
Muhammad Ali Biography

Muhammad Ali born as Cassius Clay in Louisville, Kentucky in 1942. Cassius Clay started boxing when he was 12 when he was 18 he won a gold medal in the Olympics in Rome. Even after this Clay was not allowed to get a job in a local restaurant in Louisville, Louisville was a segregated city. Clay then threw his gold medal in a River in protest at the treatment of black people in the southern states. Ali became a professional heavyweight boxer. On 25 February 1967 he defeated Sonny Liston to become heavyweight champion, Two years later he became a Muslim He dropped his surname to highlight the fact that black Americans who had been slaves were known by their surnames He named himself Cassius X later he then changed his name to Muhammad Ali. Ali defended his world heavyweight title on many occasions then in 1967 Ali was drafted to fight in the Vietnam war he refused to go stating that he was practicing his religious beliefs Ali declared that he was a conscientious objector. His refusal caused huge controversy In the US Ali was sent to jail was stripped of his heavyweight title lost his boxing license and his passport was confiscated. The authorities did this to send a message to the general public.

Ali was let out of jail on bail while he fought his case through the court. Soon the public opinion began to change, with many Americans now openly opposing the war. Many Americans opposed the war on moral grounds, appalled by the devastation and violence of the war. Others claimed the conflict was a war against Vietnamese independence or an intervention in a foreign civil war; others opposed it because they felt it lacked clear objectives and appeared to be unwinnable. Muhammad Ali's influence on the black organisers who formed the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement was distinctly positive and remarkably broad-based. His power as a heroic symbol bridged the entire span of the movement's ideological spectrum. In ways that nobody else could, Ali appealed simultaneously to people and organisations who otherwise agreed on little politically. In the words of one organiser, Bob Moses, "Muhammad Ali galvanised the Civil Rights Movement. Parkinson's syndrome severely impaired Ali's motor skills and speech, but he remained active as a humanitarian and goodwill ambassador. No sport has exploited athletes, particularly Black athletes, quite like boxing. The very first boxers in America were African slaves. White slave owners would amuse themselves by forcing slaves to box to the death while wearing iron collars.

Even after the abolition of slavery, boxing became the first sport to be desegregated so that white boxing promoters could continue to exploit Blacks and make money from the deep racism in American society. Eugenics was used to justify slavery, and the science of the time "proved" that Blacks were not only mentally inferior, but also physically inferior to whites. Ironically, early white fight promoters unwittingly created a space where Black boxers could

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destroy white supremacist ideas of society and racial hierarchy. The 1910 victory of Jack Johnson against “The Great White Hope” launched one of the greatest nationwide race riots in U.S. history. Out of that embarrassment, in which a Black man defeated a white man, Congress passed a law outlawing boxing films. With a brief look at the history of boxing, it is abundantly clear that the races and cultures that have suffered the most at any given time always tend to produce the greatest champions. Boxing has a tendency to both attract and indeed pray upon talent from underprivileged minority communities. Through boxing, one can read a direct chart of the underprivileged in America. The sport highlights the line of minorities who struggle to make it up the ladder, until they succeed, and then disappear from the boxing scene. Tellingly, the minorities that remain in the ring today are a consequence of still being on the bottom rung of America’s economic ladder.

You had the waves of underprivileged Jewish boxers, then Irish boxers, Italian-American boxers, African American boxers, and now, increasingly Hispanic boxers. In a society that is so violently racist, the sport of boxing became an escape valve for people’s anger. Boxing symbolized a twisted manifestation of the American dream, where minorities have to, literally, and fight their way out of poverty. The modern image of Muhammad Ali, portrayed by the establishment, is one of a Black man dancing in the ring and shouting, “I am the greatest!” His image is now used to sell everything from luxury cars to soft drinks. Despite the establishment’s whitewashing of Ali’s image, history shows that the true Muhammad Ali was a staunch Black Nationalist, who was good friends with Malcolm X, and a member of the Black Power group, The Nation of Islam. Ali was unquestionably the best boxer in history, not simply because of his achievements in the ring, but because he brought the fight against racism and war into professional sports. Muhammad Ali grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, as the Black freedom struggle was heating up and beginning to boil over. Born in Louisville as Cassius Clay to a house painter and domestic worker, Ali was immersed in America’s racist nature from birth. Ali found answers to America’s racism in friend and mentor Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. “X and Ali were one in the same,” journalist J. Tinsley wrote. “Both were young, handsome, intelligent, outspoken African American men who scared the crap out of White America during a time period when racial tension was the norm.”

Perhaps Ali’s greatest legacy is his voice. Ali’s voice was uncompromising in its Blackness. His voice was just as uncompromising in its rejection of the trappings of wealth and fame, as it was in the rejection of a system that unleashed German shepherds on Black children. Ali’s voice did not seek acceptance. It simply demanded to be heard. To begin with, the American press viewed Ali’s voice as a refreshing change to professional boxing’s un-poetic violence. His antics and doggerel enhanced newspaper columns. However, that editorial stance suddenly changed in 1964 when Ali, immediately after claiming the heavyweight title, revealed that he had become a Black Muslim. The American press then began to use Ali’s voice to portray him as a racist hothead. The New York Times continued to print the slave name Cassius Clay for

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years and called him a “nauseating and childish loudmouth braggart”. White sports writers certainly preferred their Negro athletes tough, quiet and docile. White America hated his voice, the white press sought to denigrate that voice, and the U.S. government tried to silence his voice completely. White America only embraced the most outspoken Black athlete in history after he was unable to speak anymore because of Parkinson’s disease. Boxing changed American history. The sport of boxing had more to do with the advancement of the civil rights movement than any other sport, from Jack Johnson to Joe Lewis to Muhammad Ali. History has never produced an athlete more persecuted by the U.S. government, more vilified by the American media, or more respected globally than Muhammad Ali.

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