



About Muhammad Ali

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I. How Muhammad Ali Wanted to be Remembered – In His Own Words

In his 2004 memoir, *The Soul of a Butterfly*, wrote in the chapter entitled *How I Would Like to be Remembered* Muhammad Ali said:

I would like to be remembered as a man who won the heavyweight title three times, who was humorous, and who treated everyone right. As a man who never looked down on those who looked up to him, and who helped as many people as he could. As a man who stood up for his beliefs no matter what. As a man who tried to unite all humankind through faith and love. And if all that's too much, then I guess I'd settle for being remembered only as a great boxer who became a leader and a champion of his people. And I wouldn't even mind if folks forgot how pretty I was.¹

II. MA's early years

1948	Cassius Clay was born in Louisville, KY
1954	Muhammad Ali at Age 12 has his "Red Bike Moment:" A catalyst for his boxing career and illustrates by example how Cassius found his purpose in life at an early age. ² Picture - Red bike hangs over old Columbia Auditorium, now Spalding University, where Muhammad Ali's red bike was stolen at age 12... Photograph: John Sommers/Reuters. From: https://www.theguardian.com/sport/picture/2016/jun/07/sport-picture-of-the-day-muhammad-alis-red-bike-started-it-all
1954-1960	Six weeks after he started training at 12 years old, Muhammad Ali fought and won his first boxing match. In high school, he won 6 Kentucky Golden Gloves Championships and two nationals championships. By the time he graduated from high school, Muhammad Ali had 100 wins and only 8 losses. During this time, Muhammad Ali appeared regularly on a local Louisville TV program Tomorrow's Champions. From: A Stolen Bicycle at https://sports.jrank.org/pages/91/Ali-Muhammad-Stolen-Bicycle.html
1960	Muhammad Ali graduates from Ali graduated from Central High School. He wins an Olympic Gold Medal in the light heavyweight division at the Olympic Games in Rome.

¹ For more information, please see his Obituary written by Robert Lipsyte in the New York Times published on June 4, 2016.

² From: Muhammad Ali Center: <https://alicenter.org/red-bike-moment/>.

	He begins professional boxing career, and wins his first professional fight, defeating Tunney Hunsaker in a six-round decision. By end of 1960, he had fought in 167 fights and won 161 of them.

MA was born on January 17, 1942 in segregated Louisville, Kentucky and named Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr. His father, Cassius Marcellus Clay Sr., had his own business as a sign painter in Louisville following the advice of his father to avoid “the dangers and indignities of working for the white man.”³ The family name, Clay, came from MA’s great-grandfather who was enslaved by the family of Henry Clay, a U.S. Senator from Kentucky.⁴

A. Formative Experiences

One of Muhammad Ali’s formative experiences was the murder of Emmet Till in Mississippi in 1955 who was just one year older than Muhammad Ali. We know that he recognized the injustices of segregation around him from *The Soul of A Butterfly*. Louisville had restaurants and stores with signs reading “Whites Only” and “No Coloreds Allowed” although Muhammad Ali did not experience the violence that many Blacks experienced in other parts of the South.

Muhammad Ali saw a newspaper with a front-page newspaper story about Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American who was lynched by a gang of white people in Mississippi in 1955, after he was accused of offending a white woman in her family’s grocery store. Muhammad Ali was 13 years old at the time and he felt a connection to this young man who was brutally murdered. As Muhammad Ali noted in *The Soul of a Butterfly*:

Although I didn’t know Emmett Till personal, from that day on I could see him in every black boy and girl. I imagined him playing and laughing. As I looked at his picture in the paper, I realized that this could just as easily have been a story about me or my brother. They caught the people that did it and put them on trial, but an all-white jury found the defendants not guilty – even though there had been eyewitness testimony that the defendants had been the ones who had kidnapped the boy. Emmett’s mother said, “When something like that happened to Negroes in the south, I said, ‘That’s their business, not mine.’ Now I know how wrong I was. The murder of my son has shown me that what happens to any of us anywhere in the world had better be the business of us all.” I believe that this is true.

I knew that my heart could harden in a world with so much pain, confusion, and injustices. Somehow, I knew that if I were going to survive, I could not become bitter. I would have to love even those who could not give it in return. I would have to learn to forgive even those who would not – or my soul would wither away.

³ Jonathan Eig, *Ali: A Life* 7 (2017).

⁴ The story about Muhammad Ali and Ali’s father, Cassius Marcellus Clay, Sr., who was named after a Kentucky slave owner turned abolitionist, and the original Cassius Marcellus Clay at <https://time.com/4363225/original-cassius-clay-muhammad-ali/>. See also, <https://news.yale.edu/2016/06/09/muhammad-ali-originally-named-ardent-abolitionist-and-yale-alumnus-cassius-clay>.

About Emmett Till - While visiting family in Money, Mississippi, 14-year-old Emmett Till, an African American from Chicago, is brutally murdered for allegedly “flirting” with a white woman four days earlier by the white woman’s husband and her brother. They made Emmett carry a 75-pound cotton-gin fan to the bank of the Tallahatchie River and ordered him to take off his clothes. The two men then beat Emmett nearly to death, gouged out his eye, shot him in the head, and then threw his body, tied to the cotton-gin fan with barbed wire, into the river. Emmett grew on the south side of Chicago, and though he had attended a segregated elementary school, he was not prepared for the level of segregation he encountered in Mississippi. Three days later, his corpse was recovered but was so disfigured that he could only be identified an initialed ring. The local police and other government officials wanted to bury the body quickly, but Emmett’s mother, Mamie Bradley, requested it be sent back to Chicago. After seeing the mutilated remains, she decided to have an open-casket funeral so that all the world could see what the racist murderers had done to her only son. *Jet*, an African American weekly magazine, published a photo of Emmett’s corpse, and soon the mainstream media picked up on the story.⁵

Another formative moment in Muhammad Ali’s youth was his famous “**Red Bike Moment**.”⁶ When Muhammad Ali was twelve years old in 1954, a thief stole his new red Schwinn bicycle outside of the annual Louisville Home Show. Clay, in tears, found a policeman to report the crime to and stated that he wanted to “whup” the thief who stole his bike. As noted by the Muhammad Ali Center, it was serendipitous that the policeman was Sergeant Joe Martin, who trained boxers.

He encouraged Clay to learn how to fight before looking for retaliation. Martin’s gym was in the basement of the same building they were standing in. Clay showed up the next day to start training and he spent the next six years under Martin. Had young Cassius not been the victim of a stolen bicycle AND had he not taken the advice of the police officer, his life would certainly have taken a different path. Cassius Clay’s stolen bike became a catalyst for his boxing career and illustrates by example how Cassius found his purpose in life at an early age.

From that forward, Muhammad Ali experienced an awakening and began to seriously consider the realities of racial tensions in America and the effects of segregation and integration. At a very young age, Muhammad made a conscious decision to use boxing as a platform for social justice and peacemaking on a global basis. Muhammad Ali utilized his “Red Bike Moment”© to fight a different kind of fight that persisted while still in the ring, and continued until his passing in June, 2016.

A significant component of the Muhammad Ali Center’s mission is to preserve and promote Muhammad Ali’s legacy. Using the “Red Bike Moment”© is a symbolic

⁵ From: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-death-of-emmett-till>

⁶ Muhammad Ali Center: <https://alicenter.org/red-bike-moment/>. Photo of Red Bike at Spaulding U - [https://www.theguardian.com/sport/picture/2016/jun/07/sport-picture-of-the-day-muhammad-alis-red-bi-ke-started-it-all](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/picture/2016/jun/07/sport-picture-of-the-day-muhammad-alis-red-bike-started-it-all)

approach to fulfilling the Center’s mission in a way that connects in both graphic and tangible ways. This curriculum is designed to encourage people to connect with and to share the notion of the “Red Bike Moment”© in their own lives. Using Muhammad Ali’s own story as motivation for positive thought and action are the powerful features that will advance both individual development and humanitarian causes, one person at a time.

A third formative experience in young Muhammad Ali’s life occurred after he won the Olympic Gold Medal in boxing at the 1960 Rome Olympics. Ali, wearing his Gold Medal, and his brother were refused service at a lunch counter in downtown Louisville. Ali chronicles this memorable experience in *The Soul of A Butterfly*:

My Olympic gold medal meant so much to me. It was a symbol of what I accomplished for myself and for my country. . . . I was sure that they were finally going to let me eat downtown. In those days almost every restaurant, hotel, and movie theater in Louisville and the entire South was either closed to Blacks or had segregated sections. *But I thought that my medal would open them up to me. . . .*

One day my friend Ronnie and I . . . walked into a little restaurant, where we sat down and ordered two cheeseburgers and two vanilla milk shakes. I was so proud, sitting there with my gold medal around my neck. (I wore it everywhere in those days.) The waitress looked at both us and said, “We don’t serve Negroes.” I politely replied, “Well, we don’t eat them either.” I told her I was Cassius Clay, the Olympic Champion. Ronnie pointed to my gold medal. . . . We were sure that now that they knew who I was we would be able to stay and eat, but when the waitress came back, she said she was sorry, but we had to leave.

As Ronnie and I stood up and walked out of the door, *my heart was pounding*. I wanted my medal to mean something – the mayor had said it was the key to Louisville. It was supposed to mean freedom and equality. . . . I had won the gold medal for America, but I still couldn’t eat in this restaurant in my hometown, the town where they all knew my name . . .

[More] than anything, I wanted the medal to mean that I was my own man and would be treated and respected like any other human being. . . . The more I thought about it, the more I began to see that if that medal did not mean equality for all, it didn’t mean anything at all.

B. Ali’s Amateur Boxing Career

Six weeks after he started training with Joe Martin, Muhammad Ali won his first boxing match. Muhammad Ali was not immediately a champion. The first time he stepped into the ring, against an older fighter, he flailed wildly and within a minute his nose was bloodied and he had to be pulled out. As Martin put it, he “didn’t know a left hook from a kick in the ass”. After his first win, after six weeks of training, his father Cassius Clay Sr. proclaimed: “My son is going to be another Joe Louis. The World Heavyweight Champion, Cassius Clay!”⁷

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2016/jun/04/muhammad-ali-death-20-best-moments>

Over the next few years of his training, Martin became more and more impressed, not only with Ali's speed and strength, but even more by his mental quickness and his ability to take a punch without the twin dangers of getting mad or going into a panic.⁸

In high school, Ali had a phenomenal boxing record of 100 victories in 108 boxing matches by the age of eighteen. He won six Kentucky Golden Gloves titles, two National Amateur Athletic Union championships, two National Golden Glove crowns, and an Olympic Gold Medal in the light heavyweight division.⁹ Throughout the 1950s, he also appeared on a local Louisville television program, *Tomorrow's Champions*. He was paid four dollars for each televised match.¹⁰

It was shortly after his graduation from Central High School in Louisville when MA won a Gold Medal at the 1960 Rome Olympics in light-heavy-weight boxing. Muhammad Ali nearly didn't travel to the Olympics because he was so afraid of flying, and he even bought a parachute from an army surplus store to wear on the plane. After winning an Olympic Gold Medal, Muhammad Ali said, "[More] than anything, I wanted the [Olympic Gold] medal to mean that I was my own man and would be treated and respected like any other human being. . . . The more I thought about it, the more I began to see that if that medal did not mean equality for all, it didn't mean anything at all."¹¹

Muhammad Ali's first-hand experience with racial discrimination after winning the Olympic Gold Medal and being refused service at a downtown Louisville lunch counter. This experience is detailed in *The Soul of a Butterfly* and it has been referenced throughout the Core Principle Modules.

III. Muhammad Ali – The Champion Athlete

A. The Sport of Boxing

Boxing may well be the world's oldest sport and has been traced to 688 BCE when it was included in the ancient Olympic Games. As described on a boxing rules website, "boxing is graceful, elegant and explosive and a magnificent example of the human body's abilities and few spectacles can match the sight of two top heavyweights going toe to toe."¹²

In the modern era, a range of different rules developed including Broughton's rules from 1743, the London Prize Ring rules (1838) and the Marquess of Queensbury Rules from 1867. Today, boxers wear gloves designed to protect the hand and the opponent, although

⁸ Muhammad Ali Biography, A Stolen Bicycle, The Louisville Lip, A Controversial Champ, In And Out Of The Wilderness, Selected Writings by Ali at <https://sports.jrank.org/pages/91/Ali-Muhammad-Stolen-Bicycle.html>.

⁹ The light heavyweight] category includes boxers who weigh between 165 - 178 pounds as amateurs, and between 160 [pounds] and 178 [pounds] if professional." The Dictionary of Sports: The Complete Guide for TV Viewers, Spectators and Players 187 (Gerry Cox ed., 1999).

¹⁰ From: <https://sports.jrank.org/pages/91/Ali-Muhammad-Stolen-Bicycle.html>

¹¹ The Soul of a Butterfly at 39-41.

¹² Boxing Rules at <https://www.rulesofsport.com/sports/boxing.html>

there are arguments that they actually increase brain injuries by facilitating a boxer receiving more damaging blows.

Boxing matches are defined by different weight categories so boxers are matched only with opponents of similar weights.

- Basic rules: in professional boxing, bouts take place over 12 three minute rounds with one minute rest between rounds.
- The only method of attack is punching with a clenched fist and you may not strike below the belt, in the kidneys or the back of your opponents head or neck.
- You cannot use the ropes for leverage.
- You cannot hit an opponent when they are down.
- A boxer hit with a low blow can take five minutes to recover.
- If an unintentional foul (such as a clash of heads) ends the fight before four rounds are completed this is a “no contest”, from the fifth onwards the decision goes to the judge’s cards and is either a technical decision for either fighter or a technical draw.

A boxing match is divided into rounds of two or three minutes, with a one-minute rest period in between. Professional matches are 12 rounds at the championship level (they used to go for 15). Ten rounds or less may be scheduled at lower rankings. Amateur matches have only three, four or five rounds, with rounds lasting two minutes. Junior divisions can have even shorter rounds. Boxing gloves are made from padded leather, designed to protect the hands as well as reduce the damage done to an opponent. Under the gloves, the hands are carefully wrapped in athletic bandages -- this wrapping is closely regulated. Amateur boxers also wear headgear that primarily protects against cuts and scrapes.¹³

B. Ali’s Professional Boxing Career

1948	Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay) was born in Louisville, KY
1960	Muhammad Ali graduates from Ali graduated from Central High School. He wins an Olympic Gold Medal in the light heavyweight division at the Olympic Games in Rome. He begins professional boxing career, and wins his first professional fight, defeating Tunney Hunsaker in a six-round decision. By end of 1960, he had fought in 167 fights and won 161 of them.
February 1964	Muhammad Ali wins a match against Sonny Liston and becomes the World Heavyweight Boxing Champion. Liston did not come out of his corner in

¹³ From: <https://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/boxing.htm>.

