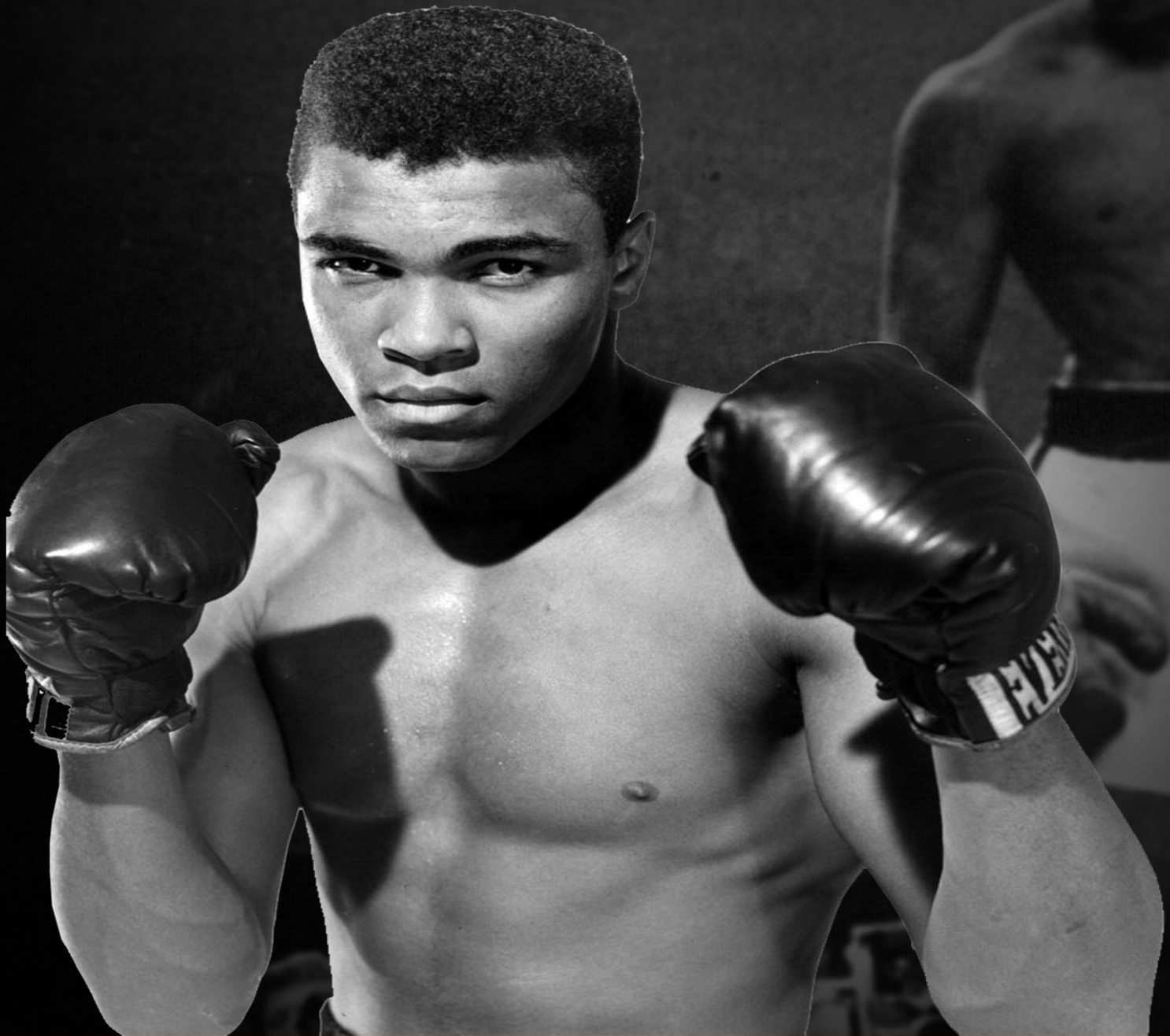


MUHAMMAD ALI

BORN TO WIN

My life... My times... My story



STEPHEN CROKE

Muhammad Ali

Born to win

My life...My times...My story...

by Stephen Croke

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Introduction



Muhammad Ali was floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee and was one of the greatest boxers the world has ever seen. But he was more than just an athlete. He was an activist, a husband, a father, a Muslim, a conscientious objector, a spoken word poet, an author, a mentor and a man that never forget where he came from. He was complex and yet his message was simple and clear. He never let others define or limit him. He lived his life like he boxed; tong, passionate and unpredictable.

He lived in a time of great turmoil in his own country and around the world. As segregation, violence and civil discord were tearing apart his nation, Muhamad Ali did not let any man label or limit him by his race. Later, when the world was destroying itself over warring ideologies, he refused to fight for a country that had treated his own race so horrendously. He stood up for his beliefs and views and sparked a controversy that few modern athletes would have the courage to instigate today.

