CUSOLOGY

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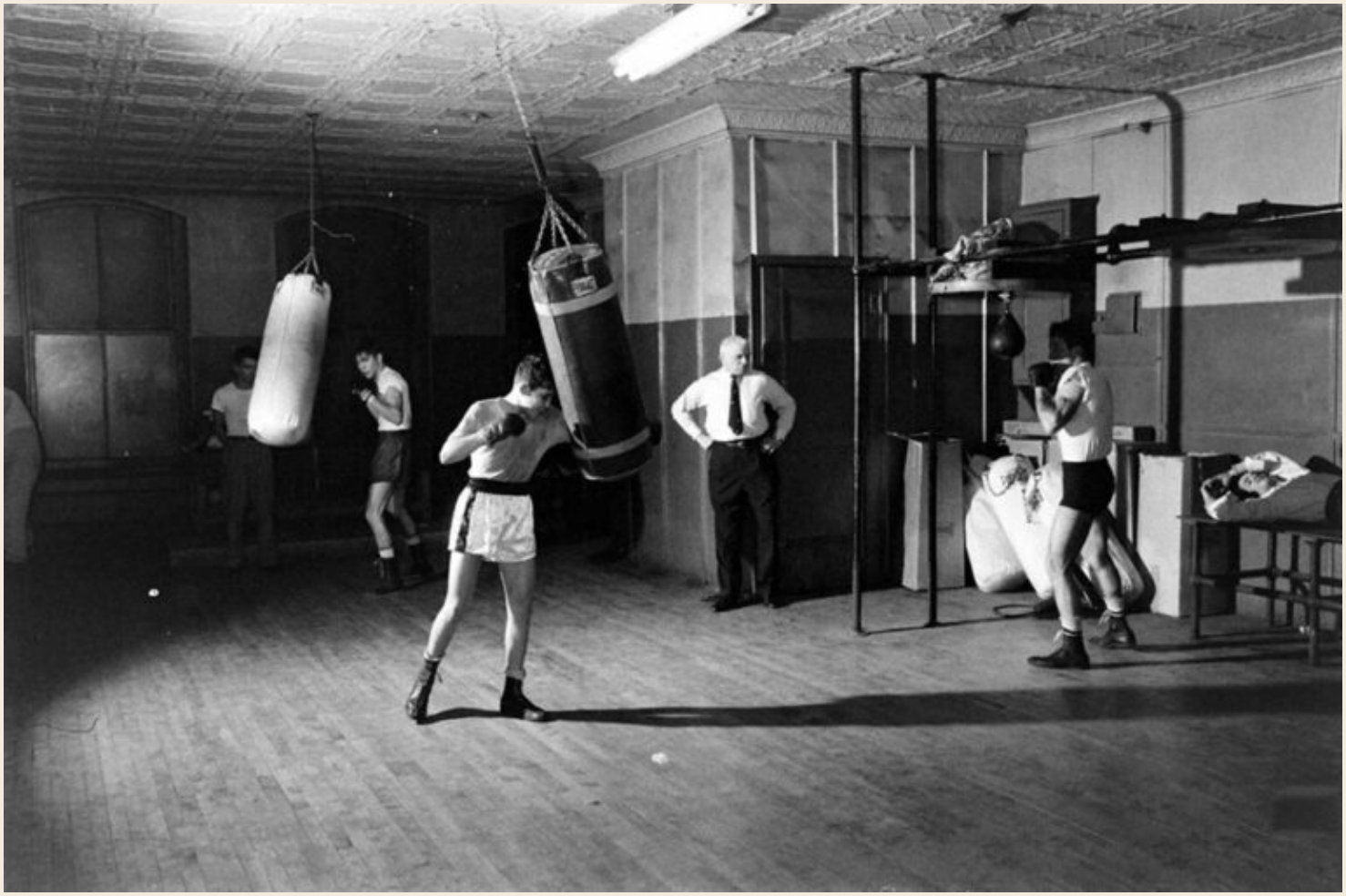
NEWSLETTER

THE SHADOW IN CUS'S CORNER: THE CHARLIE BLACK STORY



Beyond the familiar story of Cus D'Amato's fight against corruption lies a more complicated history of boxing, business, power and alleged underworld connections.

BOXING HISTORY / INVESTIGATION / LEGACY

THE MAN AND THE MYTH

The Man, the Myth and the Connections

Few figures in boxing history are as fascinating as Constantine "Cus" D'Amato. Known as creator of the peek a boo boxing style and mentor of Floyd Patterson, José Torres, and Mike Tyson, D'Amato built a reputation as a fierce opponent of boxing's corrupt power structure. For decades, the popular narrative portrayed him as a lone crusader fighting organized crime's influence over the sport. The knight in shining armor. Yet a closer examination of archival records reveals a far more complicated story.

During the 1940s and 1950s, professional boxing in New York operated within an environment where organized crime figures, promoters, managers, and political interests frequently overlapped. One of the most important figures in D'Amato's career was Charles "Charlie" Black, whose real name was Charles Antonucci.