	<p>the seventh round citing a shoulder injury. Ali is quoted in the news media for this famous statement: "I shook up the world." This is his first time winning the title.</p> <p>The next day he announces that he is a Muslim and has joined the Nation of Islam. He officially changed his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali in March 1964. At the press conference, Ali famously says "I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be who I want." Malcolm X is part of Muhammad Ali's support group before and after the boxing match.</p>
March 1965	Muhammad Ali defeats Sonny Liston again in a rematch. Due to the sudden ending of their previous bout, a rematch was ordered by the World Boxing Council. The match ended in just over two minutes after Ali caught Liston with a fast right and Liston went down.
November 1965	Muhammad Ali defended his title against former heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson on November 22, 1965. This was their first match.
1966	Ali's requests for a military draft exemption from service as a conscientious objector. The local draft board on appeal determined that Ali had a sincerely held religious belief against war and but their recommendation was not followed. He challenges the decision by the Louisville Military Draft Board all the way up to the highest level in the U.S. Defense Department.
February 1967	Muhammad Ali regained the World Boxing Association title in a match against Ernie Terrell. The title had been taken from Ali for refusing military induction. Ali's victory in this match was amplified because Terrell refused to call him Muhammad Ali and instead called him Cassius Clay. ¹⁴
1967-1970	<p>After losing the appeals within the Selective Service administration and the U.S. Department of Defense, Muhammad Ali asserts his conscientious objection to military service in the Army on April 28, 1967.</p> <p>Muhammad Ali was stripped of his World Heavyweight Championship title. New York and other states revoke his license to box, and he is banned from U.S. boxing. Later that year, his exemption request was denied again and he was convicted of draft evasion in federal district (trial) court. He appeals the decision to the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and to the U.S. Supreme Court.</p> <p>During the federal court appeals process, Ali's passport was held by the federal court so he could not box internationally either.</p> <p>At the Cleveland Summit (1967), prominent Black athletes publicly support Muhammad Ali's conscientious objection.</p>

¹⁴ From: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jun/05/muhammad-ali-every-fight-professional-61->

	Muhammad Ali supports himself and his family by giving speeches and lectures at U.S. college campuses.
1971	Muhammad Ali returns to boxing after three and one-half years. After winning 2 matches, Ali challenges Joe Frazier for the World Heavyweight Boxing title in what was called the "Fight of the Century" held at Madison Square Garden in New York City in March 1971. Both were undefeated at the time. Ali lost the challenge match against Joe Frazier based on a unanimous decision. Ali went down to the mat in the final round for only the third time in his career. Frazier ended Ali's 31-fight winning record.
1972	Muhammad Ali wins the National American Boxing Federation heavyweight title in a match against Floyd Patterson. Ali had won this title four times and was defending the title in the Patterson match.
1973	Ali loses the National American Boxing Federation title in a match against Ken Norton. It was the second time in his career that Ali lost the match on a split decision, after having his jaw broken in the 11th round.
1974	In January 1974, Ali wins a match against Joe Frazier who had lost the World Heavyweight to George Foreman in January 1973.
1974	Muhammad Ali challenges George Foreman for the World Heavyweight Championship in the "Rumble in the Jungle" held in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Ali wins the highly-publicized match with George Foreman against the odds. This was his second time winning the world heavyweight title.
1975	Muhammad Ali defends his title as World Heavyweight Championship title against Joe Frazier by winning in a match held in the Philippines in what was called the "Thrilla in Manila." This was their third match.
February 1978	Muhammad Ali loses his World Heavyweight Championship title in a match against Leon Spinks who won on points at the end of the match. It was Spinks' eighth professional fight, and it was the fastest rise of a boxer to become world heavyweight champion in the sport's history.
September 1978	Ali wins back the World Heavyweight Championship title in a rematch with Leon Spinks. The match was held at the Superdome in New Orleans, where the 63,350 was the largest indoor attendance for a boxing match. Ali won the match in a unanimous decision and became the first boxer to win the World Heavyweight Championship title three times. This record has only been surpassed once by Evander Holyfield who won the heavyweight championship four times. This was Ali's third time winning the title.
June 1979	Ali retires from professional boxing at the age of 37. His retirement did not last long.
October 1980	Ali comes out of retirement for a match against Larry Holmes who held the World Boxing Council (WBC) heavyweight title and defended it against challenges from Leon Spinks and others. Holmes won in 11 rounds, cementing his claim as world heavyweight champion, and defeating his good friend and his mentor.

December 1981	Ali's final professional boxing match was against Trevor Burbick which he lost. Muhammad Ali was 39-years-old at the time and he retired permanently after this match with a career record of 56 wins, five losses and 37 knockouts.
1990	Muhammad Ali is inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.
1993	Muhammad Ali is inducted into United States Olympic Hall of Fame.
1996	Muhammad Ali lights the Olympic Torch to begin the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia.
1999	Muhammad Ali is named "Athlete of the Century" by Sports Illustrated magazine. At that time, Muhammad Ali had appeared on the cover of Sports Illustrated 38 times, second only to basketball great Michael Jordan. ¹⁵
1999	Muhammad Ali was voted by the BBC as Sports Personality of the Century.

C. Key Aspects of Muhammad Ali's Professional Boxing Career Highlighted in the Curriculum

a. Muhammad Ali's Training Routine

Ali was a superior athlete known for his hand and foot speed, and powerful punch. Ali was known for his training routine. He was a dedicated runner as a way to build his stamina and endurance to fight in a 15-round professional boxing match. His standard running practice was to wake up early around 5:30 a.m. to run six miles per day. He ran six days each week when he was training.

The training included shadow boxing in three-minute rounds which is the length of professional boxing rounds; three-minute rounds on a heavy bag using different punch combinations; and hitting the speed bag. Muhammad Ali worked out using other exercises such as skipping rope, crunches, sit-ups, and leg raises. Sparring with a partner is another key part of any boxer's routine. Ali was known for letting his sparring partners hit him more than he hit them so he could practice his defensive moves.

b. The Deer Lake Training Camp

Muhammad Ali owned and trained at his Deer Lake Training Camp near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the Appalachian Mountains from 1972 to 1980. Deer Lake Training Camp, also known as 'Fighter's Heaven', was purchased by Muhammad Ali in 1972. This was the site at which he trained for several of his most famous boxing matches including those against George Foreman, George Chuvalo, Jerry Quarry, Ernie Shavers, Joe Frazier (Fight III), and Larry Holmes. The Camp had many famous visitors during that time, including Elvis

¹⁵ See https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/muhammad-ali#section_1

Presley, Andy Warhol, and many more who found refuge in the Training Camp's cabins and serene surroundings.¹⁶

The Deer Lake Training Camp has been preserved as a landmark in Pennsylvania.¹⁷ A short video and photos of the training camp can be found here: <http://fightersheaven.com/>.

c. Muhammad Ali's Confidence & Unique Boxing Style

Ali was renowned for his distinctive boxing style. As an amateur boxer, he was a light heavyweight before he gained enough weight to box in the heavyweight category as a professional athlete. He was called a "butterfly in a land of caterpillars. He bounced on his toes with the grace of a smaller man, circling, shuffling, hopping, dipping, ducking, feinting, jitterbugging. . . . If his offense was unorthodox, his defense was downright absurd. Ali did so many things technically wrong but had the otherworldly reflexes to get away with all of it. He held his hands low, he pulled his head straight back exactly as every boxer is instructed not to do, but he made opponents miss by an inch or two and left them off balance and open for his counters."¹⁸ Muhammad Ali was criticized for his unorthodox boxing style initially, however his impressive wins in the boxing ring eventually led the critics to change their minds.

Young Muhammad Ali was known for his quick footwork, lightning fast hands, and incredibly long reach (a reach is defined as the distance from a fighters shoulder to their fingertip and the distance from their fingertip to fingertip). He was an "out boxer" who kept a distance from his opponents and would attack opponents opportunistically. Another part of Muhammad Ali's signature style was his accuracy which allowed him to "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."¹⁹ It was said he was a heavyweight who moved like a lightweight.²⁰ Ali's speed, agility, footwork and general athleticism were among the

¹⁶ From:

<https://alicenter.org/muhammad-ali-centers-stories-of-ali-deer-lake-training-camp-in-pennsylvania-free-public-forum-to-highlight-muhammad-alis-training-camp-then-and-now/>.

¹⁷ "Muhammad Ali training camp getting historical marker" at <https://www.wnep.com/article/news/local/schuylkill-county/deer-lake-muhammad-ali-training-camp/523-9437ab86-a44e-49f6-9049-4ce91e0c3638>. Fighter's Heaven in Schuylkill County, the place where legendary boxer Muhammad Ali trained, will receive a historical marker, one of 24 approved by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Getty photos of Muhammad Ali at Deer Lake can be found here: <https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/muhammad-ali-deer-lake?mediatype=photography&phrase=muhamad%20ali%20deer%20lake&sort=mostpopular>

¹⁸ Eric Raskin "The Eccentric Genius of Muhammad Ali's Boxing Style. He was the greatest, hands down." Slate Magazine (June 4, 2016) at <https://slate.com/culture/2016/06/the-eccentric-genius-of-muhammad-alis-boxing-style.html>.

¹⁹ Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, The Many Styles of Muhammad Ali, Sapelo Square ((June 28, 2016) at <https://sapelosquare.com/2016/06/28/the-many-styles-of-muhammad-ali/>. Sapelo Square intervenes in the marginalization and erasure of Black Muslims in the public square by building an online forum that places Black Muslims at the center. It's mission is to celebrate and analyze the experiences of Black Muslims in the United States to create new understandings of who they are, what they have done, and why that matters.

²⁰ What made Muhammad Ali 'The Greatest' in the ring?, The Conversation (June 4, 2016) at <https://theconversation.com/what-made-muhammad-ali-the-greatest-in-the-ring-60521>

attributes that most distinguished him from other competitors as well as his unique boxing style that did not follow conventional norms.

Ali's boxing matches often used the "*rope-a-dope*" strategy in which Ali would fatigue his opponent by inviting offensive punches that Ali dodged or absorbed. It gave him an advantage because the opponent would tire from throwing ineffective punches leaving them vulnerable to an incisive punch from Ali. This "*rope-a-dope*" strategy was a key to Ali's win against George Foreman in their 1974 match called the Rumble in the Jungle in which Ali reclaimed the world heavyweight championship title.

Muhammad Ali's poetry was another way he was a unique athletic competitor. He was known for predicting when he would win in a boxing match. His poem, "I Am The Greatest," on National Public Radio (recorded in 1963) [here](#) illustrates his wit and charm.²¹ The poem was on recorded on what would now be called a "spoken word" album in 1963 about six months before the boxing match with Sonny Liston when he first won the heavyweight championship title. Excerpts of the poem from National Public Radio:

This is the legend of Cassius Clay, the most beautiful fighter in the world today.
He talks a great deal and brags indeed-y of a muscular punch that's incredibly speedy. The
fistic world was dull and weary. With a champ like Liston, things had to be dreary.
Then someone with color - someone with dash - brought fight fans running with cash.
This brash, young boxer is something to see. And the heavyweight championship is his
destiny. This kid fights great. He's got speed and endurance.
But if you sign to fight him, increase your insurance.
This kid's got a left. This kid's got a right. If he hits you once, you're asleep for the night.
And as you lie on the floor while the ref counts 10,
you pray that you won't have to fight me again.
For I am the man this poem is about, the next champ of the world, there isn't a doubt. If
Cassius says a cow can lay an egg, don't ask how. Grease that skillet.
He is the greatest. When I say two, there's never a third. Betting against me
is completely absurd. When Cassius says a mouse can outrun a horse,
don't ask how. Put your money where your mouse is. I am the greatest.

d. First World Heavyweight Championship Title – Ali v. Sonny Liston (1964)

Muhammad Ali fought Sonny Liston on February 25, 1964, after winning his first 19 professional fights, including 15 knockouts. Before the fight, Ali promised he would "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee" and he predicted a knockout against Liston.²² Muhammad Ali's celebrated confidence and conviction about his athletic ability is shown by how he requested to be introduced at the match. The announcer said: "This is the legend of Cassius

²¹ Remembering Muhammad Ali Through His Poem, 'I Am The Greatest.' Heard on All Things Considered National Public Radio (June 10, 2016) at <https://www.npr.org/2016/06/10/481590365/remembering-muhammad-ali-through-his-poem-i-am-the-greatest>.

²² Muhammad Ali at <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/muhammad-ali>.

Clay, the most beautiful fighter in the world today. The brash young boxer is something to see, and the heavyweight championship is his destiny.”

Ali’s legendary taunting of his opponents was evident in the pre-fight press conferences in which Ali called Liston “a big ugly bear.” Ali’s descriptions of upcoming matches often predicted in which round he would knock-out his opponent. Liston was a formidable opponent who held the championship title after winning matches against Floyd Patterson in two first-round knockouts. Ali proclaimed that the match against Liston would be “the easiest fight of my life,” however, the predictions were that Ali would lose the match. Ali’s win was truly against all odds.²³

When Muhammad Ali won the world heavyweight championship title in the match with Sonny Liston, Ali credited his religious faith saying it helped him win against Sonny Liston when so many thought he did not have a chance.²⁴

e. Second Heavyweight Championship Boxing Match in 1967 – Ali v. Ernie Terrell

Muhammad Ali regained the World Boxing Association title in a match against Ernie “the Octopus” Terrell. The title had been taken from Ali because of his conscientious objection resulting in his refusal to be inducted into the military. Ali’s victory in this match and the contentious pre-match coverage was amplified because Terrell refused to call him Muhammad Ali and instead called him Cassius Clay.²⁵ Ernie Terrell, like many in the media, insisted on using the name Cassius Clay which represented how most of white America refused to respect Ali’s conversion to the Nation of Islam or his right to announce himself a Muslim. The situation is complicated by the fact that the two boxers were friendly and had known each other since their amateur boxing days. Muhammad Ali called out Ernie Terrell at the fight weigh-in: “What’s my name?” Ernie Terrell, a white boxer, came to represent the hopes of the white public to defeat Muhammad Ali in the boxing ring, and defeat his opposition to the Vietnam War, and his religious conversion. Muhammad Ali saw in the Nation of Islam “the liberation of Black people from subjugation and slavery to freedom and equality and justice.”

f. Banned from Boxing: 1967-70

Ali was convicted of draft evasion and sentenced to the maximum of five years in prison and fined \$10,000. The New York Boxing Commission, which suspended his license, said his refusal to enter the service was detrimental to the best interests of boxing. In 1970 the New York State Supreme Court ordered his boxing license reinstated, and he returned to the ring

²³ Remnick 1998 p. 147

²⁴ Interview of Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X about Ali’s conversion to Islam at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF42STiQyWY>.