He was generous as a public figure and a pillar of the global community. He did not hesitate to take a stand in conflicts around the world even when the side he chose was not popular with many Americans. He used his celebrity status to focus attention on the plight of the Palestinian refugees, Native Americans, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Sudanese famine victims, and later Parkinson's disease.

He converted to Islam at a time when that religion was even less well received than it is today. He changed his name and in time even changed his views as a Muslim. He was one of the first celebrities to openly embrace the religion and in doing so inspired countless others to learn more about Islam. Like his life, he chose his religion according to the dictates of his conscious

and was led by what he felt was right.

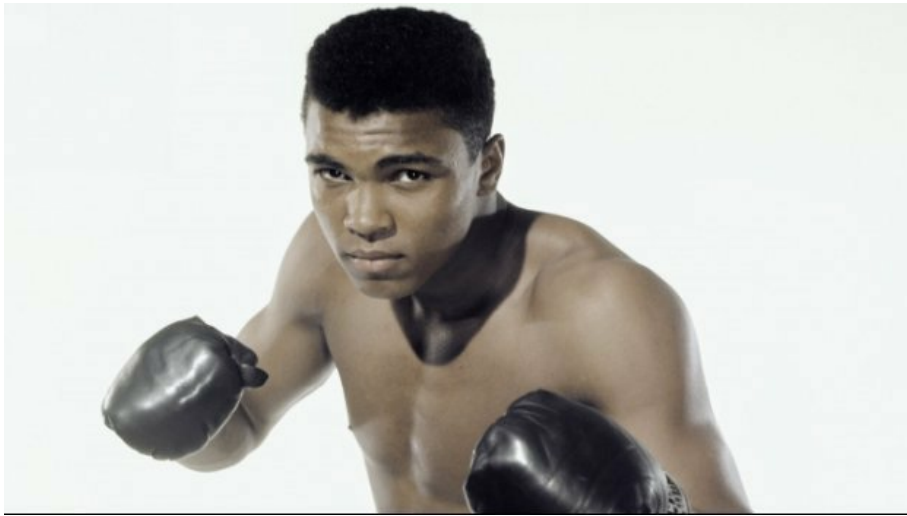
Despite his achievements as an activist and a champion for many controversial causes, Muhammad Ali will always be known for his boxing. His record is awe inspiring and he is considered to be the greatest heavyweight fighter of all time. His career spanned over two decades and his technique and talent will always be the gold standard for boxers the world over. He was easily one the most recognizable athletes of the twentieth century. His fighting style and taunting of his opponents was a unique combination that many boxers and athletes from other sports emulate to this day.

Muhammad Ali was so many things in his lifetime that it is impossible to label him. He was dedicated and dynamic. He was controversial and inspirational. He chose his own path and had the courage to walk it even when faced with punishment and persecution. He risked his reputation and success for causes that he believed were just. He was an exceptional athlete and passionate activist.

This book examines the life and legacy of this great man. From his middle class beginnings in Louisville, Kentucky to his worldwide acclaim as the greatest boxer the world has ever known, Muhammad Ali's life is a source of inspiration to many people from all walks of life. He lived fearlessly and had the courage to pursue his dreams and stand up for his causes.

Muhammad Ali was a great man in his time and left behind an even greater legacy. His combination of athletic prowess and championing the causes he believed in made him "the greatest of all time".

Chapter One



Muhammad Ali was born Cassius Marcellus Clay on January 17, 1942 to Cassius Marcellus Clay, Sr. and Odessa Grady Clay. He grew up in a middle class family in Louisville, Kentucky. He learned a strong work ethic from both of his parents. His father painted signs and billboards and his worked as a maid.

Although his home state of Kentucky was one of the earliest states to abolish the racist policy of segregation in education, Muhammad Ali grew up in a country grappling with sharp divides in opportunities and services available based on race. His personal experience as a child and young man in pre-Civil rights America would deeply affect his activism later in life.

He began his boxing career at a young age. He started training as an amateur boxer at age 12 and was mentored by Louisville police officer, Joe Martin. His first bout was in 1954 which he won by split decision. He showed great promise early in his career and won several Golden Globe titles both in Kentucky and nationally. He went on to win the Amateur Athletic Union national title before representing the United States in the 1960 Olympics. He won the gold medal in the Light Heavyweight division. His record as an amateur boxer was impressive, out of 105 fights, he won 100.

After the Olympics, he quickly made the leap from amateur to professional boxer under the sponsorship of several wealthy Louisville citizens. His early professional career saw the beginnings of his trademark style in the ring and

his larger than life persona outside of it. He demonstrated that he could win against larger, veteran opponents using an unconventional strategy that was a powerful combination of incredible footwork, hand speed and extremely quick reflexes. He also had trials early in his career and lost to Sonny Banks and Henry Cooper.