Cus was originally introduced to Charlie by his brother Tony who was suspected of having close ties to the mob. Multiple boxing historians and journalists have documented that Black was related to Anthony "Fat Tony" Salerno, who later became the powerful boss of the Genovese crime family.

"I must keep my enemies confused. When they are confused, then I can do a job for my fighters. What I do not want in life, however, is a sense of security; the moment a person knows security, his senses are dulled and he begins to die."

CUS D'AMATO

THE CHARLIE BLACK CONNECTION

Charlie Black: The Power in Cus's Corner

Charlie Black although not a made man served as an influential boxing manager and intermediary for foreign fighters entering the American market. This was useful for Cus when he brought over Brian London and Ingemar Johansson to fight Patterson.

Fat Tony Salerno also served as protection for D'Amato. In contrast to what Cus wanted people to believe he was just replacing one mob guy with another. Contemporary accounts and later historical research indicate that Black worked closely with D'Amato during the rise of Floyd Patterson.

Moreover, D'Amato attempted to perpetuate control of the heavyweight title by saddling Patterson's opponents with "hand-picked" managers. Not to mention trying to secure money from the closed circuit tv which was brought the surface the alleged relationship between the TelePrompTer Corporation, a closed-circuit television company, and Floyd Patterson Enterprises, Inc. Patterson's organization owned the radio, TV and movie rights to the fight against Ingemar Johansson, in which Patterson was dethroned by Johansson by the six-foot Swede.

HISTORICAL PROFILE

NAME
Charles "Charlie Black" Antonucci

ROLE
Boxing manager and intermediary

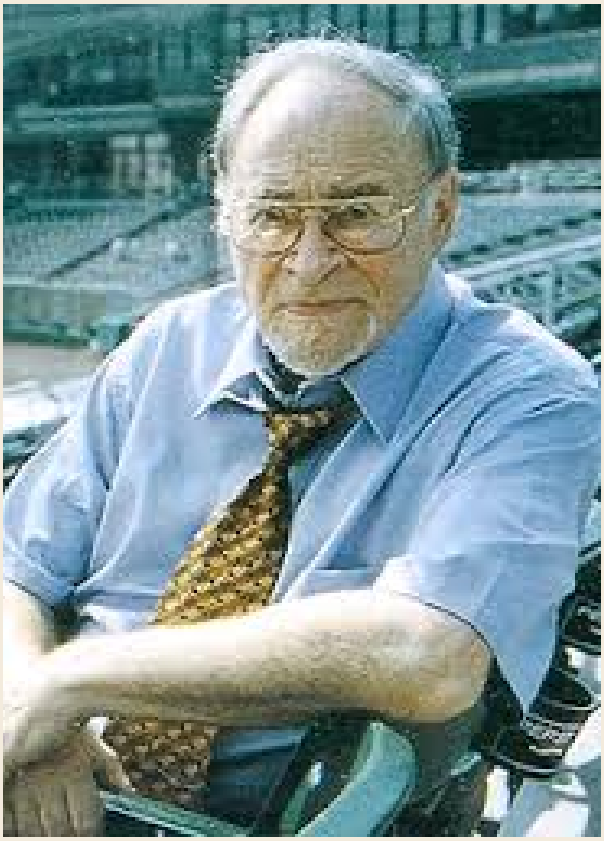
KNOWN ASSOCIATION
Cus D'Amato and Floyd Patterson

Anthony "Fat
REPORTED FAMILY CONNECTION
Tony" Salerno

CONTROL OF THE CHAMPIONSHIP

Protection, Power and Control

The relationship has fueled decades of debate. D'Amato publicly positioned himself as an enemy of the International Boxing Club and the powerful interests that controlled many championship opportunities. However, critics have argued that D'Amato opposed one group of boxing power brokers but maintained relationships with others connected to organized crime.