²⁵ From: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jun/05/muhammad-ali-every-fight-professional-61->

by knocking out Jerry Quarry in October 1970. The following year, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Ali's conviction in a unanimous decision.²⁶

g. The Rumble in the Jungle (1974): Ali Wins Back the Heavyweight Champion Title from George Foreman

The Rumble in the Jungle, held in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, was an historic boxing match. Muhammad Ali was already an inspirational symbol of anti-colonialism which he cemented on his 1964 visit to Ghana where he declared "I am an African." His choice to hold the boxing match in the Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, also brought attention to the new Africa emerging from its colonial past and inspired many African Americans to visit Africa for the first time. Generally, Muhammad Ali was idolized across Africa for his prowess in the boxing ring and for championing the rights of Black people.²⁷

Muhammad Ali was challenging George Foreman who held the world heavyweight title and was undefeated. Foreman was stronger than Ali and many experts worried that Ali might get seriously hurt.²⁸ Muhammad Ali won with a knockout punch. The Congolese president, Mobutu Sese Seko, paid each fighter \$5 million to hold the match in the capital city of Kinshasa.

The match was historic in many ways. The event, attended by many U.S. celebrities, was held in Africa with the idea that many African Americans would see the match in person or on television as a positive reflection of the continent.²⁹ A major pre-concert was held showcasing African American artists including James Brown, B.B. King, and The Spinners.

In the pre-match press conferences, Muhammad Ali used his familiar tactic of predicting his win and taunting his opponent. He called George Foreman a "Belgian" to link him to the brutal colonial past from 1908 to 1960 and effectively "brand him as an enemy."³⁰ After the country achieved its independence in 1960, there was violence and civil strife for over a decade. The decision to hold the fight in Africa had a profound international impact. Muhammad Ali's evident connection with the Congolese people manifested in a level of support for him unparalleled in boxing. He was accompanied on his morning runs and during the match with chants of "Ali, Boma Ye!" meaning "Ali, Knock Him Out!" in Lingala.

²⁶ <https://www.sportskeeda.com/boxing/muhammad-ali-10-lesser-known-stories-boxing-legend/4>

²⁷ In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

²⁸ Kevin Mitchell, Rumble in the Jungle: the night Ali became King of the World again. The Guardian (Oct. 29, 2014) at <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/oct/29/rumble-in-the-jungle-muhammad-ali-george-foreman-bo-uk-extract>.

²⁹ Josh Peter, Revisiting 'The Rumble in the Jungle' 40 years later USA Today (Oct. 29, 2014) at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/boxing/2014/10/29/muhammad-ali-george-foreman-rumble-in-t-he-jungle-40th-anniversary/18097587/>.

³⁰ Josh Peter, Revisiting 'The Rumble in the Jungle' 40 years later USA Today (Oct. 29, 2014) at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/boxing/2014/10/29/muhammad-ali-george-foreman-rumble-in-t-he-jungle-40th-anniversary/18097587/>.

The international audience for the match was estimated at one billion people, many watching on closed circuit television with paid subscriptions to the event.

Muhammad Ali's "Rumble in the Jungle" match against George Foreman was where he showcased his "rope a dope" boxing strategy. The match was an opportunity for Muhammad Ali to shine a spotlight on a post-colonial African nation led by an African leader. Ali also framed the boxing match in Zaire as a demonstration of Black pride: an African government hosted the fight; Black pilots flew him there; and his trip amounted to a kind of homecoming for a most famous African American. The festivities included a major concert to accompany the fight featuring some of U.S.'s and Africa's top Black musical talent, including James Brown, B.B. King, Miriam Makeba, Manu Dibangu, and others. Muhammad Ali was received with love and support of people wherever he went in the country.

The choice to hold the match in Zaire was significant for other reasons as it helped to solidify the government of Mobutu Sese Seko. "It had been one of the most brutally exploited European colonial possessions in Africa. As with many former European colonies, its efforts after WWII to achieve independence and self-determination were drawn into the global polarity of the Cold War. The result was authoritarianism rather than pluralistic democracy. Its first democratically-elected, post-independence leader, Patrice Lumumba, was regarded as pro-Soviet by the U.S. and Belgium; he was deposed and executed, and, after a series of coups, power passed to Joseph-Desire Mobutu. Mobutu built an authoritarian dictatorship which lasted well into the 1990s. He also took steps to de-Westernize his own and his nation's identity, adopting the name Mobutu Sese Seko, encouraging African clothing and cultural styles, and eliminating European place names."³¹

h. Thrilla in Manila – Ali v. Joe Frazier (1975)

Muhammad Ali defends his title as World Heavyweight Champ against Joe Frazier by winning in an epic match held in the Philippines in what was called the "Thrilla in Manila." This was their third match. Widely recognized as another extraordinary boxing match because of the ferocity and courage of the evenly matched boxers. Muhammad Ali used his familiar style both before and during the match. He nicknamed Joe Frazier "the Gorilla" in their first match and he continued to taunt Frazier as "ugly and dumb" in each of their matches. Muhammad Ali was cruel in his taunting in this and the earlier matches, and Frazier hated Ali. At one press conference the Manila match, Ali held up a small gorilla doll and while punching said, "It will be a killa and a thrilla and a chilla when I get the Gorilla in Manila."³²

³¹ Marc Horger, Rumble in the Jungle in Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective (Oct. 2019) at <http://origins.osu.edu/milestones/the-rumble-in-the-jungle>; Background: Congo, Democratic Republic of at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_cg.html.

³² Thomas Hauser, The unforgiven (Sept. 5, 2005) at <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2005/sep/04/features.sport16>.

As noted by Ali biographer, Thomas Hauser, “everyone at ringside understood that they were watching greatness.”³³ Another leading sportswriter said this third match showed that “Ali and Frazier were fighting for something more important than that. They were fighting for the heavyweight championship of each other.”³⁴

i. 1996 Summer Olympics – Muhammad Ali Lights the Olympic Torch in Atlanta, Georgia³⁵

Another major moment in Muhammad Ali’s athletic career that resonated throughout the U.S. and the world happened when he lit the Olympic Torch to begin the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. It was unknown who would light the torch, and “when Ali was revealed as the person lighting the Olympic flame in Atlanta, his left hand involuntarily shaking because of Parkinson’s disease, the crowd reaction – sustained noise, tears, and a huge outpouring of love – showed just how much Ali was now revered.”³⁶ This moment has been described as “one of the most indelible and stirring of Olympic images. . .” because “Muhammad Ali may be, outside of perhaps the Pope, the most beloved figure in the world. In the third world, he’s a hero. In the Muslim world, he’s a hero and fellow traveler. To anybody young — just about — in the United States, he’s a man of great moral principle who was willing to go to prison.”³⁷

D. Muhammad Ali the Athlete and the Core Principles

Confidence: Ali had extraordinary confidence in his athletic abilities. He predicted his wins often by stating which round he would win in the match. Even in the matches in which experts predicted Ali would lose, Ali’s self-confidence propelled him to achieve greatness. In his first two heavyweight championship matches, Ali was predicted to lose in the Liston match (1964) and the Foreman match (1974) after his return to boxing. “Ali declared himself “the greatest of all time” before it was true. But then he made it true. He convinced us, and no heavyweight since has come close to unconvincing us.”³⁸

³³ Thomas Hauser, The unforgiven (Sept. 5, 2005) at <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2005/sep/04/features.sport16>.

³⁴ Thomas Hauser, The unforgiven (Sept. 5, 2005) at <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2005/sep/04/features.sport16>.

³⁵ Lighting of the Olympic Flame Atlanta Games 1996 (2 minute video with sports commentary) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y67KjKfUZ-o>

³⁶ Richard Williams, Muhammad Ali still carrying that torch on his 70th birthday, The Guardian (Jan. 16, 2012) at <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2012/jan/16/muhammad-ali-70th-birthday>.

³⁷ The iconic moment Muhammad Ali lit Olympic Torch in Atlanta almost didn’t happen, Washington Post (June 4, 2016) at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2016/06/04/the-iconic-moment-muhammad-ali-lit-olympic-torch-in-atlanta-almost-didnt-happen/>.

³⁸ Eric Raskin “The Eccentric Genius of Muhammad Ali’s Boxing Style. He was the greatest, hands down.” Slate Magazine (June 4, 2016) at <https://slate.com/culture/2016/06/the-eccentric-genius-of-muhammad-alis-boxing-style.html>

Conviction: Ali's conviction as an athlete was evident in two key ways. He had the conviction to pursue his dream of becoming a world class boxer and he was focused on how he could make a difference in the lives of everyday people. Two Ali quotes illustrate this: "Champions aren't made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have the skill, and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill."³⁹ He also said, "When you saw me in the boxing ring fighting, it wasn't just so I could beat my opponent. My fighting had a purpose. I had to be successful in order to get people to listen to the things I had to say"

Dedication: Muhammad Ali is recognized as the GOAT, and he became the greatest of all time through hard work and dedication. His stringent workout regimen as a teenage amateur boxer is one example of his dedication. It included waking up early in the morning for road work (running) before his classes started at Central High School; training after school from 6pm to midnight at Joe's Gym; insisting on not dating so he could focus on boxing; and refusing to take a sip of soda in order to stick to a strict diet.

Giving: Giving is defined as service to others. As an athlete, Muhammad Ali's service was in the form of his actions rather than donations. Muhammad Ali was an inspirational symbol of anti-colonialism which he cemented on his 1964 visit to Ghana where he declared "I am an African." His choice to hold the 1974 boxing match in the Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, also brought attention to the new Africa emerging from its colonial past and inspired many African Americans to visit Africa for the first time.

Respect: Muhammad Ali, like others before and after him, used sports as a way of building self-respect, and asserting personal and collective pride publicly. Both in and out of the ring, Muhammad Ali used his fame as a tool to cultivate respect for himself, for African Americans, and for humanity at large. Muhammad Ali continued to use his platform as a famed athlete to build awareness of racial and global inequities. Athletes have continued to show respect for larger ideals and values in their sports. For example, Tommie Smith and John Carlos (both medal holders) raised their fists in the 1968 Olympics, seeking to raise awareness about South African Apartheid, hiring more Black coaches, and restoring Muhammad Ali's heavyweight title. As a result, Smith and Carlos were kicked off the team and expelled from Olympic Village and received numerous death threats.

Spirituality: Muhammad Ali attempted to hold his spirituality together with his boxing career in ways that were mutually beneficial. Some think professional boxing is in opposition to the development of spirituality. For instance, boxing involves fighting and violence, whereas spirituality usually emphasizes peace and non-violence. Muhammad Ali acquired a great deal of celebrity, notoriety, and wealth as heavyweight champion of the world. Yet, spiritual traditions often teach humility and place less value on material possessions. Boxing emphasizes physical training and development of the body. Spirituality, on the other hand, often encourages submission of the body and development of the spirit. For Ali, his spiritual disciplines made him a better boxer, and his self-discipline as a boxer aided him on his spiritual journey. When Muhammad Ali first won the world heavyweight

³⁹ Cite needed; <https://www.biographyonline.net/sport/quotes/muhammad-ali.html>

championship title in the match with Sonny Liston, Ali credited his religious faith saying it helped him win against Sonny Liston when so many thought he did not have a chance.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Interview of Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X about Ali's conversion to Islam at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF42STiQyWY>.

IV. Muhammad Ali in the U.S. – Activist/Advocate for Civil Rights and Racial Justice

1948	Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay) was born in Louisville, KY
1955	Muhammad Ali saw a newspaper with a front-page newspaper story about Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American who was lynched by a gang of white people in Mississippi in 1955. See the Early Years above.
1956-60	Muhammad Ali's attends Central High School. Fall 1956 - Louisville became one of the first southern cities to begin (token) school desegregation peacefully. Parks were desegregated in 1955.
1960	Muhammad Ali graduates from Central High School. He wins an Olympic Gold Medal in the light heavyweight division at the Olympic Games in Rome. Ali goes to a downtown Louisville lunch counter, wearing his Gold Medal, and he is refused service. Ali begins professional boxing career. After 1959 protests of "Porgy and Bess" at the Brown Theater in Louisville, protests demand desegregation of downtown businesses. Weekly sit-ins also begin. ⁴¹
1961	A massive protest march to Kentucky's state capital called for a statewide civil rights bill. The march was attended by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and Jackie Robinson. There are boycotts of selected downtown Louisville department stores. A Louisville campaign against continues with weekly picket lines. ⁴²
February 1964	Muhammad Ali wins a boxing match against Sonny Liston and becomes the World Heavyweight Boxing Champion, although Ali was expected to lose the match. Ali is quoted in the news media for this famous statement: "I shook up the world." The next day Muhammad Ali announces that he is a Muslim and has joined the Nation of Islam. He officially changed his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali in March 1964. At the press conference, Ali says "I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be who I want." Malcolm X is part of Muhammad Ali's entourage before and after the boxing match.
1966	Muhammad Ali requests for a military draft deferral and an exemption from service as a conscientious objector. The local draft board on appeal determined that Ali had a sincerely held religious belief against war but their recommendation was not followed. Ali challenges the decision by the

⁴¹ From: <https://www.ket.org/education/resources/living-story-civil-rights-movement-kentucky/>

⁴² From: <https://www.ket.org/education/resources/living-story-civil-rights-movement-kentucky/>

	Louisville Military Draft Board all the way up to the highest level inside the U.S. Defense Department.
February 1967	<p>Muhammad Ali regained the World Boxing Association title in a match against Ernie “the Octopus” Terrell. The title had been taken from Ali because of his conscientious objection. Ali’s victory in this match and the contentious pre-match coverage was amplified because Terrell refused to call him Muhammad Ali and instead called him Cassius Clay.⁴³</p> <p>Ali is recognized as the largest single Black contributor to the treasury of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) by donating \$10,000.</p>
1967-1970	<p>After losing the appeals, Muhammad Ali asserts his conscientious objection at his final military induction date on April 28, 1967. Muhammad Ali is stripped of his World Heavyweight Championship title, has his boxing license suspended in New York and in other states, meaning he is banned from U.S. boxing.</p> <p>He was convicted of not serving in the U.S. military in federal district (trial) court. It was an all-white jury and it took 21 minutes to find him guilty on June 20, 1967. The judge made an example of the high-profile defendant by handing down the maximum penalty for the felony offense—five years in jail and a \$10,000 fine.⁴⁴ He appeals to the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and to the U.S. Supreme Court.</p> <p>Ali’s passport was held by the federal court so he could not box internationally either.</p> <p>In Louisville, mass demonstrations for open housing begin. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King came to the city several times.</p> <p>In Summer 1967, after the West Side of Chicago unrest in 1966, Ali appears in secret in in Chicago's East Garfield Park neighborhood and urges reconciliation among Black youths, an end to violence in Black communities, and restraint in the upcoming summer.⁴⁵</p>
1967-1970	Muhammad Ali supports himself and his family by giving speeches and lectures at U.S. college campuses.
June 1970	The New York State Supreme Court ordered Muhammad Ali’s boxing license be reinstated.

