Marcos clan was spotted in attendance. The friendships formed during the several weeks of training prior to the fight even made the news as, two days before the fight, the *Daily Express* proudly reported that Frazier would be providing complimentary tickets to the title bout for some of his new close Filipino friends.⁴⁹

Even a moment of great embarrassment for Ali provided the press with opportunities to gush over the champion. Ali arrived in the Philippines with a beautiful woman in tow whom he introduced as his “wife.” She accompanied him on his visit to the presidential palace and was the subject of positive press coverage and several compliments from President Marcos. When photographs and video footage of the Malacañang reception reached the United States, Muhammad Ali’s actual wife was understandably enraged. She flew to Manila and created quite a stir upon her arrival. On September 27, just days before the title bout, the front page of the *Daily Express* informed readers that Mrs. Ali had confronted her husband upon her arrival in Manila. A front page headline and article the following day explained that Ali was downplaying his marital troubles and that the spat would not affect the upcoming boxing match.⁵⁰ Political cartoonists took the opportunity to poke fun at the champ, emphasizing the familiar relationship with Ali that the media had been striving to portray.

The Glory of the Marcos Family

Reporting on the fight and the preparation was often supplemented with extreme detail regarding the Marcos clan’s participation in the events. Pictures and descriptions of the first couple appear early and often in recaps of the thrilling events. This was something to which Filipinos had probably grown accustomed to by 1975. The pages of the *Bulletin Today* and *Daily Express* frequently featured multi-page picture spreads of First Lady Imelda engaged in state business. It stood to reason then that newspaper coverage of Ali and Frazier’s visit to the presidential palace included a complimentary description of Imelda’s choice of dress for the event. Ali warned President Marcos to make sure his beautifully dressed wife was kept safe with the undisciplined Frazier in town. In case Filipinos were still struggling to create a mental picture of the glamour of the event and of the first lady, the *Daily Express* further explained that Imelda’s gown was the same one she had worn for her historic meeting with Fidel Castro of Cuba.⁵¹

The first paragraph of the fight recap in the *Daily Bulletin* described the green dress which the first lady wore ring-side.⁵² President Marcos’ relevance in the presence of two international superstars was also a

focus of coverage in the daily newspapers. At a time in which his presidency was under an international microscope, the local press coverage of the Martial Law President stressed his charisma and international appeal. Reports of the boxers’ palace visit included comments from the ever garrulous Ali that the peaceful and pleasant meeting between the two combatants was made possible only because Marcos stood in between them. Marcos was a worthy man to preside over the meeting of “the two most famous fighters in the history of boxing” for, as the reports proclaimed, the President himself was a “former Varsity boxing champ.”⁵³

Conclusion

The newspaper coverage in the Philippines of the 1975 heavyweight title fight between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier provides fascinating insights into the then-empowered regime of Ferdinand Marcos. Themes which appear heavily in newspaper reporting reflect the goals and ideals of the Marcos administration as well as the image which the regime wished to project to both a domestic and an international audience. Beholden to Marcos under the terms of Martial Law, newspaper staff wrote articles emphasizing the progress towards modernity of the Philippines, which was a favorite topic of the administration. Reporters saw in the two boxers many of the virtues and values which Marcos hoped would define Filipinos as well. The various Manila dailies regularly reported on positive statements made by the athletes regarding the president and his vision for the Philippines. Similarly, the Philippine press stressed the glamour and international prestige of the First Couple as Ferdinand and Imelda basked in the international sporting spotlight. As an endorsement of the cosmopolitanism of Manila, newspapers emphasized that Frazier and Ali were fitting in nicely into Filipino society. The flood of international guests and international money into the Philippines was presented to newspaper readers as proof of the progress and growing international clout of the Marcos-led Philippines. Ali may have been “the greatest.” However, for the weeks leading up to the Thrilla in Manila, the brightest star shining in the Manila newspapers was not the heavyweight champion of the world but rather, the man hosting the champ, President Ferdinand Marcos.