His early career also saw the beginnings of the taunting and his larger than life personality. He was known to call opponents, ugly and bums. He was quoted as saying that Madison Square Garden was too small for him. His over the top behavior infuriated many fans of the sport, agents and promoters. He wanted to train under the great Sugar Ray Robinson, but the trainer declined to work with Ali.

On March 13, 1963 he fought Doug Jones at Madison Square Garden. This fight was one of the toughest in his early career and also one of the most promoted of his early professional career. Ali ended up winning by decision. Boxing fans in attendance through trash into the ring after the decision was announced. No matter whether fans of the sport adored his style and antics, or despised his egocentric hype, he was an exciting athlete to watch. Despite the reception of fans and boxing world, this fight would be named the fight of the year by Ring magazine.

Chapter Two



By the end of 1963, Muhammad Ali's career had reached a turning point. He had gained attention and notoriety in the boxing world. He had won many fights and had become a contender for the World Heavyweight Title. The Heavyweight title at that time was held by the incomparable Sonny Liston.

Sonny Liston had watched Ali's fight with Doug Jones earlier in the year and had commented that he if he fought Ali that he would be locked up for murder. Liston had a complicated past that included criminal charges and links to the mafia, specifically the Lucchese crime family. He had spent time in prison and had been charged with armed robbery and assault. He was incredibly intimidating and his hits were brutal, he was even described as ferocious. He was widely thought of as the greatest Heavyweight fighter of his day and many veteran fighters did not want to be in the ring with him. He was the toughest opponent that Ali would face at that time.

The fight was scheduled for February 25, 1964 in Miami, Florida and Ali, still known then as Cassius Clay, was considered to be the underdog. Liston was expected to win the bout easily against the lighter, younger Ali. Liston's ability to dominate an opponent with his heavy hits was thought to be sufficient to put aside any hopes that Ali would have of victory. Ali fought in a quicker style that was widely seen in the lighter weight divisions and was

considered to be a disadvantage when going up against veteran heavyweight fighters like Liston.

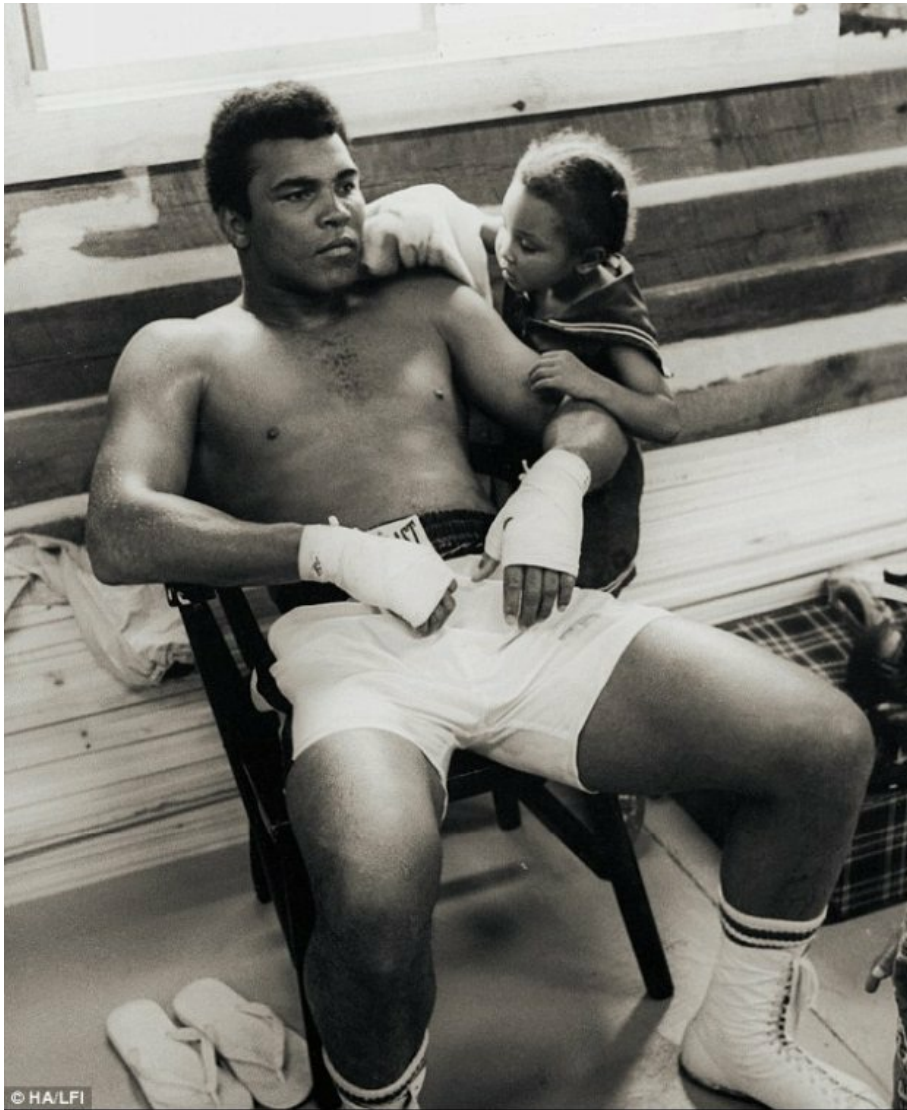
The days leading up to the fight were filled with wild speculation by the press and erratic behavior by Ali. The press believed that Ali was terrified of facing Liston in the ring and reported that Ali would not even show up to the match. The press went so far as to report that Ali had even bought an airline ticket to leave the country. Ali did his part to gain attention by behaving like a man with a death wish. He purchased a bus and painted taunts on the side and drove it to Liston's house late at night. He referred to Liston as a big ugly bear and showed up to the pre-fight weigh in wearing jacket emblazoned with the title "Bear Hunter" on the back.