⁴³ From: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jun/05/muhammad-ali-every-fight-professional-61->

⁴⁴ From <https://www.history.com/news/muhammad-ali-vs-the-united-states-of-america>.

⁴⁵ From <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-muhammad-ali-chicago-gangs-riot-kamen-persp-ec-0607-jm-20160606-story.html>.

1971	Muhammad Ali returns to boxing after three and one-half years. After winning 2 matches, Ali challenges Joe Frazier for the World Heavyweight Boxing title in what was called the “Fight of the Century” held at Madison Square Garden in New York City in March 1971. Ali lost challenge match against Joe Frazier based on a unanimous decision. Frazier ended Ali’s 31-fight winning record.
1974	Muhammad Ali visits a Youth Detention Center. Ali visited various sites in New York City, including the Rikers Island Adolescent Remand Center, where he tells young prisoners, “Life is too short to spend any of it in a place like this.” Muhammad Ali challenges George Foreman in a world heavyweight title match held in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire) known as the “Rumble in the Junge.” Ali’s choice to hold the boxing match in the Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo brought attention to the new Africa emerging from its colonial past and inspired many African Americans to visit Africa for the first time.
1981	Muhammad Ali retired with a 56-5 record and thirty-seven knockouts.

A. Young Muhammad Ali

Muhammad Ali’s consciousness about racial injustice began at a young age. He grew up in a segregated city, and as a young teen learned about the brutal murder of Emmett Till who just one year older than Ali. While Muhammad Ali was training as an amateur boxer and attending Central High School in Louisville, civil rights protests and efforts to integrate the city were underway.

As the timeline illustrates, Muhammad Ali’s years as a high school student and after he graduated coincided with civil rights protests in Louisville. In Fall 1956, as Ali entered ninth grade, Louisville became one of the first southern cities to begin (token) school desegregation peacefully. Its parks had been desegregated in 1955, and these were years of vigorous activity by the Louisville NAACP, whose youth council led downtown pickets of a segregated performance of “Porgy and Bess” at the Brown Theatre in late 1959.⁴⁶

In 1960 when Ali graduated and competed in the Rome Olympic Games, young members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) began weekly sit-ins at segregated businesses in downtown Louisville. After several of them were arrested in February 1961, the number of demonstrators multiplied every week as others turned out to protest the police action. Picket lines were common in Louisville throughout 1961. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) is a civil rights organization that played a pivotal role from its inception in 1942 and

⁴⁶ <https://schools.jefferson.kyschools.us/High/Central/page2.html#msg-box5-d>; and <https://www.wlky.com/article/50-years-later-central-makes-history-as-first-all-black-team-to-win-state-title/26737298#>.

throughout the 1960s using the principles of nonviolence to fight against segregation. CORE had chapters across the U.S. and it sponsored the “Freedom Rides” of integrated groups who travelled in the South challenging segregated interstate travel on buses and in bus terminals.

Living in a segregated city directly impacted Muhammad Ali. For example, while wearing his Olympic Gold Medal, Ali and his brother were refused service at a downtown Louisville lunch counter. For more, see above Muhammad Ali’s Formative Experiences. As Muhammad Ali has said:

“I used to walk down Main Street in Louisville, Kentucky, looking at how the Negroes couldn’t go to this show, looking at how Negroes couldn’t eat here, or at how the whites [would] look at [them]. After the Negroes had been working for three hundred and ten years for America, working sixteen hours a day without a payday, fighting all the wars for America.”⁴⁷

Muhammad Ali’s exposure to the Islamic faith and, specifically, the Nation of Islam, also informed his views about the lack of racial justice and civil rights protections for Black people in the U.S. His conversion to Islam led to some of the most momentous events in his career including his conscientious objection to military service in the Vietnam War.

B. Muhammad Ali and His Faith (1964)⁴⁸

In 1961, Ali began his association with the Nation of Islam which he kept to himself for quite some time, perhaps because he knew his Nation of Islam association could have damaged his career as it was starting. Protests began in Louisville that February to demand desegregation of downtown businesses led mostly by Black high school students. The next three years were peak years for civil rights activities in Louisville and across the South with many spaces once closed to Blacks desegregating. Malcolm X, whom Ali seems to have met in 1962, spoke often in support of greater militancy, of Blacks building their own institutions, and not integrating with whites. In 1963 Louisville passed an open accommodations law that barred discrimination in services.

In February 1964, Muhammad Ali won the world heavyweight championship by defeating the heavily-favored Charles “Sonny” Liston in Miami, Florida. He announced next day that he was a member of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X, who was by then close to Ali, attended that fight and was a behind-the-scenes member of Ali’s support group. Muhammad Ali announced his conversion to Islam on February 26, 1964, the day after he won the world heavyweight title in the match against Sonny Liston. Initially Muhammad Ali adopted the

⁴⁷ Black is Best: The Riddle of Cassius Clay.

⁴⁸ Interview of MA and Malcolm X about Ali’s conversion to Islam (Ali discusses how his religious faith is what helped him win against Sonny Liston because so many thought he did not have a chance) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF42STiQyWY>;
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/10/26/the-real-reason-muhammad-ali-converted-to-islam/>; Sean Gregory, Exclusive: The Real Reason Muhammad Ali Converted to Islam, Time Magazine (June 2, 2017) at <https://time.com/4798179/muhammad-ali-islam-conversion/>.

name of Cassius X until March 6, 1964, when Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975) gave Cassius Clay the name of Muhammad Ali.

Initially, and for several years, the media and boxing match opponents refused to call him Muhammad Ali. Muhammad Ali responded to this refusal by the media by stating that:

“Cassius Clay is a slave name. I didn’t choose it and I don’t want it. I am Muhammad Ali, a free name – it means beloved of God, and I insist people use it when people speak to me.”⁴⁹

After announcing his conversation in February, Ali was called Cassius X until his official name change. His public conversion to Islam, in 1964, “was among the most defining moments of his remarkable life. The decision enraged his critics — his hometown newspaper continued to refer to Ali by his birth name, Cassius Clay, for years to come — and led him to refuse to serve in Vietnam, a stand that cost him his title, his livelihood and, ultimately, cemented his status as an American iconoclast.”⁵⁰

Muhammad Ali wrote a letter about his earliest association with the Nation of Islam and what inspired him about the group in the early 1960s. This began with him seeing a newspaper cartoon while still in high school.⁵¹ A 2017 biography chronicles this experience.

“Muhammad Ali’s conversion to Islam, in many ways, defined his career and legacy as a fighter with conviction.” A recent biography of Muhammad Ali included a letter he wrote about the Nation of Islam and what inspired him about the group. “In the letter, Ali writes of his teenage days in Louisville when he was still known as Cassius Clay Jr. He says he was leaving a roller skating rink and scanning the sidewalk for pretty girls when he noticed a man in a black mohair suit selling newspapers for the Nation of Islam. Ali had heard of the Nation and its leader, Elijah Muhammad, but he had never given serious thought to joining the group, which used some elements of Islam to preach black separatism and self-improvement. Ali took a newspaper, mostly to be polite, but a cartoon caught his eye. It showed a white slave owner beating his black slave and insisting the man pray to Jesus. The message was that Christianity was a religion forced on slaves by the white establishment. “I liked that cartoon,” Ali wrote. “It did something to me. And it made sense.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Alexandra Sims, Muhammad Ali: Why did the boxing legend change his name from Cassius Clay? The Independent (June 4, 2016) at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/muhammad-ali-death-cassius-clay-why-did-he-change-his-name-nation-of-islam-a7065256.html>.

⁵⁰ Sean Gregory, Exclusive: The Real Reason Muhammad Ali Converted to Islam, Time Magazine (June 2, 2017) at <https://time.com/4798179/muhammad-ali-islam-conversion/>.

⁵¹ Sean Gregory, Exclusive: The Real Reason Muhammad Ali Converted to Islam, Time Magazine (June 2, 2017) at <https://time.com/4798179/muhammad-ali-islam-conversion/>.

⁵² The real reason Muhammad Ali converted to Islam, The Washington Post (Oct. 26, 2017) at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/10/26/the-real-reason-muhammad-ali-converted-to-islam/>.

Ali's involvement with the Nation of Islam created a rift between him and many of his white and more moderate Black fans who viewed the Nation of Islam as a hateful religion. Most journalists refused to address Ali by his new, chosen name, and former opponent Floyd Patterson said of Ali, at the time, that the "image of a Black Muslim as the world heavyweight champion disgraces the sport and the nation."⁵³

In 1964 civil rights activities heated up around the South, and the Student National Coordinating Committee (SNCC) planned to bring hundreds of college students into Mississippi that summer to expose the blatant racial violence and intimidation happening regularly there even as the Civil Rights Act first proposed by President Kennedy in 1963 was stalled in Congress. In Spring 1964, Kentucky activists organized a massive march on the capitol in Frankfort to call for a statewide civil rights bill, and leaders such as Rev. Martin Luther King and baseball great Jackie Robinson attended. The bill ultimately passed, but not before the U.S. Civil Rights Act was signed into law in July 1964.

C. Muhammad Ali in Africa (1964)

Muhammad Ali was idolized across Africa for his prowess in the boxing ring and for championing the rights of Black people.⁵⁴ He had a longstanding commitment and connection to many countries in Africa. In 1964, Ali embarked on his first visit to a number of African countries saying: "I want to see Africa and meet my brothers and sisters." His visit began in Ghana, the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to win independence from a European power. His itinerary included Nigeria and Egypt, Africa's most populous state at that time, where crowds welcomed him with chants of "king of the world".⁵⁵

"I am glad to tell our people that there are more things to be seen in Africa than lions and elephants. They never told us about your beautiful flowers, magnificent hotels, beautiful houses, beaches, great hospitals, schools, and universities," he said.⁵⁶

Muhammad Ali became an inspirational symbol of anti-colonialism which he cemented on his 1964 visit to Ghana where he declared "I am an African."⁵⁷ His connection to Africa and the struggles of people of color worldwide for freedom and liberation was deepened further when Muhammad Ali asserted his objection to the Vietnam War for religious and racial justice reasons including white supremacy in the U.S. and worldwide.

D. Muhammad Ali and Racial Justice

⁵³ Joshua Fatzick, Muhammad Ali: The American Muslim, Voice of America News (June 4, 2016) at <https://www.voanews.com/usa/muhammad-ali-american-muslim>.

⁵⁴ In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

⁵⁵ In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

⁵⁶ In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

⁵⁷ In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

Muhammad Ali's advocacy for racial justice began with his awareness and experience of racism and white supremacy in Louisville, Kentucky. His dedication to his boxing career, as an amateur and professional, was accompanied by his profound conviction that he had a greater purpose. He consistently raised questions and spotlighted issues about racism, segregation, U.S. history and global hegemony, and white supremacy. He directly confronted power structures that tried to limit his independence and his views about the treatment of Black people in the U.S. As one scholar has noted, "[i]n an age of Jim Crow laws and brutal lynchings, for a young Black man to stand up and proclaim his greatness, defy convention, refuse to be humble or to know his place, was an incomparable act of bravery and defiance."⁵⁸

Muhammad Ali demanded that he be known by his new name in 1964. This was about more than his commitment to Islam, but also to demonstrate his convictions about racial justice. He demanded respect to be called the name that he chose. When the media refused to call him Muhammad Ali, he insisted that:

"Cassius Clay is a slave name. I didn't choose it and I don't want it. I am Muhammad Ali, a free name – it means beloved of God, and I insist people use it when people speak to me."⁵⁹

Muhammad Ali decided to change his name after he looked into Black history in more depth and heard the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam. He asked himself why he should keep a name that had been handed down to him by a slave master even though original Marcellus Cassius Clay may have been an abolitionist.⁶⁰ Muhammad Ali said "Why should I keep my white slave master's name visible and my black ancestors' invisible, unknown, unhonored?"⁶¹

The refusal to recognize Muhammad Ali by his name was a contentious issue in his early professional boxing career. Muhammad Ali demanded to be his own person, on his own terms, eventually leading to worldwide respect and admiration. Muhammad Ali as a symbol of Black excellence, leadership, and liberation may be universal today, although this was not true early in his career. "[I]n the context of the treatment of African Americans in the 1960s, it was a bold insistence on being able to define his own identity, and not allowing himself to be constrained by a deeply racist society and by his 'slave name.'"⁶²

⁵⁸ Kenan Malik, 'Get Used To Me': The Defiant Courage of Muhammad Ali (June 7, 2016) at <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/get-used-to-me-the-defiant-courage-of-muhammad-ali/10096904>

⁵⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/muhammad-ali-death-cassius-clay-why-did-he-change-his-name-nation-of-islam-a7065256.html>

⁶⁰ The story about Muhammad Ali and Ali's father, Cassius Marcellus Clay, Sr, who was named after a Kentucky slave owner turned abolitionist, and the original Cassius Marcellus Clay at <https://time.com/4363225/original-cassius-clay-muhammad-ali/>. See also, <https://news.yale.edu/2016/06/09/muhammad-ali-originally-named-ardent-abolitionist-and-yale-alumnus-cassius-clay>.

⁶¹ The Greatest: My Own Story, By Muhammad Ali, Richard Durham.

⁶² Kenan Malik, 'Get Used To Me': The Defiant Courage of Muhammad Ali (June 7, 2016) at <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/get-used-to-me-the-defiant-courage-of-muhammad-ali/10096904>.

