

## Jordon and Ali

Throughout black history, great black athletes have served as role models to America's youth, in a way that may not have been possible for others leaders. And to be sure, some of these great heroes of athletics have become virtually godlike to all sports fans, not just those in the black community. Michael Jordon's ability on the basketball field during his career at times seems to be virtually superhuman. And the career of Mohammed Ali sent such a powerful message of black pride to black and white America that he virtually transformed social perception of the black man through sheer talent and attitude.

Before Mohammed Ali came along, the idea of a black boxer, even a very good black boxer becoming such a central figure for black pride seemed unlikely. But Ali demonstrated something to the youth of the African American community that was so inspirational that it helped to transform their world view like no other public figure could have done.

With his swagger and braggadocio, Ali stood out as a proud black man in such a way that had never been seen before. His use of rhyme with such phrases as "I float like a butterfly and sting like a bee" to his self promotion maintaining "I'm pretty", that sent a message to black and white admirer alike. And that message was loud and clear. Ali was black and he was proud and other black men and women in America have just as much reason to be proud as he was.

This was an important message because coming out of years of oppression, it was sometimes difficult for black youth to gain a sense of pride and the self assurance needed to get out there and be a success. It took the work of great black role models such as Mohammed Ali to let them know that it is allowable for you to be proud and to be great as well. For Ali didn't back up his claims with just boasts. He was truly a great black athlete as well. So when Ali bragged that he was "pretty", he showed that the way he fought truly was a thing of beauty.

That same excellence and how it has been used to inspire the black community can be found in the phenomenal career of Michael Jordon. In the same way that Ali's talent seemed to eclipse even the genre of boxing, Jordon was so phenomenal at basketball that he became an icon of excellence and skill and a role model for black youth across the country. Both of these men recognized that God had given them this tremendous talent and the opportunities to reach their potential. And they worked hard to be a role model to their community so others would be inspired to be their best as well.

Moreover, great black sports heroes also provided healing by setting a high standard of excellence for sports fans of all races to admire. It wasn't just black sports fans who adored the work of Mohammed Ali and Michael Jordon. They became true heroes to anyone to whom sports was an important part of life.

Sports is an arena where men and woman can come to socialize and find common ground. Like entertainment, there is a world of sports that makes comrades of

all who enjoy the exploits of sports heroes whether on the baseball diamond, the football field, the boxing arena or the basketball stadium. And sports fans have a standard that they value their heroes that is based on talent, achievement and ability to do that one thing everybody in sports admires - to be a winner. And Mohammed Ali and Michael Jordon were certainly embodiment of great black men who were also in every way winners. And we all admire that regardless of race, color or creed.

PPPPP 643