Liston prepared for the fight that he believed he would win readily by training less seriously than he ever had before. It was rumored that he ate poorly, drank and entertained prostitutes rather than train for a serious match. It has also been suggested that he was experiencing issues with his shoulder and bursitis. Regardless of the truth about his training or health issues, he ended weighing more than he ever had before at the weigh in. Ali, on the hand trained harder and studied films of his opponent's fights.

The fight itself has been heralded as one of the four greatest sporting moments in the twentieth century. Liston and Ali traded hits early in the first two rounds. By the third and fourth round, it became clear that Ali was winning the match. Despite, the efforts of Liston and his attendants to win by cheating, Ali proved to be too quick and too powerful for Liston. Ali fought the entire 5th round nearly blind by a caustic substance that Liston had smeared on gloves. By the sixth round, Ali's sight started to return and he was able to deliver combination to Liston that the Heavyweight Champion was unable to return. At the end of the 6th round, Liston spit out his mouth guard and told his people "That's it" as he sat on his stool in the corner of the ring as the bell for the 7th round rang. Muhammad Ali was declared the victor and was credited with one of the biggest upsets ins sports history.

Three days later, he would make news again by announcing that he had joined the controversial and then regarded as a hate group, Nation of Islam.

Chapter Three



Muhammad Ali, born Cassius Clay had developed an interest in the Nation of Islam early in his teens. He listened to Elijah Muhammad broadcast on the radio and joined the Nation. At first he took the name Cassius X, using the X to replace what he considered to be his slave name. He developed a friendship with Malcom X early in his career. Malcolm X even attended the Liston fight and was Ali's spiritual advisor.

In March of 1964, Elijah Muhammad announced to the world that Cassius Clay, then Cassius X would now be known as Muhammad Ali. Ali's father was distraught that Ali and his brother, Rudolph had both joined this

controversial group and denounced their Christina upbringing.

Ali's conversion to the Nation of Islam was met with concern and consternation by the boxing world. Like his verbal insults and unpredictable antics, it was considered one more reason for many boxing fans to find the fighter distasteful. Yet, regardless of the negative attention that he received for his religious, political and personal views, he was a boxing superstar.

In May of 1965, Ali and Liston had a rematch in Lewiston, Maine. The rematch was controversial at the time and remains so to this day. It only lasted 2 minutes. Ali is credited with knocking out Liston in the first round with a phantom punch, although there is speculation that Liston may have feared death threats by the nation of Islam or accepted a large pay off. Regardless of the controversy, in film footage, Ali can clearly be seen landing a hard hitting and quick right to Liston that apparently did more damage than was immediately apparent at the time.

The next fight for Ali was with Floyd Patterson. Patterson was no stranger to the ring, a former Heavyweight Champion, Patterson lasted 12 rounds with Ali before losing in a technical knockout. Ali's next fight was scheduled with Ernie Terrell. Terrell held the title of Heavyweight Champion by the boxing association, the WBA. Just prior to the scheduled bout, Ali ran straight into controversy by his refusal to participate in the draft.

Although he had not been called to serve, Ali indicated that he would refuse to fight in Vietnam. He cited religious beliefs and commented to the press that he personally did not have any problem with the Vietcong. He stated that he would not fight a people that had not responsible for the racial injustice that he had experienced in his own country. Due to his public denouncement of The United States involvement in Vietnam and his insistence that he would not fight if drafted, the Terrell fight was canceled when a public outcry erupted leading the fight to be canceled due to technicalities.