Veteran sports journalist Jerry Izenberg

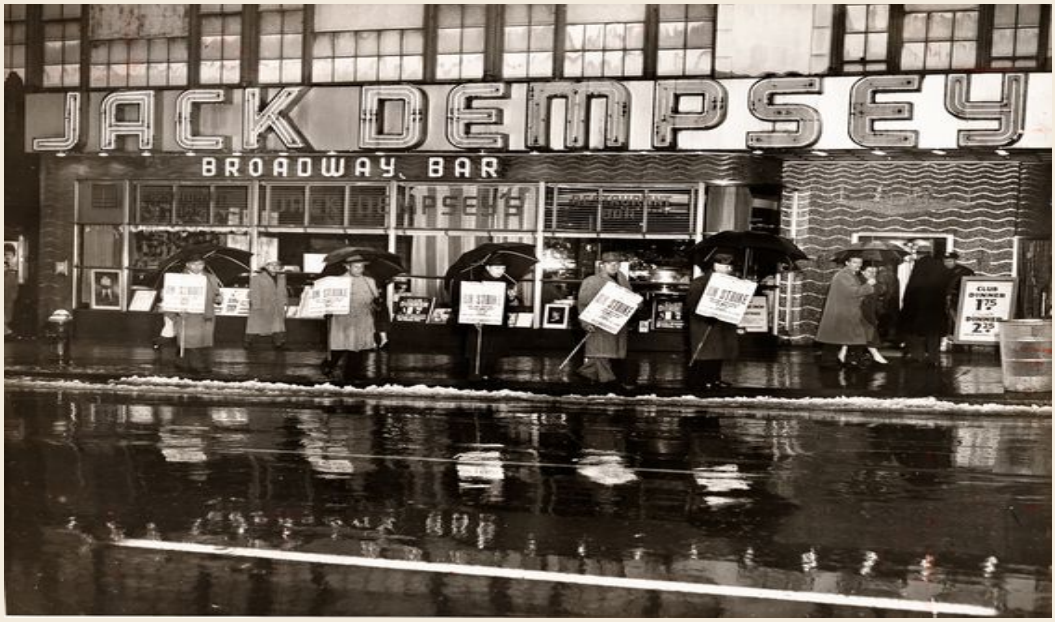
Cus knew how to play this game. The bottom line was that Cus was mobbed up as well. Veteran sports journalist Jerry Izenberg, who covered boxing during the era, stated that Salerno's influence provided protection for D'Amato within the rough world of New York boxing.

D’Amato used his power to protect his fighters from tough opponents making for much less competitive matches. Some say that this facade of solely fighting the mob ruined the best part of Jose Torre’s career. He would have been one of the great middleweights of all time if given the chance to fight better opponents.

One of the most controversial episodes in D'Amato's career involved legal action brought by New York authorities. Historical records show that D'Amato was arrested, had his manager's license suspended, and became the subject of an investigation by the New York State Attorney General. Authorities alleged that D'Amato participated in a conspiracy to monopolize aspects of the heavyweight championship through control of gate receipts, broadcast, and closed-circuit rights.

BOXING, POWER AND NEW YORK

The Business Behind the Boxing



The investigation also examined business relationships surrounding television contracts and boxing promotions. These allegations became a major scandal within the sport, although interpretations of the case continue to vary among boxing historians.

To understand the environment in which these events unfolded, one must picture New York City in the postwar decades. Boxing business was often conducted in smoky Midtown bars, neighborhood social clubs, and restaurant back rooms rather than corporate boardrooms.

Sportswriters, promoters, bookmakers, and fighters frequently cross paths in establishments around Times Square, the Garment District, and the West Side. Legendary venues such as Jack Dempsey's Restaurant on Broadway became unofficial meeting places for the boxing world, where deals were discussed over drinks and reporters traded rumors with trainers and managers as they took bribes.

THE LEGAL CONTROVERSY

Where Boxing's Power Brokers Gathered

Other places that were frequented by Boxiana like "The Neutral Corner" and "The Turf Restaurant," a known hangout for sportswriters and promoters tied to the Garden. The Turf was a boxing-and-Broadway crossover bar, frequented by Mike Jacobs' (the biggest promoter of that era) old press corps and later by IBC-connected figures. While many stories from these locations have entered boxing folklore, historians generally distinguish between colorful anecdotes and documented evidence.

CUSOLOGY WEBSITE COMING SOON

THE JOSÉ TORRES QUESTION

Inside New York’s Boxing Establishment

The bars surrounding Madison Square Garden were especially important gathering places. On fight nights, sportswriters from the Daily News, New York Post, and Journal-American mingled with promoters, managers, and political figures. It was an era when a conversation at a Midtown tavern could influence matchmaking, publicity campaigns, or future title opportunities.

Organized crime figures were known to frequent some of the same establishments, reflecting the broader reality that gambling and boxing remained intricately connected during much of the twentieth century.

What remains clear is that D'Amato was both a brilliant boxing strategist and a deeply controversial figure. His training methods transformed generations of fighters, and his psychological approach remains influential today. Yet the historical record suggests that the simplistic image of D'Amato as a lone warrior battling a corrupt system does not fully capture the complexity of his relationships within the New York boxing establishment.

TWO VIEWS

THE DEFENSE

Cus protected his fighters from exploitation and unnecessary punishment.

THE CRITISM

Cautious matchmaking may have kept them from facing the strongest available opposition.

A COMPLICATED LEGACY

The Shadow Behind the Legacy

The documented connections involving Charlie Black, Black's family relationship to Genovese boss Anthony Salerno, and the legal allegations brought against D'Amato demonstrate that the intersection of boxing, business, and organized crime was rarely straightforward.

Today, historians continue to debate exactly how close D'Amato's ties were to organized crime figures. What is beyond dispute is that he operated in a boxing world where mob influence was widespread, relationships were often transactional, and survival at the highest levels required navigating a landscape far more complicated than the legends suggest.

Written by: Dr. Scott Weiss | Cusology