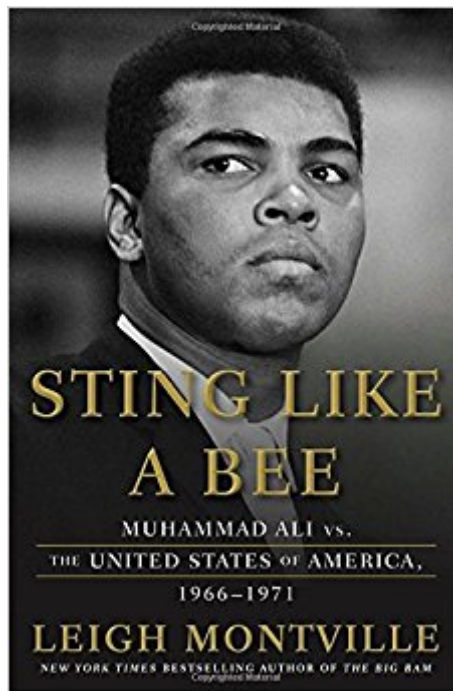




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# Sting Like A Bee: Muhammad Ali Vs. The United States Of America, 1966-1971



## Synopsis

An insightful portrait of Muhammad Ali from the New York Times bestselling author of *At the Altar of Speed* and *The Big Bam*. It centers on the cultural and political implications of Ali's refusal of service in the military—and the key moments in a life that was as high profile and transformative as any in the twentieth century. With the death of Muhammad Ali in June, 2016, the media and America in general have remembered a hero, a heavyweight champion, an Olympic gold medalist, an icon, and a man who represents the sheer greatness of America. New York Times bestselling author Leigh Montville goes deeper, with a fascinating chronicle of a story that has been largely untold. Muhammad Ali, in the late 1960s, was young, successful, brash, and hugely admired—but with some reservations. He was bombastic and cocky in a way that captured the imagination of America, but also drew its detractors. He was a bold young African American in an era when few people were as outspoken. He renounced his name—Cassius Clay—as being his 'slave name,' and joined the Nation of Islam, renaming himself Muhammad Ali. And finally in 1966, after being drafted, he refused to join the military for religious and conscientious reasons, triggering a fight that was larger than any of his bouts in the ring. What followed was a period of legal battles, of cultural obsession, and in some ways of being the very embodiment of the civil rights movement located in the heart of one man. Muhammad Ali was the tip of the arrow, and Leigh Montville brilliantly assembles all the boxing, the charisma, the cultural and political shifting tides, and ultimately the enormous waft of entertainment that always surrounded Ali. *Muhammed Ali vs. the United States of America* is an important and incredibly engaging book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"An absorbing portrait of Ali during his years of vilification and exile from the ring . . . .  
Mr. Montville has managed, in a sympathetic but not hagiographic fashion, to find a fresh angle on the Greatest<sup>TM</sup> --by showing him embattled, as one might expect, and yet outside the ring."--Wall Street Journal  
"Meticulously researched . . . .  
The inventory of Ali books is indeed long. But put this one on the short list."--Newsday  
"A fresh, ambitious book about one of the most written-about men in the history of sports or anything else . . . . He<sup>TM</sup> is a writer who never disappoints."--The Boston Globe  
"Sting Like a Bee is a valuable, indeed essential, addition to the growing library on Ali, offering a broader understanding of the enigma known as 'the Greatest.'"--The Washington Post  
"A fast-paced account of Muhammad Ali's struggle as a conscientious draft objector, a flashpoint for a tumultuous era. . . .  
A dramatic, pleasing tale of a sports iconoclast fighting for his rights."--Kirkus  
"Montville has given fans and boxing historians a thoroughly enjoyable and informative read."--Library Journal  
"A (starred review)"  
"Fascinating backstory . . . the result is<sup>TM</sup> a book that belongs in the top tier of Ali literature."--Booklist  
"Revealing . . . .  
With dry humor, Montville portrays the central figures of Ali's life --mostly hustlers and religious idealists --as well as the controversies surrounding an African-American who both condemned racial injustice and praised George Wallace . . . .  
Montville shows how Ali earned the title he came up with for himself: 'The Greatest.'"--Publishers Weekly  
"In Sting Like a Bee, Montville has put together an exhaustively researched and deftly written account of that stretch. The portrait of Ali is rendered with rich, meticulous detail . . . .  
there<sup>TM</sup> is no denying that Sting Like a Bee will give the reader a new appreciation for the difficulties of Ali's journey."--The Maine Edge  
"Montville has conducted serious research into the legal maneuvering and legal issues surrounding Muhammad Ali and the draft, and brought the source material together in a way that makes it more easily accessed and more fully understood. That<sup>TM</sup> is a valuable service."--Ring Magazine

Three-time New York Times bestselling author LEIGH MONTVILLE is a former columnist at The Boston Globe and former senior writer at Sports Illustrated. He is the author of *Evel*, *The Mysterious Montague*, *The Big Bam*, *Ted Williams*, *At the Altar of Speed*, *Manute*, and *Why Not Us?* He lives in Boston.