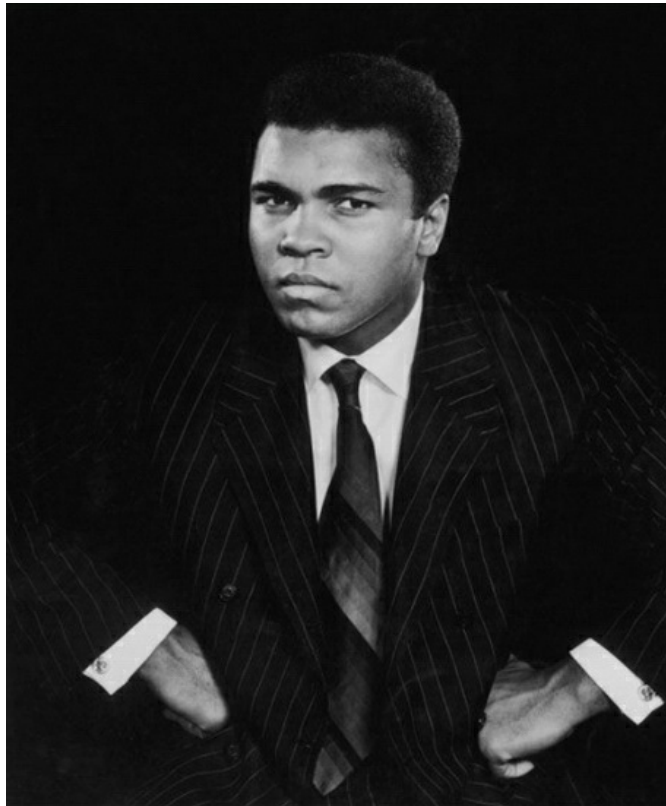
During the next two years, Ali would fight Cleveland Williams, and Ernie Terrell and Zora Foley. He defended his title against all three opponents. In spring of 1967, he refused to be drafted just as he told the press two years earlier. Du to his affiliation with the Nation of Islam and his willingness to fight in an Islamic holy war, his citing of religious beliefs as an objection to fight in Vietnam declined. He was stripped of his championship title and

suspended from fighting in every state in the United States for 3 ½ years. He was charged and criminally indicted. He was sentenced to serve 5 years in prison. Fortunately for Ali he was free on bail during this time and his conviction was eventually overturned by the United States Supreme Court.

Support for the Vietnam War significantly decreased and Ali's stance on refusing to fight was seen more sympathetically by many Americans. He was invited to speak at colleges while he was suspended from boxing and he became a leader and advocate for the anti-war movement and for racial equality.

During his years as professional boxer and activist, he married Sonji Ro in 1964. The couple later divorced in 1966 due to Sonji's refusal to comply with the Nation of Islam's dress code for women. In 1967, he married Belinda Boyd who converted to Islam and changed her name to Khalilah Ali. They had four children, Maryum, Jamillah and Rasheda and Muhammad Ali, Jr.

Chapter Four



As Ali waited for his case to be heard before the Supreme Court, he returned to professional boxing in 1970. His first bout was in August against Jerry Quarry in Atlanta, Georgia. The city of Atlanta issued Ali a license to box in the city and welcomed the fighter back into the ring. The fight lasted only three rounds, but Ali was back and had won the victory.

In September, the state of New York was ordered to reinstate his boxing license. Ali was soon back in Madison Square Garden fighting Oscar Bonavena in December. Ali won by a technical knockout and in only two fights was a contender for The Heavyweight Championship.

Joe Frazier was the current Heavyweight Champion and Ali taunted him as being a favorite of white supremacists, the KKK and called him dumb. The fight was set for March 8, 1971 and was dubbed the fight of the century by the press. The taunts and insults leveled at Frazier by Ali would lead to feelings of deep dislike and animosity for many years to come.

The fight of the century was truly a bout to remember, both men were trained

and fighting in peak condition. For the first round, both fighters appeared to be evenly matched. Frazier delivered hard hits that were his trademarks and Ali demonstrated his ability to persevere against incredible punishment. It was an example of one of Ali's famous strategies of tiring out his opponent by absorbing hits. The fight lasted 12 rounds with Frazier landing one of the hardest hits in boxing in the form of a punishing left hook. Ali took the hit and was back up in just a few seconds. Despite returning from a hit that should have knocked him cold, the fight was ended by a unanimous decision in Frazier's favor.

A fight with basketball great Wilt Chamberlain was scheduled but Chamberlain canceled the match. Ali went on to fight Jerry Quarry, Floyd Patterson and Bob Foster. In 1973, during a bout with Ken Norton, Ali sustained a broken jaw and a loss. He considered retirement after the injury but reconsidered and decided to remain in boxing.

Ali met Norton in a rematch and won in a decision and also met Joe Frazier in a rematch on January 28, 1974 at Madison Square Garden. The rematch with Frazier once again showed how well matched these two fighters were. Ali dominated the early rounds and Frazier persevered in the middle. The last rounds were well fought by both men and the fight was eventually decided in a unanimous decision for Ali.

