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SPINKS AND PRUITT-IGOE

The movie ROCKY, in which a street-fighter and amateur boxer from the Italian ghetto got a chance to fight the heavyweight champion, would not have been believable if Rocky had actually won the championship. The happy ending of that movie was satisfied when Rocky won the moral victory of merely staying in the ring for 15 rounds.

The stunning victory of Leon Spinks over Muhammad Ali proves again that truth is stranger than successful authors and movie producers dare to write their fiction. A street-fighter from the worst black ghetto in the United States, in his eighth professional bout, defeated the most remarkable heavyweight champion of our time (who incidentally was 27 pounds heavier and had a four-inch longer reach than Spinks).

To rise to the pinnacle from the depths of the infamous Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis is the ultimate in what hard work and dogged determination can accomplish in the American system. It once again disproves the liberal dogma that a disadvantaged racial ghetto can excuse crime, lack of achievement, or any other malady.

Pruitt-Igoe was a giant public housing complex consisting of 33 eleven-story buildings designed to house 2,870 families. Built in 1955 it was one of the largest projects of these who believe that all problems can be solved by putting more power and more money into the hands of the Federal Government. The original construction cost was $36 million. It ultimately cost the U.S. taxpayers $65 million.

Pruitt-Igoe was never fully occupied. Before long, it was plagued by vacancies, vandalism, theft of fixtures, and crime. Delivery men and bill collectors refused to go there because they knew their lives were in danger. In the last few years

(More)

of its occupancy, countless numbers of children were brutally assaulted. Rapists and child molesters prowled the project looking for victims.

In an interview when he was in Las Vegas for the title bout with Ali, Spinks described li·fe at Pruitt-Igoe: "Around our [public housing] project ... the police got too scared to come too close. People might be shootin' out the windows at them. A lot of my friends were getting shot, or killed, or dotn' time in r,;rison -- and a lot were gain' on dope.[11]

In 1970-, all but six buildings were closed. By 1972 only 547 apartments were occupied. The Department of Housing and Urban Development deliber tely dynamited three buildings that year. In 1973 when the project was running an.annual deficit of about $4 million the St. Louis Housing Board voted unanimously to close it down. The last families moved out in 1974 and the buildings were finally torn down.

Despite that underprivileged environment, Mrs. Kay Spinks brought up her children to be religious and hard working. They had to learn to fight to avoid being beaten up by others, but they were always looking out for their friends. When Leon and his younger brother, Michael, won gold medals at the Montreal Olympics in 1976, an anonymous donor paid Kay Spink plane fare to watch her sons box.

More ex iting even than the upset victory of an underdog in a title bout is the electrifying effect Spinks' victory has had in the black community where Spinks was known. Inquiring reporters keep hearing the same refrain from everyone in the disadvantaged neighborhood where Mrs.Spinks and three younger sons now live on the eighth floor of the Darst-Webbe public housing project.

"No matter who you are, your dreams can come true. All you have to do is apply yourself like the Spin s did.[11] "When you are raised in a place like this, all you can think of is to get on out of here.[11] [11]I think Leon won because he was just tired of the vermin around here.[11] Teachers are telling their pupils, "You can do it too. Maybe not in sports. Maybe in education or something else. But whatever you want bad enough, you can achieve."

If a winner can come out of Pruitt-Igoe, then the American dream is truly within the reach ,-;r ,, ,,. [1]\merican.