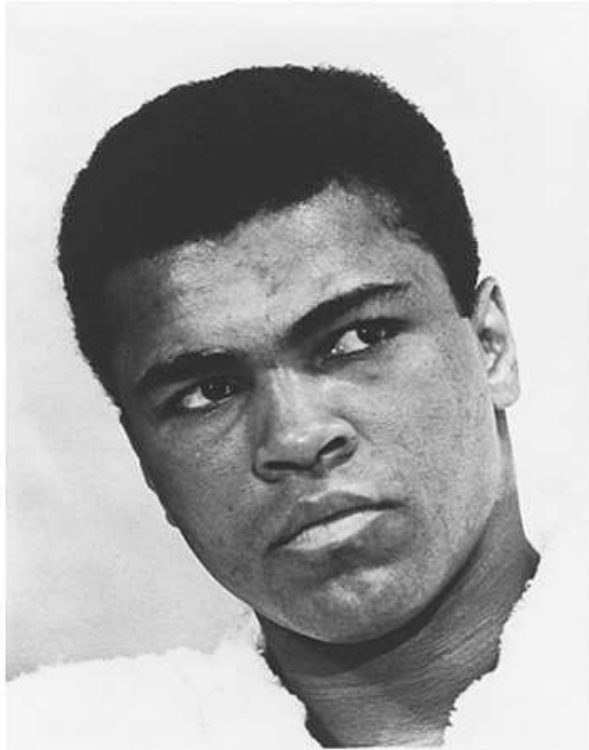


Ali, Muhammad

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Record Information

Source: Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division. New York World-Telegram and Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection.

Record Type: Photograph or Illustration

Date: b. 1942–d. 2016

Also Known As: Cassius M. Clay; Cassius Clay;

Description:

World heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali was the best-known athlete in the world during the 1970s. Brash, outspoken and politically involved, Ali flouted the unspoken rules of behavior for a high-profile African American of his era. He is shown here in 1967.

Muhammad Ali, who was originally named Cassius Clay, became a professional boxer after winning a gold medal in the 1960 Olympics. He reached his boxing peak in his twenties at a time when the Civil Rights movement was already in full swing and the Black Power movement was beginning to gain momentum.

In 1964, after defeating Sonny Liston to become heavyweight champion, Clay announced that he had become a member of the Nation of Islam and would thereafter be known by the Islamic name Muhammad **Ali**. The announcement was met with widespread criticism. Additional criticism followed his request for a draft deferment on grounds that he was a Muslim minister. **Ali** had previously been classified 1-Y after failing a preinduction mental test, but in 1966, he was suddenly reclassified A-1. He refused to be inducted into the army, saying "No Vietcong ever called me Nigger." As a result, he was sentenced to five years in prison and stripped of his boxing title by the World Boxing Association and his license to fight was revoked by the New York State Athletic Commission. **Ali** remained free on bail while the case was appealed, and in 1970, Judge Walter Mansfield ruled that the athletic commission had acted illegally in denying him a license to box. In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned his conviction. On March 8, 1971, **Ali** lost to Joe Frazier in what was called the "Fight of the Century." A second fight with Frazier in 1974 ended in an **Ali** victory. Ten months later, he fought heavyweight champion George Foreman and regained his title. In 1975, **Ali** met Joe

Frazier for the third time for the "Thrilla in Manila" and won when Frazier's manager stopped the fight. He lost his title to Leon Spinks in 1978 but regained it seven months later.

When he retired in 1979, his boxing record was 56 wins, 3 losses. Ali often referred to himself as "the Greatest" and frequently used rhymes to taunt his opponents. He was the first man to win the heavyweight crown three times and is regarded as one of the most skillful boxers of all time. An Oscar-winning documentary called *When We Were Kings*, about Ali's 1974 fight with George Foreman, was released in 1996. He was honored at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.

Ali, who was frequently referred to as the "Greatest Athlete on Earth," continued to be a presence in the sportsworld and beyond. In May of 2000, Congress passed the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act to prohibit the bribing of boxing officials and to set guidelines for contracts between promoters and fighters. In January of 2001, President Clinton awarded Ali the Presidential Citizens Medal, the highest national honor available to a civilian. A new organization called The Muhammad Ali Center opened in 2005 in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, to promote the ideals and beliefs he championed throughout his career and to inspire others to reach their goals. Ali appeared to have inspired his daughter, Laila, who made her professional boxing debut in October of 1999. She went undefeated in her first seven fights. Muhammad Ali died on June 3, 2016.

References and Further Information

Ali, Muhammad. *The Greatest: My Own Story*. New York: Random House, 1975.