With his win over Frazier, Ali was poised to fight Heavyweight Champion George Foreman. In one of the celebrated fights in Ali and Foreman were scheduled to fight on October 30, 1974 in Zaire. The fight was called the Rumble in the Jungle and was publicized as being a sure victory for Foreman. Foreman was widely accepted as having one of the hardest punches in boxing and his strength coupled with Ali's advancing age in the sport, he was 32 appeared to guarantee a Foreman victory. Regardless of the press and his peers in the boxing world's foregone conclusion that Foreman would easily win this match, Ali taunted Foreman and bragged of his ability to the press. In Zaire, he was greeted by the people as a hero.

The fight showcased Ali's ability to take intense punishment from a powerful opponent. Ali started the first round with a few roses to Foreman's head and then in the second round Ali began absorbing hits thrown by Foreman while simultaneously taunting him in the ring to make him angry. To fans and referees alike it appeared that Ali was in the ropes and that Foreman would

definitely win this match. By the middle rounds, Foreman clearly showed signs of exhaustion. In the eighth round, Ali executed a combination and Foreman dropped to the mat. He did not get up by the end of the referee's count. Ali had won by using his controversial technique of absorbing his opponent's hits, he referred to this method of winning as rope a dope. Once again, Ali had stunned the boxing world by winning a match against an opponent deemed to be heavily favored to win.

After the publicized Foreman fight, Ali went on to fight Chuck Wepner, Ron Lyle and Joe Bugner. Wepner hit Ali with a knockout punch in a late round of their match and was declared the winner. This fight would be the inspiration to Sylvester Stallone's critically acclaimed film, Rocky.

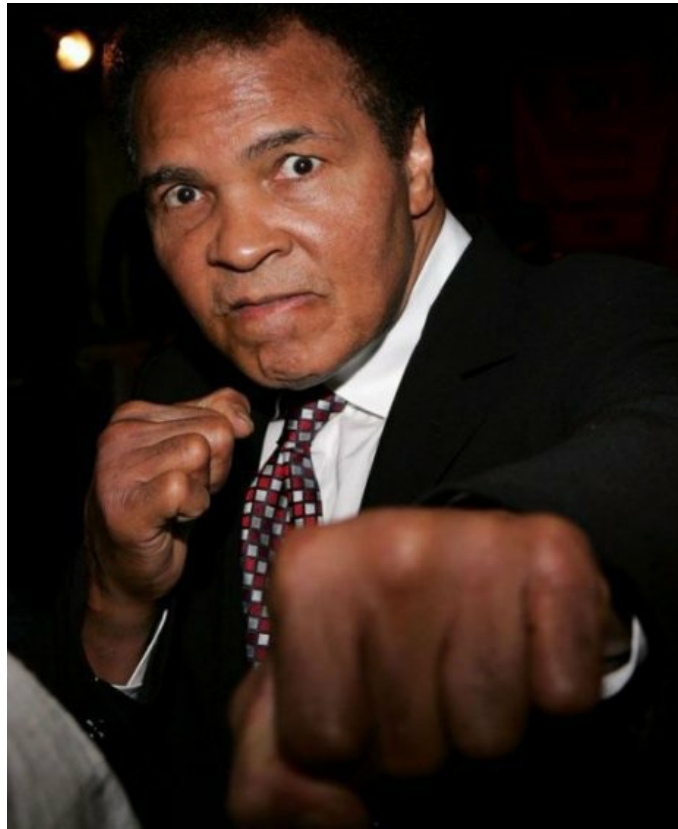
On October 1, 1975 Ali and Frazier met one last time in a fight touted to be the Thrilla in Manila set in Manila, Philippines. The fight was called the greatest prizefight of all time by the press and once again pitted Ali against his old nemesis, Joe Frazier. The fight between these two athletes lived up to the publicity.

In the first three rounds, Ali dominated over Frazier before appearing to tire in the subsequent rounds. Frazier threw punch after punch in an aggressive attack. Ali for his part absorbed the brutal punishment and waited for Frazier to tire himself out which he did by the 12th round. Ali hit Frazier over both eyes and causes the boxer to lose his capacity for sight during the fight.

During the 13th and the 14th fight, Ali delivered several hard blows to Frazier's head and by the end of the 14th round, Frazier's trainer refused to let the fight go. Frazier did not return to the ring for the 15th round. Ali had won the third fight with Frazier but he had exhausted himself in the effort. After the fight, Ali is credited with saying that Frazier was the greatest fighter of all times next to himself. For Ali, that was truly a compliment.

Through the second half of his professional career, Ali was still married to Khalilah Ali. He is also known to have had affairs with other women and fathered Miya and Khaliah by these women.

