



# Joe Louis: The Great Black Hope

*Richard Bak*

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When Joe Louis (1914–1981) knocked out the German boxer Max Schmeling in 1938 in two minutes and four seconds, the entire nation—black and white—celebrated the "fight of the century" as a victory of the United States against the ominous tide of Nazism. Never had an African-American received such universal praise across racial lines. Heavyweight champion for a record twelve years from 1937 to 1949, Louis opened the doors for such future black athletes as Jackie Robinson, Sugar Ray Robinson, and Muhammad Ali. *Joe Louis* depicts the prizefighter's life, and the times in which he lived, from his childhood in a sharecropper's cabin in Alabama and his formative years in Detroit, to his legendary career, his service in the Army, his stint as a professional wrestler after retiring from boxing in 1951, and his professional demise as an official greeter for a Las Vegas casino. Along the way, Richard Bak compassionately, yet evenhandedly, details Louis's private vices: incessant womanizing, reckless spending habits, massive debts to the IRS, and drug abuse. Filled with over one hundred photographs, including twenty-two in color, *Joe Louis* is the most comprehensive portrait yet written of one of the greatest African-American heroes who used his fists figuratively—and literally—to fight racism.

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