Muhammad Ali's membership in the Nation of Islam was particularly challenging to the U.S. public. He asserted his right to be Black and proud. He connected his racial identity to the identity of other people in the countries of the Global South (the Third World) in his conscientious objection to military service in the Vietnam War. During his 1964 visit to Ghana, Muhammad Ali proudly claimed his connection to African when he said to the press he was African. Holding the 1974 world heavyweight boxing match in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire) in 1974 showed how Muhammad Ali used his fame to shine a spotlight on a post-colonial African nation led by an African leader. He also framed the boxing match as a demonstration of Black pride: an African government hosted the fight; Black pilots flew him there; and his trip amounted to a kind of homecoming for a most famous African American. The festivities included a major concert to accompany the fight featuring some of U.S.'s and Africa's top Black musical talent, including James Brown, B.B. King, Miriam Makeba, Manu Dibangu, and others. Muhammad Ali was received with love and support of people wherever he went in the country.

Muhammad Ali was someone who refused to be minimized as he asserted his Black identity. As one author has noted, "[i]t was not with Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and Joe Frazier that Ali stood, but with Garvey, DuBois, and Jomo Kenyatta."⁶³ This became evident during the lead-up to Muhammad Ali's championship fight with Ernie Terrell in 1967. The press coverage illustrates the refusal of the U.S. public to accept Muhammad Ali's conversion to Islam.⁶⁴ It is hard to capture today how this public demand for recognition resonated throughout the U.S. for Black people and White people.

Muhammad Ali's boxing match against Ernie Terrell in 1967 occurred just before Ali lost his boxing licenses. The title had been taken from him when he asserted his conscientious objection to military service and requested an exemption in April 1967. Muhammad Ali regained the World Boxing Association title in the match. His victory in this match was amplified because Terrell refused to call him Muhammad Ali and instead called him Cassius Clay.⁶⁵ As one scholar has noted:

The atmosphere leading up to and during Muhammad Ali's championship fight with Ernie "the Octopus" Terrell in 1967 illustrates the refusal of the U.S. public to accept Muhammad Ali's conversion to Islam. Ernie Terrell, like many in the media, insisted on using the name Cassius Clay which represented how most of white America refused to respect Ali's conversion to the Nation of Islam or his right to announce himself a Muslim. Muhammad Ali called out Ernie Terrell at the fight weigh-in:

⁶³ Budd Schulberg, *Looser and Still Champion*, cited in *What's My Name, Muhammad Ali, Postcolonial Pugilist in Dispositio*, Vol. 20, No. 47, *Postcolonial and the Americas* (1995), pp. 37-58, Published by: Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

⁶⁴ Budd Schulberg, *Looser and Still Champion*, cited in *What's My Name, Muhammad Ali, Postcolonial Pugilist in Dispositio*, Vol. 20, No. 47, *Postcolonial and the Americas* (1995), pp. 37-58, Published by: Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

⁶⁵ Rob Smyth, *Muhammad Ali: all of his 61 fights as a professional*, *The Guardian* (June 5, 2016) at <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jun/05/muhammad-ali-every-fight-professional-61->

“What’s my name?” Ernie Terrell, a white boxer, came to represent the hopes of the white public to defeat Muhammad Ali in the boxing ring, and defeat his opposition to the Vietnam War, and his religious conversion. Muhammad Ali saw in the Nation of Islam “the liberation of black people from subjugation and slavery to freedom and equality and justice.”⁶⁶

His request for his conscientious objection to military service was premised on racial justice as well as his religious beliefs against war. He challenged the entire decision making process for the Vietnam War military draft when he asserted that the disproportionate impact of the draft and war was falling on Black and brown people in the U.S. There were no Black people serving on the local and state draft boards in Kentucky similar to many other U.S. states. This racial justice issue was infused in all of his public statements about the Vietnam War.

E. 1967: A Pivotal Year in Muhammad Ali’s Life

1967 was a pivotal year in which defining events of Muhammad Ali’s life occurred. He “was twenty-five years old, the most widely recognized athlete on earth, the most prominent Muslim in America, and the most visible opponent of the war in Vietnam.”⁶⁷ As noted above, the public continued to “disrespect” him by refusing to call him by his chosen name. His long battle to have his religious objection to military service resulted in a federal felony conviction. He lost his challenge about the lack of Black representation in military draft decision making because there was one Black officer serving in Washington D.C. who was on the panel that considered his application. It was the year in which his boxing license was suspended, his world heavyweight championship title was rescinded, and his passport withheld by the federal district court so he could not travel. Despite these challenges, Muhammad Ali actively worked to advance racial justice and civil rights by shining a spotlight on issues around the country.

a. His Opposition to the Vietnam War

Muhammad Ali’s conscientious objection to military service based on his religious beliefs was also a key part of the civil rights movement, as well as his vocal opposition to the Vietnam War, which was not shared widely. While he was banned from boxing from 1967-1970, he spoke to college students at primarily white college campuses about his objections to the war. He explained that his objection to military service included racial injustice that existed because men of color and economically disadvantaged men were more likely to be drafted to fight in Vietnam. Muhammad Ali did not shy away from the effect of this racial injustice and white supremacy. As he said, it was a “war of domination of slave masters over the darker people of the earth”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ What’s My Name, Muhammad Ali, Postcolonial Pugilist citing Ali, The Greatest (p 102).

⁶⁷ Jonathan Eig, *Ali A Life* (2017) at p. 228.

⁶⁸ Muhammad Ali Center; Muhammad on the word Black, Sports Illustrated Magazine at <https://youtu.be/ueDbCmG3iu4>.

Muhammad Ali was among the first high-profile individuals in the U.S. to publicly criticize the Vietnam War when he initially requested a military service exemption in 1966. Muhammad Ali's public statements against the draft in 1966 took place about a month after the release of the Student National Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) antiwar manifesto, which was a first of its kind for the movement. Muhammad Ali's public stance against the Vietnam War took place a full year before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's.⁶⁹

The civil rights and racial justice aspects of Muhammad Ali's opposition to the Vietnam War was shared with the Louisville press in mid-April 1967 that he'd assert his conscientious objection to military service based on his religious belief. At that time he said:

"Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam after so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?"⁷⁰

Muhammad Ali further elaborated on April 28, 1967 at a press conference at the Houston, Texas Military Induction Center when he asserted his objection for last time within the Selective Service administration after many appeals. He said:

"I am proud of the title 'World Heavyweight Champion' which I won in the ring in Miami on February 25, 1964. The holder of it should at all times have the courage of convictions and carry out those convictions, not only in the ring but throughout all phases of his life. It is in light of my own personal convictions that I take my stand in rejecting the call to be inducted into the armed services. I do so with full realization of its implications and possible consequences."⁷¹

In addition to the formal press statement that he read on that day, Muhammad Ali explained further with a comment that would become famous:

"I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong," he told reporters. The boxer declared conscientious objector status that day, though it wasn't really a surprise. He'd become outspoken about the vicious racism Black Americans faced and saw their conscription as an absurd addition of insult to injury. "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform," he said, "and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are

⁶⁹ How Muhammad Ali influenced the Civil Rights Movement - <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/06/muhammad-ali-influenced-civil-rights-movement-160605055700822.html>

⁷⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/27/opinion/muhammad-ali-vietnam-war.html>

⁷¹ Kenan Malik, 'Get Used To Me': The Defiant Courage of Muhammad Ali (June 7, 2016) at <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/get-used-to-me-the-defiant-courage-of-muhammad-ali/10096904>.

treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?...I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. We've been in jail for four hundred years."⁷²

Muhammad Ali also explicitly made the connection between the treatment of Third World people of color, and the racism against Black people in the United States. As Muhammad Ali famously said, in 1967, when speaking on the injustices of the Vietnam War:

"The real enemy of my people is here. I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom and equality. ... I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So I'll go to jail, so what? We've been in jail for 400 years."⁷³

Muhammad Ali's conscientious objection to military service during the Vietnam War had ignited an extraordinary backlash in the media and general public until the anti-Vietnam War movement became more mainstream. The fact that Ali's religious objections were tied to the Nation of Islam was a source of particular animosity. There was public opposition to a member of the Nation of Islam receiving a religious belief exemption from military service. Members of the Nation of Islam were denied conscientious objection during World War II.⁷⁴

The consequences of Muhammad Ali's request for a conscientious objection exemption to military service at this point were swift and long-lasting. He was convicted for failure to serve in the military in a federal district court jury trial by an all-white jury after only twenty minutes of deliberation. He was sentenced to the maximum of five years in prison and fined \$10,000. The New York Boxing Commission, which suspended his license, said his refusal to enter the military service was detrimental to the best interests of boxing. In 1970 the New York State Supreme Court ordered his boxing license reinstated, and he returned to his professional boxing career. The following year, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Muhammad Ali's conviction in a unanimous decision.⁷⁵

Many believed that Muhammad Ali was singled-out by the U.S. government because of his membership in the Nation of Islam combined with his high-profile, vocal opposition to the war. It is clear that the state boxing commission treated Muhammad Ali differently from other boxers. He was not yet convicted for draft evasion, and even a conviction would not have been a reason to refuse him boxing license. "There are plenty of convicted felons in the boxing ring. Most states allow them to box. So he should have been allowed to box while

⁷² <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/individuals/muhammad-ali>; and https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=*&f.ancestorNalds=5604069&sort=naIdSort%20asc&offset=40

⁷³ Muhammad Ali (Feb. 12, 2018), The Associated Press, at <https://apnews.com/afs:Content:1781540008>

⁷⁴ Mr. Elijah Muhammad, while in Washington, D.C. was arrested on May 8, 1942, for allegedly evading the draft. "When the call was made for all males between 18 and 44, I refused (NOT EVADED) on the grounds that, first, I was a Muslim and would not take part in war and especially not on the side with the infidels," he wrote in "Message To The Blackman." "Second, I was 45 years of age and was NOT, according to the law, required to register." Many other male members of the Nation of Islam at that time were imprisoned for being conscientious objectors to World War II. After World War II ended, Mr. Muhammad won his release from prison and returned to Chicago. From: <https://www.noi.org/honorable-elijah-muhammad/>.

⁷⁵ <https://www.sportskeeda.com/boxing/muhammad-ali-10-lesser-known-stories-boxing-legend/4>.

his case was on appeal. And he was not. He was denied a license. And he was stripped of his heavyweight crown. He gave up three and a half years of his prime career when he was at his peak as an athlete and his peak as a money earner because he was a political symbol. .

”⁷⁶

b. The Cleveland Summit (1967)⁷⁷

In June 1967, prominent Black athletes and politicians publicly expressed their support for Muhammad Ali after meeting with him about his conscientious objection to military service. They saw a need to support his religious freedom rights in the face of the extraordinary public backlash against him. This meeting has been described as “a watershed moment . . . in the annals of both the civil rights movement and the protest against the Vietnam War.”⁷⁸ The group included Bill Russell, Ali, Jim Brown and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (then known as Lew Alcindor⁷⁹), Carl Stokes,⁸⁰ Walter Beach, Bobby Mitchell⁸¹, Sid Williams, Curtis McClinton, Willie Davis, Jim Shorter, and John Wooten.

Cleveland Browns running back Jim Brown had just retired as the NFL’s leading rusher, and he called together Ali and the other prominent, vocal Black athletes. Known as the Cleveland Summit, the meeting was held at the Negro Industrial Economic Union, a Black empowerment organization that Jim Brown had founded with branches throughout the U.S. As Jim Brown later said:

“I felt with Ali taking the position he was taking, and with him losing the crown, and with the government coming at him with everything they had, that we as a body of prominent athletes could get the truth and stand behind Ali and give him the necessary support,”⁸²

Their connection extended far beyond the Cleveland Summit. As Jim Brown has said about Muhammad Ali.⁸³

⁷⁶ New Muhammad Ali Biography Reveals A Flawed Rebel Who Loved Attention, NPR Interview on October 4, 2017 at <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=555301222>).

⁷⁷ Men of Change, Smithsonian Institute at <https://menofchange.si.edu/exhibit/men-of-change/ali/>

⁷⁸ Branson Wright, Remembering Cleveland’s Muhammad Ali Summit, 45 years later, The Plain Dealer (June 03, 2012) at https://www.cleveland.com/sports/2012/06/gathering_of_stars.html

⁷⁹ At the time, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar played on the UCLA Basketball team.

⁸⁰ Carl Stokes was a Cleveland, who later that year would become mayor of the city – the first Black man to be elected to that office any major U.S. city.

⁸¹ Bobby Mitchell was a professional football player (running back) for the Washington D.C. football team.

⁸² Quotes from Jim Brown at

https://www.espn.com/blog/cleveland-browns/post/_/id/19127/jim-brown-and-muhammad-ali-stood-together-to-fight-injustice.

⁸³ Jim Brown talks about his friendship with Muhammad Ali | NFL -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nI5mEoyY6w> –great video by Jim Brown about Cleveland Summit, Q&A before, “Young men taking a risk for what we thought was right.” Quotes from Jim Brown at

https://www.espn.com/blog/cleveland-browns/post/_/id/19127/jim-brown-and-muhammad-ali-stood-together-to-fight-injustice

"We never accepted second class citizenship, and we made it known," said Jim Brown of Muhammad Ali. "We gravitated toward each other."

"But we (Ali and Brown) had the same attitude about being an American and our rights and our equal rights and being outspoken about it, and never taking a back seat to freedom, equality and justice."

"Young men taking a risk for what we thought was right"

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar shared his connection with Muhammad Ali soon after he passed away. As he said about Muhammad Ali's "indomitable" spirit: "While I admired the athlete, what I most admired was his principles." "[He s]et the example that if we were going to have any change in this country, we would have to go out there and stand for it."⁸⁴

c. Muhammad Ali and Other Civil Rights Issues in 1967

In Louisville mass demonstrations for open housing began during Spring 1967, including a major threat to shut down the Kentucky Derby, which was avoided at the last minute and instead transformed into a downtown march. Dr. Martin Luther King came to the city several times in support of open housing and was hit with a rock by an opponent on one of the marches. That attack became the basis of a famous speech King gave in Louisville in which he declared, "Upon this rock, we will build an open city." By the end of 1967, local civil rights leaders had organized voting drives to elect a new Board of Aldermen who in December passed an open housing ordinance in Louisville. In early 1968, Kentucky Senator Georgia Powers led the passage of an open housing bill by the state legislature.

Muhammad Ali also directly participated in efforts to advance civil rights and racial justice in 1967. He gained the distinction of being the largest single Black contributor to the treasury of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) by donating \$10,000. UNCF President Dr. Wright noted that, "Unlike other donations, the envelope did not contain anything which would have amounted to a request for publicity. It just contained the check." Today, the UNCF helps support 37 historically Black colleges and universities by keeping their academic programs strong and their tuitions affordable. Member institutions educate more than 50,000 students each year and have produced more than 430,000 graduates.