Chapter Five



After the Manila fight, Ali struggled with illness and the side effects that stem from a long term boxing career. For several years after Foreman, Ali would announce that he was retiring and then return to the ring. During this period of his life, he had a rematch with Ken Norton which he won by decision, fought a Japanese martial artist, won a match against Alfredo Evangelista, and won a third Heavyweight Championship against Leon Spinks. His last fights against Larry Holmes and Trevor Berbicks ended in defeat. Muhammad Ali finally decided to retire from boxing.

Although he was finished with fighting inside the ring, he was not finished with fighting for causes that he firmly believed to be just. He had been an activist for the anti-war movement during Vietnam and had championed the cause of racial justice in the United States. He would now take his celebrity status and his passion for activism and use them to focus attention on the impoverished, the refugees and the victims of persecution, war and famine all over the world.

It was during the mid-70s that he also made significant changes in his faith. He had come to see the Nation of Islam as not being true to his values due to their racist and inflammatory views. In his early twenties, the Nation of Islam had played a prominent role in his life. He had lived in Chicago and generally kept a residence within close proximity to the main of mosque of the Nation.

In close parallel to Malcom X, he made the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in 1972 and saw many people of different races worshipping and practicing the Islamic faith. He studied the Qur'an extensively and like his friend, Malcom X before him, he embraced the wider, more tolerant world view of Sunni Islam.

The Nation of Islam was led by Warith Deen Muhammad after Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975. This new leader led many adherents to the Nation's faith towards the less extreme and more moderate version of Islam that is Sunni Islam. Muhammad Ali often attributed his shift in faith to several factors this leader's teaching and guidance. He rejected the teachings of Louis Farrakhan and embraced an Islam that was inclusive of all people. This new direction in his faith inspired Ali to dedicate his life peace, charity and helping others.

In 1975, he began a relationship with Veronica Porche and divorced his wife, Belinda. He married Veronica in 1977. The couple had 2 children, Hana and Laila Ali. He also fathered Kiiursti Mensah-Ali during this time as result of a twenty year extra marital relationship with her mother, Barbara Mensah.

Chapter Six

Muhammad Ali's work as an activist really began when he stood up to his own government and refused to fight in a war that he neither supported nor believed in. At the time, his opposition to Vietnam and his refusal to fight for his country were seen as seditious by a nation that still supported the war. As the sixties came to a close and support for The United States involvement in Vietnam waned, Ali came to be seen as a champion and a hero. This fearlessness and willingness to sacrifice his own reputation for a cause that he found to be worthy and just defined his life after his boxing career came to a close.

As early as 1974, while still boxing, he traveled to the southern region of Lebanon and visited Palestinians housed in a refugee camp. He was moved by the conditions of the camp and was sympathetic to these people who had been displaced from their homeland because of war and their faith. At a time when most of the citizens of the United States supported Israel, Ali stood up for the families and children of Palestine that had been exiled as result of conflict with Israel. It was not a popular cause, but one that Ali felt passionate about. He continued to support the Palestinian cause for many years.

In 1978, many Native Americans gathered for a march from California to Washington, D.C. called the Longest March. The march was held to spotlight the needs and rights of Native Americans who had struggled against the laws and abuses of the United States. The march was also held to in protest of legislation that was being voted on in the Congress and Senate that would further the interest of the United States and limit and restrict Native American interests and rights such as water and forced relocation and the treatment and imprisonment of political prisoners. Muhammad Ali supported their cause and joined the march, accompanied by Marlon Brando and Senator Ted Kennedy.

In 1980, Ali spoke out against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. HE traveled to Kenya and met with leaders of that country. He urged them to boycott the Olympics held in Moscow that year as a sign of protest to the Soviet invasion. As a direct result of Ali's status as celebrity and hero in that country and his passionate activism on behalf of Afghanistan, Kenya agreed and boycotted the Olympics that year.

Ali worked to promote peace and bring awareness to the plight of the disenfranchised and the underdogs. As he worked furthering his humanitarian causes, his health was slowly in decline. He had sustained numerous injuries during his boxing career and now, sadly those injuries were causing noticeable symptoms such as slurred speech and trembling. In 1984, as his symptoms grew steadily worse, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

Despite his fading health, he still made public appearances to use the drawing power of his celebrity status to highlight causes that he felt needed attention and to be addressed. During the 1980's, Ali continued to work tirelessly for the rights of Muslims imprisoned by the Israeli government and Palestinians still in refugee camps. He supported the first Palestinian uprising in 1988 at Chicago rally. In 1989, he traveled to Kerala in India to participate in charity events advocating the Muslim Educational Society. He also worked to further the efforts to raise money and awareness for Parkinson's disease research.

In his personal life, Ali and Veronica Porche divorced in 1986. Later that year, he married Yolanda Williams. Yolanda had been an acquaintance of Ali's since the 1960s and had remained a trusted and dear friend for many years. They had one son together, Assad Amin, whom they adopted.