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End Notes

- ¹Interview with Howard Cosell. Quote available online at a number of sources. "Muhammad Ali Quotes," http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/celebrity/muhammad_ali/im_the_king_of_the_world_650 is one such internet site.
- ²James Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, London: Granta Books, 1999. p. 86. Hamilton-Paterson also explains that prior to his 1965 presidential campaign, Marcos hired an American writer to compose a heroic biography which "was more like a 'B' movie script than a serious account of one man's odyssey."
- ³Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Ballantine, 1989), 365.
- ⁴Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 205.
- ⁵Karnow, 359.
- ⁶Ibid. 205.
- ⁷Abinales and Amoroso, 208
- ⁸Marcos' dealings with the Soviet Union as well as his wife's meeting with Cuba's Fidel Castro at first glance seem out of step with Marcos' desire to project a staunch anti-communist stance. Manila newspapers' boasting of those events seems to support the image of the Marcos clan as having access to all prominent international figures.
- ⁹*Philippines Daily Express*, 13 September 1975, A20.
- ¹⁰"Frazier Arrives Today," *Philippines Daily Express*, 13 September 1975, A20.
- ¹¹"Frazier Says Ali Won't Last 15 Rounds," *Philippines Daily Express*, 14 September 1975, A22.
- ¹²D.R. Sar Desai, *Southeast Asia Past and Present* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003), 214.
- ¹³"Ali, Frazier Made 'Adopted Sons' of Manila," *Philippines Daily Express*, 16 September 1975, A19.
- ¹⁴"Filipinos 'Sweetest People in the World,' says Ali," *Philippines Daily Express*, 20 September 1975, A24.
- ¹⁵"Brown Dolls Reign in Boxing World," *Philippines Daily Express*, 27 September 1975, A24.
- ¹⁶"Frazier Puts on More Speed," *Philippines Daily Express*, 16 September 1975, A19.
- ¹⁷It is worth noting that in order to embark on his early morning jogs through the streets of Manila, Frazier was granted a special exemption from the standard curfew which was in effect under the terms of Martial Law.
- ¹⁸Throughout September the *Philippines Daily Express* frequently featured short blurbs containing the opinions of Manila residents concerning the upcoming title bout.
- ¹⁹"Ali-Frazier Highlights: 'I Talked to a Great Boxer and a Great Poet'," *Philippines Daily Express*, 28 September 1975, A22.
- ²⁰"Ali-Frazier to receive doctorates," *Baguio Midland Courier*, 28 September 1975, A1.
- ²¹"Ali, Frazier Made 'Adopted Sons' of Manila," *Philippines Daily Express*, 16 September 1975, A19.
- ²²"The Tempts to watch Ali-Frazier Fight," *Philippines Daily Express*, 24 September 1975, A30.
- ²³"Top US sportswriters give predictions on Ali-Frazier," *Philippines Daily Express*, 24 September 1975, A19.
- ²⁴"Norman Mailer, 84, Had Beer at the Big Dome," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 19 November 2007, A20.
- ²⁵Ted Lerner, "Hey Joe; When Ali and Frazier visited the President." *Business World*, 22 August 2000, 23.
- ²⁶"Ali, Frazier call on First Couple," *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A6.
- ²⁷"Ali-Frazier," *Baguio Midland Courier*, 5 October 1975, A4.
- ²⁸There is more than a little irony in the scene described in detail by the Manila papers of throngs of happy Filipinos filling the streets of Manila to celebrate the Marcos administration and Martial Law. Hardly more than 10 years later, the crowds which

filled Manila's streets were singing a very different tune and the Marcos clan was forced to flee the Philippines.

²⁹“Ali, Frazier call on First Couple,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A6.

³⁰“Filipinos ‘Sweetest People in the World,’ says Ali,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 20 September 1975, A24.

³¹“Ali says I’m a Miracle Man,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 21 September 1975, A23.

³²“Frazier can start calling Ali ‘Kuya,’” *Philippines Daily Express*, 26 September 1975, A23.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Mark Kram, *Ghosts of Manila* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 173.

³⁵“Traffic Rerouted for Ali-Frazier Fight,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 29 September 1975, A12.

³⁶“Manila ‘Thrilla’ had many firsts,” *Bulletin Today*, 2 October 1975, A6.

³⁷The running joke among commentators outside of the Marcos circle was that first lady Imelda had an “edifice complex.”

³⁸The countries listed are two previous Ali title fight venues. The quote appears in the “Ali, Frazier men inspect fight site,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 21 September 1975, A24.

³⁹“Norton wants to fight in Manila,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 29 September, A23

⁴⁰“Ali, Frazier men inspect fight site,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 21 September 1975, A24.

⁴¹“Elorde Sports and Tourism Development Complex Launches Sports-Commercial Complex,” *Philippines Daily Express*. 19 September 1975, A18.

⁴²“Manila ‘Thrilla’ had many firsts,” *Bulletin Today*, 2 October 1975, A1.

⁴³“Tabuena lauded for Big Fight,” *Philippines Daily Express* 30 September 1975, A22.

⁴⁴“3 Officials in title bout all Filipinos,” *Bulletin Today*. 1 October 1975, A1.

⁴⁵Dave Anderson, “The Marcos Thrilla,” *The New York Times*, 10 March, 1986, C3

⁴⁶“Frazier shows speed, flexibility,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 15 September 1975, A24.

⁴⁷“Ali, Frazier call on First Couple,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A6.

⁴⁸“Ali, Frazier call on First Couple,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A1.

⁴⁹“Frazier receives gift, Gives artist 3 tickets,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 29 September 1975, A24

⁵⁰“Women trouble doesn’t bother me, says Ali.” *Philippines Daily Express*, 28 September 1975, A1

⁵¹*Philippines Daily Express* September 19. The irony in Ali’s comments on Frazier’s savage lust for women would become very obvious several days after the meeting in Malacañang when, upon seeing pictures of Ali and his female traveling companion in American newspapers, the actual Mrs. Muhammad Ali flew to Manila in a rage, confronted her husband, and returned to the States.

⁵²“Manila ‘Thrilla’ had many firsts,” *Bulletin Today*, 2 October 1975, A1.

⁵³“Ali, Frazier call on First Couple,” *Philippines Daily Express*, 19 September 1975, A1.