In the summer of 1967, Chicago was in fear of a resurgence of violence after the 1966 West Side uprising and protests. At an unpublicized meeting in the old Senate Theatre in Chicago's East Garfield Park neighborhood, Muhammad Ali appeared in secret in front of a crowd that gathered. He expressed his desire to reconcile differences among Black youths and to end violence in Black communities, and urged them not to engage in civil unrest in the summer months. Ali warned, "The police will shut down the ghetto. Nobody will get in or out. They will starve your mothers and your sisters. Don't play into their game! They are

⁸⁴ June 2016 Interview by Gayle King - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRmOf_IMOeM.

waiting to trap you. Don't be fooled." There was no civil unrest that summer.⁸⁵

On August 14, 1967 Ali served as grand marshal of the Watts Summer Festival parade through the streets of Watts, California. He is praised for epitomizing "a new era in the history of the black man in America." A coalition of anti-poverty organizations and Black nationalist groups initiated the Watts Summer Festival in 1966 as a way to focus the Watts community on celebrating Black heritage and culture annually on the anniversary of the Watts riots.

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/watts-summer-festival-1966/>

d. Muhammad Ali and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King (1967)

Martin Luther King also saw Muhammad Ali as a fellow civil rights activist when he said "As Muhammad Ali has said, we are all victims of the same oppression." Martin Luther King supported Ali's refusal to join the army. "I've talked with him about it," King said in a televised interview. "I think he is absolutely sincere. ... It is legally justified to be a conscientious objector ... I would strongly endorse his actions on the basis of conscience ... I would not dare stand in the way of one who has taken a position because of moral conscience."

NEWS ARTICLE: "Agree to Disagree: The King and the Greatest Form a Bond Amid Criticism"

By Amanda Scurlock, Sport Writer, Published January 11, 2018 at

<https://lasentinel.net/agree-to-disagree-the-king-and-the-greatest-form-a-bond-amid-criticism.html>

Muhammad Ali, also known as "The Greatest," had several interactions with Martin Luther King. Initially, they did not share the same views, but they grew to support each other. King did not initially agree with the then Cassius Clay converting to Islam, and then renaming himself Cassius X, according to the biography "King of the World" by David Remnick.

"When Cassius Clay joined the Black Muslims and started calling himself Cassius X he became a champion of racial segregation and that is what we are fighting against," King said.

Ali, along with the Nation of Islam, did not support King's methods of non-violent protests and integration, according to Paste Magazine.

"Integration is wrong. White people don't want it; the Muslims don't want it. So, what's wrong with the Muslims? I've never been in jail. I've never been in court. I don't join integration marches and I never hold a sign" Ali said in 1964.

Yet, King and Ali would have similar views on the Vietnam War. In 1967, King publicly told of his disagreement with the war. When asked about his focus on the issue, King quoted Ali in response, the Independent reports.

"Like Muhammad Ali puts it, we are all – Black and Brown and poor – victims of the same system of oppression," King said.

King also supported Ali's ardent refusal of the draft for the Vietnam War.

⁸⁵ From

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-muhammad-ali-chicago-gangs-riot-kamen-perspec-0607-jm-20160606-story.html>.

"No matter what you think of Mr. Muhammad Ali's religion, you certainly have to admire his courage," King said, according to Paste Magazine.

Although they did not agree in some issues, King and Ali would become allies. The FBI overheard a phone call between the two historic icons. King was congratulating Ali on his boxing and Ali warned King to "watch out for them Whites," the biography states.

Ali sent a telegraph of support to King in 1967 when he was put in jail. King was arrested in Birmingham, AL for not getting a parade permit for the March on Washington in 1963. The message was sent from Chicago, saying "Hope that you are comfortable not suffering," according to The Post Game.

King and Ali had diverse, yet successful approaches to gaining civil rights. The two icons will always be remembered for their hard work, impactful statements, and society-changing sacrifice.

I. Banned from Boxing – 1967-1970

As the Vietnam War became increasingly unpopular, Ali made speeches on university campuses, becoming an antiwar and civil rights hero. Dr. Martin Luther King had given his famous anti-war sermon at Riverside Church which was said to have been influenced by Muhammad Ali's stance against the war.

The lectures were challenging in many ways. Muhammad Ali was heckled at some of his lectures. He also had dyslexia so reading was difficult. To prepare for the lectures, Muhammad Ali listened to recordings of Elijah Muhammad's sermons and read his book *Message to the Blackman in America*.⁸⁶ He read the Koran and Christian bible as well.

Muhammad Ali's opposition to the war made him a political figure. His stance was widely discussed throughout the U.S. and by U.S. troops in Vietnam. While Muhammad Ali was banned from professional boxing, he lived in Chicago and he is remembered:

Through the park district, he helped form amateur boxing leagues while also fighting any opponent he could in the rings of south side gyms. Although he was known for his flashy footwork, floating around his opponents with lightning speed, outside of the ring, Ali's feet were planted firmly in the soil of his beliefs. He was the "People's Champ" and advocated along the south side and other parts of the city in speaking engagements, confessing the truth for his people and the fruits within the Nation of Islam.⁸⁷

Muhammad Ali's boxing license was reinstated by the New York State Boxing Commission after he succeeded in his legal challenge to their action. The New York State Supreme Court

⁸⁶ Jonathan Eig, *Ali A Life* (2017) at p. 259.

⁸⁷ Renata Cherlise, Muhammad Ali's deep roots in Chicago bloomed on the south side (Aug. 2, 2016) at <https://www.chicagoreader.com/Bleader/archives/2016/08/02/muhammad-alis-deep-roots-in-chicago-bloomed-on-the-south-side>.

ordered that that the license be reinstated. Although the U.S. Supreme Court had not yet reversed his conviction, Muhammad Ali was once again free to regain his professional boxing career.

By 1970, with 50,000 US soldiers dead and following the largest protest in US history in November 1969, the antiwar movement had more or less succeeded in shifting public opinion on the Vietnam War. The month before Ali's conviction reversal, the killings of 4 protesting students at Kent State University in Ohio on May 4, 1970, mobilized more campus protests against the war, including at the University of KY. Racist atrocities also continued, and a lesser-known incident on the campus of Jackson State Univ. in Mississippi left two Black students killed by police on that campus.

J. Muhammad Ali – Black is Beautiful

In 1971, Muhammad Ali appeared on a famous U.K. talk show hosted by Michael Parkinson.⁸⁸ In this interview, Muhammad Ali repeated many of the comments he used in his college campus speeches while he was banned from boxing. He spoke about racial justice issues, his attraction to Islam, and the teachings of Nation of Islam. He posed thought-provoking questions about why Jesus is pictured as white, why Tarzan, King of the Jungle in Africa, is white, and Miss America was always white, among other questions. He discussed the reason he asserted conscientious objection to military service based on his religious belief, and why he saw himself as an advocate for Black freedom and liberation beyond being an athlete. Muhammad Ali also talked about his approach to boxing and the danger of the sport.

Quotes from Muhammad Ali's 1971 legendary interview with Michael Parkinson:⁸⁹

"I need to get everything straight. I'm not involved in a power struggle between black and white. I'm not trying to get power over white. I'm involved in a freedom struggle. Not a power struggle. We're not trying to take power away or rule anybody - we're just trying to get up from under the rulers. . . I do a lot of reading, a lot of studying. I ask questions, I'll go out, travel these countries, I'll watch how their people live, and I learn. And I always asked my mother, I said, 'Momma, how come is everything white?' I said, 'Why is Jesus white with blond hair and blue eyes? Why is the Lord's supper all white men? Angels are white, the Pope, Mary, and even the angels.' I said, 'Mother, when we die, do we go to Heaven?' She said, 'Naturally we go to Heaven.' I said, 'Well, what happened to all the black angels?'. . . So anyway, I was always curious. I always wondered why Tarzan is the King of the Jungle in Africa, he was white.

⁸⁸ By Vicki Grimshaw, June 6, 2016, at <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/boxing/watch-read-full-transcript-muhammad-8120706>; <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/boxing/watch-read-full-transcript-muhammad-8120706>.

⁸⁹ Sir Michael Parkinson CBE is an English broadcaster, journalist and author. He presented his television talk show, Parkinson, from 1971 to 1982 and from 1998 to 2007, as well as other talk shows and programmes both in the UK and internationally. He has also worked in radio broadcasting. Michael Parkinson always sought guests who, besides being well known, had some sort of story to relate. He then saw his job as allowing them to tell it and did so by being open, relaxed and attentive. Wikipedia - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkinson_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkinson_(TV_series))

I saw this white man swinging around Africa with a diaper on, hollering. Did you all see Tarzan over here? And all of the Africans, he's beating them up and breaking the lion's jaw, and here's Tarzan, talking to the animals. And the Africans have been there for centuries and they can't talk to the animals. Only Tarzan can talk to the animals. I always wondered why.

And Miss America was always white. All the beautiful brown women in America, beautiful sun tans, beautiful shapes, all types of complexions, but she always was white.

And Miss World was always white, and Miss Universe was always white. And then they got some stuff called White House cigars, White Swan soap, King White soap, White Cloud tissue paper, White Rain hair rinse, White Tornado floor wax, everything was white.

And the angel fruit cake was the white cake and the devil food cake was the chocolate cake.

I said, 'Momma, why is everything white?' I always wondered. And the President lived in the White House. And Mary had a little lamb with feet as white as snow, and Snow White, and everything was white. Santa Claus was white and everything bad was black. The little ugly duckling was the black duck, and the black cat was the bad luck. And if I threaten you, I'm going to blackmail you. said, 'Momma, why don't they call it 'whitemail'? They lie too.'

I was always curious. And then this is when I knew something was wrong."

K. Muhammad Ali the Racial Justice and Civil Rights Activist/Advocate and the Core Principles

Conviction: This lesson focuses on pivotal moments in Muhammad Ali's life that reflect his commitment to freedom and liberation, and represent his conviction in equality for all. The lesson informs about his experiences as a young man as well as the experiences of Black teens and adults in the 1950s-60s in Louisville. Participants learn about how Muhammad Ali showed conviction as a racial justice and civil rights advocate, and how his conviction can inspire us today.

Dedication: This lesson focuses on the Civil Rights Movement and highlights Muhammad Ali's experience as a Black Olympic Gold Medalist in a segregated U.S. south. The lesson explores the current state of civil rights in the U.S. today, and how current athletes add to social movements identifying similarities between their actions and Muhammad Ali's.

Respect: This lesson focuses on how being born in the U.S. informed Muhammad Ali's commitment to showing and receiving respect, and how he demanded respect as a citizen to advocate for civil rights goals in U.S. politics and culture. The lesson provides connections between the history of the Black Freedom Movement and contemporary struggles for equality.

Spirituality: This Spirituality lesson focuses on the idea of spirituality as expansive and brining in ever-widening circles of concern including social justice. Muhammad Ali held a more expansive view of his spirituality that led him to address a range of social, political

and humanitarian concerns throughout his life from racism, to war, and eventually sexism, and religious intolerance.

V. Muhammad Ali, Conscientious Objection, and the Vietnam War

April 18, 1960	Muhammad Ali registered for selective service with the Local Draft Board in Louisville, Kentucky.
March 9, 1962	Muhammad Ali was classified 1-A, fully acceptable for induction into the military and immediately available, by the Local Draft Board in Louisville, Kentucky.
March 26, 1964	Muhammad Ali was classified 1-Y as a result of a physical examination (not acceptable for induction in the armed forces & not qualified under current standards).
February 17, 1966	Muhammad Ali was reclassified 1-A by the Local Draft Board in Louisville after being considered by the Examining Station under the then current regulations.
February 18, 1966	1-A classification notice was mailed to Muhammad Ali and he was given the Special Form for Conscientious Objector.
February 28, 1966	Muhammad Ali filed the Conscientious Objector Form with the Local Board. This was the first time he made the claim and he requested a personal appearance before the Local Draft Board about his reclassification from 1-Y to 1-A.
March 17, 1966	The Local Draft Board granted the personal appearance by Muhammad Ali and again classified him 1-A.
March 28, 1966	Muhammad Ali appealed the 1-A classification to the Kentucky Appeal Board.
May 6, 1966	The Kentucky Appeal Board tentatively determined that the Muhammad Ali was not eligible for the conscientious objection classification, and the case was referred to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for an advisory recommendation as required by the Selective Service rules. The FBI conducted an investigation interviewing 35 people including members of Ali's family and many of his friends, neighbors, and business and religious associates.
August 23, 1966	Muhammad Ali filed a letter request with Local Draft Board in Louisville requesting conscientious objector status as a Minister of the Lost Found Nation of Islam.
August 23, 1966	The Kentucky Appeal Board held a special hearing to consider Ali's conscientious objector claim after receiving the DOJ recommendation. The Hearing Officer concluded that Muhammad Ali was sincere in his conscientious objector claim, and that Ali's application should be granted. The Hearing Officer made this recommendation after reviewing the DOJ recommendation, the FBI report, and hearing testimony from the Ali's parents, one of his lawyers, and a minister of the Nation of Islam.
January 10, 1967	The Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel, Conscientious Objector Section, recommended to the Kentucky Appeal Board that Muhammad Ali's request for conscientious objector status be denied. Following this recommendation, the Kentucky Board of Appeal denied Muhammad Ali's claim without a statement of reasons, and notified the him that he was classified 1-A in November 1966. After several appeals within the Selective Service administration in Kentucky (January 1967), in Houston, Texas where he was living (February 1967), and to

	the Presidential Appeal Board in Washington D.C. (March 1967), Muhammad Ali was ordered to report for induction into the U.S. military.
April 28, 1967	Muhammad Ali reported for induction in Houston, Texas but asserted his conscientious objection based on his religious beliefs against war and as a minister of the Nation of Islam. He refused to take the traditional step forward, and this prosecution and conviction followed.
May 1967	Muhammad Ali is stripped of his World Heavyweight Championship title, has his boxing license suspended by the New York State Boxing Commission and in other states, meaning he is banned from U.S. boxing. His passport is withheld by the federal courts while his appeal is pending meaning he can't travel outside of the U.S. to continue his professional boxing career.
June 1967	Cleveland Summit: In June 1967, prominent Black athletes and politicians publicly expressed their support for Muhammad Ali after meeting with him about his conscientious objection to military service based on his religious beliefs. They saw a need to support Ali's right of religious freedom in the face of the extraordinary public backlash against the world champ. It has been described as "a watershed moment . . . in the annals of both the civil rights movement and the protest against the Vietnam War." ⁹⁰
1967-70	Muhammad Ali is banned from boxing in the U.S. and becomes a leading figure in the anti-war movement through lectures on college campuses, media appearances, and other activities. He inspires civil rights leaders with his anti-war stance linked to racial justice in the U.S. including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
June 1970	The New York State Supreme Court ordered Muhammad Ali's boxing license be reinstated. He resumes his professional boxing career.
June 28, 1971	The U.S. Supreme Court reverses the criminal conviction of Muhammad Ali.

