
Muhammad Ali – A Fighter In And Out Of The Ring

Muhammad Ali is known as one of the most influential figures in and out of the boxing ring. Also known as one of the greatest boxers and sporting figures of all time, Ali was also a part of the civil rights movement. Along with fellow civil rights activist Malcolm X, Ali used his platform to create change. Ali's frankness on issues of race, region, and politics made him an extremely contentious figure. Often perceived as self-assured, arrogant, and egotistic, Gordon Parks, an American photographer sought out to change Ali's image with this picture by showing the human side of the infamous boxer. These up-close intimate pictures of Ali convey him as a normal human being, rather than just a powerful athlete. The sweat on Ali's face is a symbol of his hard work. Ali fought hard in as well as out of the boxing ring, whether his competitors were those of boxing opponents or citizens that were against equal rights, Ali worked hard for the things he wanted.

Ali became a fighter at a very young age. After getting his bicycle stolen at the age of 12, Ali reported the theft to a local officer, Joe Martin, vowing to 'pummel' the thief who stole his bike. Officer Martin, who was also a boxing trainer urged Ali to first learn how to fight. Martin would later take Ali under his wing and the youngster would soon begin boxing.

Over the next decade, Ali would go on to win two national Golden Gloves titles, two amateur athletic union titles while also collecting 100 victories and only eight losses.

After being seen numerous times out in public with Nation of Islam member and human rights activist Malcolm X, Ali (then known as Cassius Clay) confirmed his conversion to Islam and then adopted the name of Muhammad Ali. A year later, Ali was drafted to serve in the Vietnam War but cited his religious beliefs in Islam as a reason for refusing to serve. Ali was punished heavily, sentenced to five years in prison along with a \$10,000 fine, but remained free while the conviction was appealed. Many would view Ali as a draft dodger, this along with Ali's actions would result in his popularity plummeting and his reputation taking a hit. Ali was banned from boxing for 3 three years and took the time to speak out against the Vietnam War.

After three years out of the boxing ring, Ali would return to face Jerry Quarry, knocking him out in the third round. Ali would go on and try to reclaim his heavyweight crown against Joe Frazier, only to lose in a unanimous decision, resulting in Ali's first loss as a professional.

Ali would go onto defend his title in 10 fights, including legendary fights such as George Foreman and Joe Frazier. An aging and struggling Ali would retire at 39 years old.

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Parks would first meet Ali in 1966, around the time Ali made it clear that his faith in Islam would not allow him to serve in the Vietnam War. This picture was of many by Parks that redefined Ali's image. Professional athletes are often looked at like robots, inhumane creatures that have no feeling, but that's not true. Up unto this point, all the pictures that had been shown of Ali had been him fighting in the boxing ring, Parks was different, he captured him as a human and not only a sports figure. Parks approach divided the thought of Ali as an athlete and a figure, one that was often scorned by the media, and the perceived hero to many. Parks conveyed Ali's greatness and humanity. Maurice Berger, an American historian, and curator stated "Too much writing on and imagery of Ali in the 1960s and 1970s turned him into a stereotype, indeed a full range of stereotypes — from uneducated or a draft dodger to a superhuman athlete or black saint. Parks captured Ali's complexity, and not just his extraordinary grace and physical prowess but also his emotional, intellectual and spiritual life. In these pictures, we get a sense of Ali's wisdom, benevolence, and generous personality'.

Parks used numerous types of visual elements in his picture of Ali, such as composition, lighting, and color. Parks equally places half of Ali's face and body in the picture, causing all the sweat on his body to be visible. Ali's sweat can be symbolic of his hard work, emotion, and the difficulty he endured in boxing as well as out of the ring. The dark choice of lighting and color used in the picture shows Ali as a human being with emotion, not as a hero or high-profile athlete as he was seen to many.

A fighter in and out of the ring, Muhammad Ali is known as one of the most influential people in history. His dedication, determination, and perseverance will forever be recognized in boxing as well as a part of the civil rights movement. Ali stood for the greater cause, something we all can take lessons from.

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