I found this book very entertaining. I've read every major book (and most minor ones) about Ali, but this presented his exile from boxing, and the circumstances leading up to it, in a fresh way that was never boring and often surprisingly intimate. In tackling Ali's complexity and contradictions regarding race, religion and women, Montville displays a genuine fondness for his subject but doesn't sugarcoat the man's shortcomings, either. There are also enough new interviews (especially with Ali's second wife, Khalilah/Belinda) and research to make this a very worthwhile addition to the library of any Ali aficionado or historian. (Khalilah has been threatening to write her own book about her years with Ali since their divorce in '77--I hope she finally does it. That's a book I'd buy in a second!)

An entertaining and insightful read into the most turbulent years for Ali and this country. Montville does a masterful job of telling a story and managing details of Ali's appeal to Supreme Court for CO eligibility and providing a fresh feel for him as a person. Not a puppet showman but a real human being --Ali was the real deal and a real and fallible person as well. The book is fair to both...and fun!! Highly recommended!

Well researched and written. Can't read enough about Ali.

Excellent disappointing the true story of Muhammad Ali

I knew Leigh Montville would deliver on this Ali biography and he didn't disappoint. This is a very narrow, specific look at the five years where Ali was fighting to avoid the draft and military service. While we of course know the outcome, I had very little knowledge of how it all played out. This was a good look at the legal battles, the controversies and what Ali had to do to make some money - speeches for the most part, but also a Broadway play that inexplicably only ran six days. But then again, it makes sense - at that time in 1969-70, Ali was a star but not the era-defining superstar he became. I had even forgotten that he lost the first Frazier fight when he returned to boxing. At the beginning of the book, Montville expresses his intention to tell this biography in the moment - the 'present' of 1966-71, and that's a good choice. Montville does a strong job of telling the story of \*before\* we know the result. So Montville successfully builds tension of court decisions and protests and the Nation of Islam - even when the conclusion is preordained. Ali, I have to say, held up pretty strong with five years in prison hanging over his head - and very narrow paths for legal relief. Should he have gotten that relief? I would say probably...not? Was he truly a conscientious objector all the

time, or only when it suited him? But the bottom line is he was absolutely treated unfairly by draft boards and the courts at first - he \*had\* gone to the draft board and been ruled ineligible and then they changed their mind. That's not right. The book ends very abruptly, which is fine - it's not an Ali biography as much as a history of this narrow period. Any sports fan is going to be interested. It was a strange time that Montville describes, and as erratic and generally terrible 2017 is shaping up to be, it's a good reminder that 1966-71 was a time when elected politicians could openly spout racism. There were ups and downs in larger public opinion that Ali benefited from, but what he benefited the most by was just sticking with his fight. The storytelling style kept me engaged the whole time. Leigh Montville was always one of the Boston Globe's best columnists and I grew up reading him, so I expected him to do a good job and he did.

Sting Like a Bee: Muhammad Ali vs. the United States of America, 1966-1971 details a period of Muhammad Ali's life that doesn't square nicely with his later life and eulogized in death as a man of peace. While it covers the basic biographical aspects, the meat of the book is the five year battle when Ali became a Muslim, battled the US government over his draft status and the Vietnam War, and spoke out against integration between blacks and whites. This wasn't the Ali I remember reading about. Leigh Montville is able to blend the worlds of sports and politics effortlessly in a very clear writing style. He weaves from fights with no name boxers to appearances in front of various judges. Because of the writing style, the book tends to fly by. What the reader gets is this picture of this brash, flamboyant, champion who beat virtually every boxer he stepped into the ring with and didn't flinch in front of the US government. A book that both sports fans and history and politics junkies can enjoy.

First let me state that Leigh Montville is one of my favorite writers. His biographies on Babe Ruth and Ted Williams are first rate. Perhaps it's because I'm not a boxing fan and that I found much of this book on Muhammad Ali to be regarding courtroom decisions. This book is not a biography on the life of Ali but concentrates on the years 1966--1971 where Ali went up against the United States regarding his status as a Muslim. His controversial remark stating he doesn't have anything against the Vietcong became memorable when he declined to be drafted into the United States army. I remember one of his poems which is not mentioned in the book which went "I'll answer the bell against Ernie Terrell but don't ring the gong for a fight with the Cong." I confess to getting bogged down with the book and skimming parts of it. Author Leigh Montville did a masterful job in researching his subject and for that he rates five stars. However, I can only rate it regarding the interest level

that it had for me. The book contain an epilogue of twelve pages summing up what subsequently happened in the lives of the principal characters in the book.

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