Muhammad Ali's exposure to the Islamic faith and, specifically, the Nation of Islam, solidified his views about the lack of racial justice and civil rights protections for Black people in the U.S. His conversion to Islam led to some of the most momentous events in his career including his conscientious objection to military service in the Vietnam War. See above Muhammad Ali and His Faith.

A. U.S. Constitution & Fundamental Rights

⁹⁰ Branson Wright, Remembering Cleveland's Muhammad Ali Summit, 45 years later, The Plain Dealer (June 03, 2012) at https://www.cleveland.com/sports/2012/06/gathering_of_stars.html

Muhammad Ali's request for conscientious objector status was based on his First Amendment constitutional right to freely practice his religion. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."⁹¹ This guarantees that the government will not limit people in their "exercise of religion," which includes practicing their religion or choosing not to practice any religion. This freedom also means that the government will not evaluate the strength of a person's religious commitment or whether their religion is organized, widely recognized, or more obscure. Similar to all constitutionally protected rights, this freedom to "exercise religion" or engage in religious practices is not absolute. Generally, the U.S. Constitution prohibits the government from giving an explicit preference to any particular religion or to any individual who is religious compared to those who are not religious.

The freedom to engage in religious practices requires some understanding of the general meaning of religion. The U.S. Supreme Court does not define what a religion is, or the specific religions that are protected. For conscientious objector claims, the only question is whether a person's "belief is sincere and meaningful" and whether that the belief has a place in the person's life similar to the traditional religious belief in a supreme being.

B. U.S. Selective Service System & Conscientious Objections

Conscription is the mandatory enlistment in a country's armed forces, and is sometimes referred to as "the draft." The origins of military conscription dates back thousands of years to ancient Mesopotamia, but the first modern draft occurred during the French Revolution in the 1790s.⁹² The first U.S. military draft happened during the Civil War in 1863. All males between the ages of 20 and 45 had to register, yet the obligation fell mostly on the poor. Wealthier men could afford to hire a substitute to take their place in the draft or pay \$300 for a draft exemption which was enormous sum of money. The draft sparked civil unrest and draft riots. In New York City, anti-draft riots lasted three days led by poor Irish immigrants who scapegoated African Americans for long-standing grievances, including wartime inflation, competition for jobs, and racial prejudice among working-class people.⁹³

The Selective Services Act became law in 1917 to prepare for World War I. In 1940, Congress passed legislation creating the first peacetime registration in U.S. history. At that time, "conscientious objector" status was granted to those who could demonstrate "sincerity of belief in religious teachings combined with a profound moral aversion to war."

Today, virtually all men in the U.S. are required to register with the U.S. Selective Service Administration within 30 days of their 18th birthday. This includes noncitizens in the U.S., whether documented or undocumented. The purpose of this registration requirement is to maintain a system that, if authorized by the President and Congress, rapidly provides

⁹¹ U.S. Constitution, First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof".

⁹² From <https://www.history.com/topics/us-government/conscription>.

⁹³ From <https://www.history.com/topics/us-government/conscription>.

military service personnel in a fair and equitable manner using a “draft” of registered men.⁹⁴

The Selective Service System also includes an alternative service program for conscientious objectors. A conscientious objector is someone who is opposed to serving in the armed forces and/or bearing arms on the grounds of moral or religious principles.⁹⁵ Today, all conscientious objectors are required to register with the Selective Service Administration.

Conscientious objection to U.S. military service has existed since the colonial era, and initially was only granted to members of specific religious groups known for their pacifist beliefs, including Quakers and Mennonites. This exemption was first recognized in 1863 during the U.S. Civil War when the federal government held the first draft. The exemption was interpreted narrowly at times, such as during World War I when some applicants were required to pay a fee. Restrictive interpretations led to the imprisonment of hundreds of U.S. citizens at that time. The “alternative civilian service” program for conscientious objectors before World War II placed men in noncombatant support positions, such as work in hospitals and national parks.

The definition of conscientious objection has changed over time as the interpretations of First Amendment protection have expanded. In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court held that the First Amendment required a broader interpretation of the conscientious objector criteria to include anyone who ***“has deeply held beliefs that cause them to oppose participation in war in any form.”***⁹⁶ This can include ethical and moral beliefs opposed to war that are similar and just as strong as religious convictions. The required “opposition to war in any form” was viewed as a way to exclude conscientious objectors who only opposed the Vietnam War.⁹⁷

During the Vietnam War⁹⁸, the conscientious objector exemption in Section 6(j) of the Military Selective Service Act of 1967 (1964 ed.) provided:

Nothing contained in this title * * * shall be construed to require any person to be subject to combatant training and service in the armed forces of the United States who, by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.

In order to qualify for classification as a conscientious objector, a registrant must satisfy three basic tests:

⁹⁴ From <https://www.sss.gov/about/>.

⁹⁵ From <https://www.sss.gov/conscientious-objectors/>.

⁹⁶ *Gillette v. U.S.*, 91 S.Ct. 828 (1971) (Claim to conscientious objector military exemption to participation in the Vietnam conflict because it was an ‘unjust’ war. U.S. Supreme Court upheld the requirement of §6(j) of the Military Selective Service Act of 1967 that requires conscientious objection to “war in any form” and therefore covers “only objectors to all war.”).

⁹⁷ A Closer Look: Conscientious Objection - Facts and figures about choosing one's conscience over the call to duty, PBS Now (Aug. 24, 2007) at <https://www.pbs.org/now/shows/334/conscientious-objection.html>.

⁹⁸ The Vietnam Draft Lottery at <https://www.vietnamlotteryfate.com/selective-service-classifications>.

- 1) He must show that he is conscientiously opposed to war in any form.
- 2) He must show that this opposition is based upon religious training and belief.
- 3) He must show that this objection is sincere.

In applying the sincerity of religion test, the Selective Service administration was required to consider only what Muhammad Ali as an individual believed about his religion, and whether he was sincere in his belief about the guidance his religion provided to him. The Selective Service administration is not supposed to rely on its own interpretation of the religion; in this case the dogma of the Nation of Islam.

C. The Vietnam War (1964-1973) and the Draft

A military draft lottery was established to provide soldiers for the Vietnam War with the first drawing for men born on December 1, 1969. The Vietnam draft lottery system classified registered men into categories ranging from immediately “available for military service” (1-A) to “not qualified for service.” If their birthdate was called, young men were required to report to a local draft board and then were sent to U.S. Military Induction Offices to determine their eligibility to serve. The first priority selection group was the youngest – 20 year olds. The last induction call was issued in December 1972, and the induction authority enacted by Congress expired on July 1, 1973.⁹⁹

During the Vietnam War, 2.2 million men were drafted from an eligible pool of 27 million. Only 25 percent of the combat forces came from the draft; many young men instead chose to volunteer in order to have some choice of where they would serve, e.g. in the Army, Navy, Air Force, etc. Many soldiers supported the war, at least initially, and others saw the draft as something like a death sentence feeling they were sent to a war to fight for a cause that they did not believe in. Draft opponents had a few options such as college or parental deferments, or intentionally failed aptitude or medical tests. Thousands fled to Canada while politically-connected men joined the National Guard. At the same time, many people engaged in direct resistance. Antiwar activists viewed the draft as immoral and understood that the war could only continue as long as the draft was in place. “Ironically, as the draft continued to fuel the war effort, it also intensified the antiwar cause.”¹⁰⁰

Draft resistance became increasingly widespread during the Vietnam War. In 1967, U.S. casualties in Vietnam had reached 15,058 killed and 109,527 wounded. Each month, as many as 40,000 young men were drafted into service. Those men who evaded the draft were called “draft dodgers,” and, according to Canadian immigration statistics, as many as 30,000 of these men went to Canada. Draft evasion carried steep fines and the possibility of

⁹⁹ From <https://www.sss.gov/history-and-records/timeline/>.

¹⁰⁰ From Resistance to Revolution: The Anti-Vietnam War Movement at the University of Michigan (1965-73) (chronicling how the University became a stronghold of political activism and intellectual discussion against the war in Vietnam) at http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/antivietnamwar/exhibits/show/exhibit/draft_protests/the-military-draft-during-the-

jail time. During the war, nearly 210,000 men were charged with draft evasion, including Muhammad Ali whose conviction was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter pardoned all Vietnam War draft evaders.¹⁰¹

D. Muhammad Ali's Legal Case & Arguments

Muhammad Ali, during the Vietnam War, registered for the Selective Service in April 1960 at the age of 18. During the Vietnam War, the system classified registered men into categories ranging from immediately "available for military service" to "not qualified for service." Under the "draft" system he was classified in March 1962 as immediately available for military service by the local Louisville Draft Board (1-A). After the required physical examination, he was reclassified and remained on the list of men who could be called up, but who were not immediately available (1-Y). Muhammad Ali was reclassified 1-A in February 1966 by the Louisville Draft Board, and he filed a Conscientious Objector application which was denied.

Muhammad Ali appealed the Louisville Draft Board decision to the Kentucky Appeal Board in March 1966. His appeal was denied in January 1967, despite the fact that Kentucky hearing officer determined Muhammad Ali was eligible for Conscientious Objector status because he had a sincerely held religious belief opposing all war. The denial was based on a U.S. Department of Justice recommendation containing incorrect legal reasoning about Ali's eligibility and concluded that he did not oppose "war in any form." The DOJ recommendation stated that Ali followed the teachings of the Nation of Islam which only prohibit fighting for the U.S. based on political and racial objections to U.S. policies as interpreted by Elijah Muhammad, Minister of the Nation of Islam.

In April 1967, Muhammad Ali asserted his conscientious objection and refused induction into the U.S. Military. In June 1967, he was convicted in federal district court for the federal crime of "knowingly and willfully refusing to report for and submit to induction into the U.S. Armed Forces." He was fined \$10,000 and sentenced to 5 years in jail. He was allowed to remain free on bail during the appeal of his criminal conviction to the U.S. Court of Appeals (Fifth Circuit) which upheld the criminal conviction.

Muhammad Ali appealed the conviction to the U.S. Supreme Court, the highest court in the U.S. By this time, Muhammad Ali asserted his religious objection to military service through many appeals within the Selective Service Administration (local draft board, Kentucky Board of Appeal, Presidential Appeal Board in Washington, D.C.) and in the judicial system in federal district court, the federal appeals court, and the U.S. Supreme Court. The financial cost of the appeals was enormous, \$ 2 Million dollars according to Muhammad Ali. One question to consider is how many people would have the financial ability to challenge the government's decision at all of these levels.

Muhammad Ali made several legal arguments about the denial of his conscientious objection application and about racial discrimination in the draft system generally:

¹⁰¹ From <https://www.history.com/topics/us-government/conscription>.

- a. The process of selecting men to be drafted violated the U.S. Constitution's equality guarantee because of lack of representation of Blacks on draft boards. Muhammad Ali argued there was a systematic exclusion of Blacks and therefore the decisions of the Kentucky draft boards were a violation of the U.S. Constitution Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause.¹⁰²
- b. A lack of impartial decision making due to political and other pressures.
- c. He was entitled to receive the Conscientious Objector Exemption from service.
- d. He was entitled to receive the Ministerial Exemption as Minister of Nation of Islam.

The denial of Muhammad Ali's requests at every level were based on the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) recommendation letter which included the FBI investigation report. The DOJ recommendation against Ali's conscientious objection application stated:

"It seems clear that the teachings of the Nation of Islam preclude fighting for the United States not because of objections to participation in war in any form but rather because of political and racial objections to policies of the United States as interpreted by Elijah Muhammad. * * * It is therefore our conclusion that registrant's claimed objections to participation in war insofar as they are based upon the teachings of the Nation of Islam, rest on grounds which primarily are political and racial."

The DOJ's recommendation against Muhammad Ali also determined he was not sincere in his religious beliefs because he failed to have consistent and overt manifestations of his conscientious objection. The DOJ asserted this consistency was required to establish Muhammad Ali's subjective state of mind and belief, and, therefore, his sincerity.

On June 28, 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the criminal conviction of Muhammad Ali. The Government argued that there was a factual basis for finding that Muhammad Ali was "not opposed to 'war in any form,' but is only selectively opposed to certain wars." The Supreme Court determined that it did not need to resolve this issue, because even if the government was correct there was another problem with the conviction. The Government argued that Muhammad Ali did not have a sincere opposition to war because he had not consistently made his conscientious objector claim. However, this was not required to show he had a sincerely held religious belief. The Government also conceded before the Supreme Court that Ali has a sincere belief; there was "no dispute that petitioner's professed beliefs were founded on basic tenets of the Muslim religion, as he understood them, and derived in substantial part from his devotion to Allah as the Supreme Being."

The Supreme Court determined that the DOJ was wrong to advise the Kentucky Appeal Board that Muhammad Ali was not eligible for conscientious objector status because of the circumstances and timing of his claim. And, since the Kentucky Appeal Board gave no

¹⁰² U.S. Constitution, 14th Amendment, Section 1: No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

reasons for its denial, there was absolutely no way of knowing whether or not the decision was made based on DOJ's incorrect legal reasoning. The Supreme Court held that the DOJ was simply wrong in as a matter of law in advising that Muhammad Ali's beliefs were not religiously based and were not sincerely held.

CONCLUSION: Muhammad Ali was wrongly denied Conscientious Objector status, but correctly denied the minister exemption from military service.

Muhammad Ali held himself out as a professional boxer in all of the applications and forms he submitted to the draft board, and other public information about him such as news and television interviews. As a result, under the Selective Service Administration's definition of a minister of religion, Muhammad Ali did not qualify.

Muhammad Ali was wrongly denied conscientious objector status. The Kentucky Appeal Board was led to believe that Muhammad Ali failed to satisfy each of the three basic tests to be eligible as a conscientious objector by relying on the conclusion of a U.S. Department of Justice recommendation. The DOJ recommendation letter was incorrect when it that concluded that Muhammad Ali's "beliefs were not religiously based and were not sincerely held."