Chapter Seven

During the 1990s, Ali's health steadily declined and his appearances become more and more infrequent. Although he was no longer in the public eye as much as he had been in prior years, he still worked to bring peace to the Middle East and to raise awareness for the need for a cure for Parkinson's disease.

Before the Gulf War began in 1990, Ali met with Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Hussein was holding several Americans hostage and Ali used his skills as a diplomat to secure their release. This success was met with criticism from leaders in the United States but was widely praised by many Americans.

When the Olympics came to Atlanta, Georgia in 1996, he was chosen to light the flame. Being one of the most recognizable sports figures of the century, a gold medalist and his ceaseless work for charitable causes across the globe led to overwhelming fanfare and cheering as he lit the flame. Although his symptoms were noticeable as he lit the flame, the crowds in Atlanta cheered this inspiring sports legend. In 2012, he was chosen to be a titular bearer of the Olympic Flag at the Olympics held in London. This appearance in London once again proved the love and respect felt by many around the world for Muhammad Ali.

In the new century, Ali traveled to Kabul, Afghanistan as a representative of the United Nations on a goodwill mission to help calm tensions and solidify peace in that war torn country. Although his physical abilities were greatly diminished as the new century progresses, he still traveled the globe to further the causes that he personally championed. As late as 2014, Ali supported the Black Lives Matter movement and spoke out about the slaying of Trayvon Martin.

From 2014 to 2016, Ali's health rapidly declined. He was treated during his final years for various ailments and released to his home in Scottsdale, Arizona. On June 2, 2016 Ali was admitted to the hospital to be treated for a respiratory ailment. He died the next day as result of septic shock.

As per his wishes, Ali's body was returned to his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky and a two day funeral and memorial were held in his honor. An Islamic prayer service was held and his funeral procession followed a route

through his old hometown. He was buried at Cave Hill Cemetery.

Conclusion

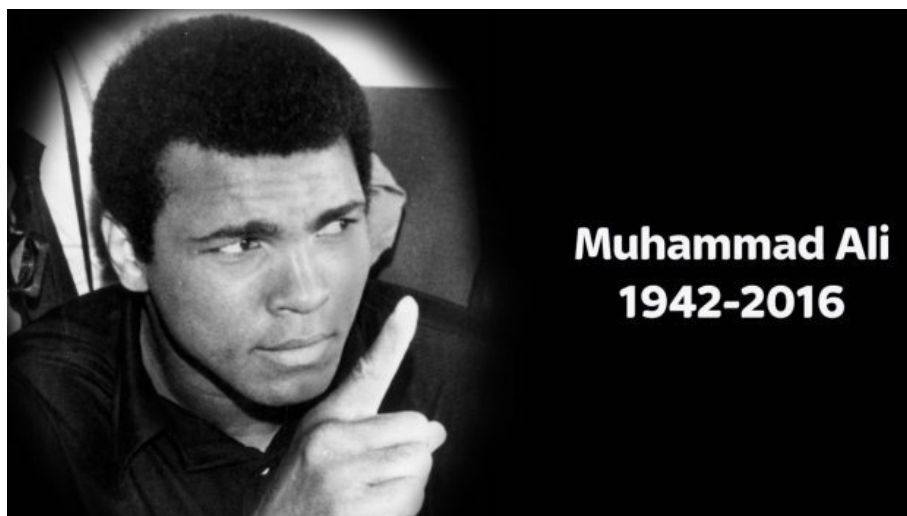
Muhammad Ali was an amazing athlete and a passionate activist. He lived his life by his own rules and followed the dictates of his own conscience. He is one of the most recognized sports figures in the world and he is beloved for his devotion to championing causes that were not always popular.

He was controversial and admired in life and in death has become a legend. His boxing record will stand as a testament to his skill and his dedication to the hard work of training. His boxing record truly showed his unparalleled prowess as an athlete. Out of 61 bouts, he only lost 5 during his career. He was named Fighter of the year by Ring Magazine 5 times and was a 4 time WBA Heavyweight Champion, a 3 time NABF Heavyweight Champion and inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame just to name a few of his impressive list of achievements and accolades.

He was also recognized during his lifetime as a humanitarian and was awarded the President's Citizens Medal and the President's Medal of Freedom. He also received the Otto Hahn Peace Medal in Gold as recognition for his work to further the cause of civil rights in the United States and peace around the globe.

Ali's life and legacy have been chronicled in books, autobiographies, films, magazine articles, the Hollywood Walk of Fame and his home town of Louisville. There are streets named after him and The Muhammad Ali Center which focuses on his boxing career and his devotion to humanitarian causes.

The legacy of Muhammad Ali is one of strength, perseverance and dedication to standing up for causes that bring equal rights and peace for all. He described himself as the greatest of all time while still boxing, but Muhammad Ali proved that he was the greatest Humanitarian, diplomat, athlete and Champion for people all over the world.



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