E. In His Own Words - Muhammad Ali on His Conscientious Objection

Muhammad Ali asserted his right to be Black and proud. He connected his racial identity to the identity of other people in the countries of the Global South (the Third World) in his conscientious objection to military service in the Vietnam War. In mid-April 1967, Ali told reporters in Louisville that he'd assert his conscientious objection to military service based on his religious belief and said:

"Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam after so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?"¹⁰³

Muhammad Ali's conscientious objection was a key part of the civil rights movement. He explained that his objection to military service included the racial injustice toward men of color and also economically disadvantaged men were more likely to be drafted to fight and be killed in Vietnam. As Muhammad Ali noted at the Houston, Texas Military Induction Center when he asserted his objection for last time before the Selective Service Administration that he had a conscientious objection on April 28, 1967:

"I am proud of the title 'World Heavyweight Champion' which I won in the ring in Miami on February 25, 1964. The holder of it should at all times have the courage of convictions and carry out those convictions, not only in the ring but throughout all phases of his life. It is in light of my own personal convictions that I take my stand in rejecting the call to be inducted into the armed services. I do so with full realization of its implications and possible consequences."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/27/opinion/muhammad-ali-vietnam-war.html>

¹⁰⁴ Kenan Malik, 'Get Used To Me': The Defiant Courage of Muhammad Ali (June 7, 2016) at <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/get-used-to-me-the-defiant-courage-of-muhammad-ali/10096904>.

Muhammad Ali's conscientious objection to military service during the Vietnam War generated tremendous backlash in the media and general public until the anti-Vietnam War movement became more mainstream. The fact that Ali's religious objections were tied to the Nation of Islam also was a source of particular animosity. There was public opposition to a member of the Nation of Islam receiving a religious belief exemption from military service. Members of the Nation of Islam were denied conscientious objection during World War II.¹⁰⁵

The Nation of Islam's position against war can be found in Elijah Muhammad's *Message to the Blackman in America* (1965) which was examined by the U.S. Supreme Court to evaluate Muhammad Ali's religious beliefs. Elijah Muhammad, who was jailed during World War II when a military service exemption based on his religious beliefs was denied, wrote:

"The very dominant idea in Islam is the making of peace and not war; our refusal to go armed is our proof that we want peace. We felt that we had no right to take part in a war with nonbelievers of Islam who have always denied us justice and equal rights; and if we were going to be examples of peace and righteousness (as Allah has chosen us to be), we felt we had not right to join hands with the murderers of people or to help murder those who have done us no wrong."

Muhammad Ali was widely known as a truth-teller when he talked about the vicious racism Black Americans faced and how they saw their conscription as an absurd addition of insult to injury. On April 28, 1967 in Houston, Texas when Muhammad Ali was ordered to appear for induction into the military he read a prepared press release, and he made a statement to reporters that became famous:

"I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong," he told reporters. "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform," he said, "and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?...I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. We've been in jail for four hundred years."¹⁰⁶

Muhammad Ali had to uphold his convictions about his religion and his opposition to the racial injustice revealed by the impact of the war through years of legal proceedings. Ali was convicted in federal court when his conscientious objector claim was denied again, and he was sentenced to the maximum of five years in prison and fined \$10,000. The New York Boxing Commission, which already had suspended his boxing license, said his refusal to enter the service was detrimental to the best interests of boxing. In 1970 the New York

¹⁰⁵ Mr. Elijah Muhammad, while in Washington, D.C. was arrested on May 8, 1942, for allegedly evading the draft. "When the call was made for all males between 18 and 44, I refused (NOT EVADED) on the grounds that, first, I was a Muslim and would not take part in war and especially not on the side with the infidels," he wrote in "Message To The Blackman." "Second, I was 45 years of age and was NOT, according to the law, required to register." Many other male members of the Nation of Islam at that time were imprisoned for being conscientious objectors to World War II. After World War II ended, Mr. Muhammad won his release from prison and returned to Chicago. From: <https://www.noi.org/honorable-elijah-muhammad/>.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/individuals/muhammad-ali>; and https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=*&f.ancestorNaIds=5604069&sort=naIdSort%20asc&offset=40

State Supreme Court ordered his boxing license reinstated. The following year, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned his conviction in a unanimous decision.¹⁰⁷

While he was banned from professional boxing, Muhammad Ali gave many speeches on college campuses explaining his opposition to the Vietnam War. He frequently referred to how “justice” should happen in his case. He refused to accept the idea that his constitutional rights would not be recognized. As he said in different ways throughout these years:

“It has been said that I have two alternatives,” Ali told a crowd of college antiwar protesters. “Either go to jail or go to the army. But I would like to say that there is another alternative. And that alternative, that alternative is justice. And if justice prevails, I will neither go to the army, nor will I go to jail.”¹⁰⁸

For Muhammad Ali, justice necessarily involved not only the protection of his right to practice his religion but also meaningful action to address the longstanding racial injustice embedded in the fabric of the United States.

F. Muhammad Ali’s Conscientious Objection and the Vietnam War - the Core Principles

Confidence: This lesson examines Muhammad Ali’s statements opposing the military draft system and the Vietnam War including his conscientious objector claim that he was a Minister of the Nation of Islam who saw Ali as a representation of freedom of a Black man in the U.S. The lesson also highlights the brutal criticism Muhammad Ali faced in the media, particularly from media personalities such as David Susskind.

Conviction: This lesson focuses on the major issues of the Vietnam War including the role of conscientious objectors in U.S. wars. The lesson invites participants to think about the consequences of Muhammad Ali’s anti-war convictions in his life and whether they would be willing to give up their careers or professions for their own convictions.

Dedication: This module focuses on Muhammad Ali’s stance against the Vietnam War and his conscientious objection to military service because of his religious beliefs in the prior lesson that focuses on Muhammad Ali and the Civil Rights Movement.

Respect: This module references Muhammad Ali’s stance against the Vietnam War and his conscientious objection to military service because of his religious beliefs in the prior lesson that focuses on Muhammad Ali and the Civil Rights Movement.

VI. Muhammad Ali – Global Humanitarian Events & Public Service

1964	Muhammad Ali visits Africa for the first time on a three-country trip to Ghana, Nigeria and Egypt. While in Ghana he states “I am an African,” inspiring millions as a symbol of anti-colonialism.
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¹⁰⁷ <https://www.sportskeeda.com/boxing/muhammad-ali-10-lesser-known-stories-boxing-legend/4>.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/06/15/shoot-them-for-what-how-muhammad-ali-won-his-greatest-fight/>.

1972	Muhammad Ali famously made the pilgrimage to Mecca for Hajj. At the time, Ali was arguably the most famous modern figure to perform hajj, and it crystalized his popularity in the region. ¹⁰⁹
1974	Muhammad Ali visits Palestinian Refugee Camp to shine a spotlight on the needs of people there. Muhammad Ali's "Rumble in the Jungle" match in the Democratic Republic of Congo, then Zaire, against George Foreman was an opportunity for Muhammad Ali to shine a spotlight on a post-colonial African nation led by an African leader. Ali also framed the boxing match in Zaire as a demonstration of black pride.
1975	Muhammad Ali Donates to West Africa - Ali donates 50 cents of each closed-circuit-television ticket sold for his title fight against Chuck Wepner to UNICEF and Africare to help aid the drought-stricken Sahel region of West Africa. Ali donates to the New York Hillside Aged Center in New York City as it was ready to close its doors for good. After an unannounced visit, he says to the press: "You just don't announce things like that. They're not for publicity. <i>Service to others is the rent I pay for my room here on earth.</i> "
1977	Muhammad Ali travels to northeastern England on a Goodwill Tour to raise money boys boxing clubs in the area. While in London, he donates a bus to the Hospital for Sick Children.
1978	Muhammad Ali participates in the international campaign against the apartheid regime in South Africa. He addressed the United Nations at a session of the U.N. Special Committee against Apartheid. Soviet Union Goodwill Tour: Muhammad Ali goes on a twelve-day tour to encourage Soviet-American relations during the Cold War. Muhammad Ali also participated in the Longest Walk with Native American nations at events in New York City, and walked with the group into Washington D.C. This was was a 3,000-mile march across the U.S. to bring attention to the rights of Native people and to protest 11 anti-Indian bills introduced in Congress that threatened treaty rights.
1980	Muhammad Ali meets with African Leaders on behalf of U.S. President Jimmy Carter who had called for a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics to protect human rights after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.
1981	Muhammad Ali talks a 21-year-old Vietnam veteran out of committing suicide by jumping off a nine-story building in Los Angeles.

¹⁰⁹ Ali Khaled, How Muhammad Ali became a sporting hero to the Arab world, Al Arabiya English (June 4, 2016) at <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/sports/2016/06/04/How-Muhammad-Ali-became-a-sporting-hero-to-the-Arab-world>.

1981	Muhammad Ali retired with a 56-5 record and thirty-seven knockouts.
1985	<p>In 1985, Muhammad Ali sponsored the Children's Journey for Peace, and was one of the founders of the Children's Peace Foundation, together with Peter Georgi, then president of MTV and the president of Nickelodeon. Muhammad Ali negotiates for release of 4 U.S. citizen-hostages and a Saudi Arabian hostage held by unknown captors held in West Beirut, Lebanon, reportedly on behalf of U.S. Vice President George H.W. Bush and the Reagan administration.</p> <p>Muhammad Ali negotiated for release of four U.S. citizen-hostages and a Saudi Arabian hostage held by unknown captors held in West Beirut, Lebanon, reportedly on behalf of U.S. Vice President George H.W. Bush and the Reagan administration. Hezbollah had announced its existence in West Beirut Lebanon with a manifesto proclaiming its goal of the obliteration of Israel and a promise "to expel all Americans and their allies from Lebanon, putting an end to any colonialist entity on our land". Muhammad Ali was then "the most famous American on earth sat across from [Hezbollah leader] . . . "and argued for the release of four of his compatriots [and a Saudi Arabian] then being held hostage in south Lebanon."</p>
1988	Muhammad Ali Travels to Sudan for Famine Relief. He is invited by a relief group called the Islamica Dawa Organization to travel to Sudan on an American Society for Humanitarian Aid and Development (ASHAD) mission for famine relief. He visited several camps of refugees and internally displaced Sudanese, displaced by famine and war, particularly victims of heavy August 1988 floods that disrupted food production in large parts of the country. ¹¹⁰
1990	Muhammad Ali traveled to Iraq to negotiate the release of 15 U.S. citizens including members of U.S. Native American nations taken hostage by Saddam Hussein after his invasion of Kuwait and being held as "human shields." The Iraq government detained U.S. and British citizens.
1993	<p>Muhammad Ali visited Nelson Mandela in South Africa upon Mr. Mandela's release from prison after 27 years.</p> <p>Muhammad Ali traveled to Iran to negotiate a prisoner exchange of and freedom for approximately 25,000 combatants imprisoned since the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted from 1980 to 1988.</p>
1994	Muhammad Ali travels to Vietnam on a humanitarian visit aimed at seeking information on the whereabouts of POW/MIAs, and at building a bridge of friendship between Vietnam and the U.S.
1995	Muhammad Ali travelled to North Korea on a goodwill mission to attend a wrestling exhibition, the "Sports and Culture Festival for Peace."

¹¹⁰ Muhammad Ali visits Sudanese refugee camps, UPI Archives, Nov. 18, 1988 - <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1988/11/18/Muhammad-Ali-visits-Sudanese-refugee-camps/4784595832400/>.

1996	Muhammad Ali light the Olympic Torch at the Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia.
1997	<p>Muhammad Ali donates medicine, clothing, and toys to the Liberian refugees, many of whom were physically disabled, at the Centre Bon Berger Catholic Mission having been sent a letter by the Mission's organizer, Sister M. Sponsa Beltran.</p> <p>Press Conference for World Healing Honors Charity Concert - Musician Prince was honored to support his hero Muhammad Ali and his message of racial tolerance at the World Healing Project press conference. The two met with the press on July 22nd to outline the upcoming October charity concert tour to aid the Muhammad Ali World Healing Project program.</p>
1998	<p>Muhammad Ali was appointed a United Nations Messenger of Peace.</p> <p>Muhammad Ali visited Cuba with the Disarm Education Fund and donated over \$1 million in medicines and medical supplies. In September, Ali gave \$1.2 million in donations and humanitarian aid to Cuba for local hospitals and clinics. While there, he and his wife Lonnie visit children at the Juan Manuel Marquez Children's Hospital where Ali donated medical supplies.</p>
1999	Muhammad Ali served as the International Ambassador of the Jubilee 2000. He flew to England in 1999 to serve as ambassador of the Jubilee 2000 campaign that worked to cancel the debts of Third World countries. After the Jubilee campaign was shown at the Brit Awards, Ali received the Freddie Mercury Award for outstanding charitable works.
2001	<p>On January 8th, Muhammad Ali is awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal, by President William Clinton. The award is given to U.S. citizens who have performed exemplary deeds of service for our nation. Ali is chosen to obtain this award for his public and global service in promoting human, religious, and civil rights and advocating for the awareness of Parkinsons Disease.</p> <p>Muhammad Ali visits Ground Zero and issues a written statement on on September 20 after the destruction of September 11.</p>
2002	Muhammad Ali visited Afghanistan to raise awareness of the country's needs and the U.N.'s work there with the World Food Program and the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF).
2003	Helps Inaugurate the Special Olympics in Dublin, Ireland.
2004	Muhammad Ali received the Kahlil Gibran Spirit of Humanity Lifetime Achievement Award from The Arab American Institute (AAI) Foundation.
2006	Muhammad Ali received an award from the Council of 100 Leaders: West Islamic World Dialogue Initiative of the World Economic Forum.
2011	Muhammad Ali, joined by other Muslim leaders, wrote to Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic of Iran, asking for the release of two American hikers held in Iran from 2009 to 2011.

2012	Muhammad Ali received the Liberty Award from the National Constitutional Center.
2015	Muhammad Ali issued a public statement that advocated for the release of Jason Rezaian, Washington Post’s Tehran correspondent.
2015	Muhammad Ali issued one of his final public statements about Islam after several terrorist attacks in the name of Islam in Paris and California. The statement, “Presidential Candidates Proposing to Ban Muslim Immigration to the United States,” was issued to NBC News.

A. Overview

Muhammad Ali’s commitment to global justice issues began early in his professional career. In 1964, he travelled to Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt in visits in which Ali was hailed as a symbol of anti-colonial aspirations. His choice to hold the 1974 World Heavyweight title match in the Democratic Republic of Congo, then Zaire, was important in Africa and in the United States. Ali highlighted Black pride in the concert beforehand featuring Black artists from the U.S. and Africa, and he honored post-colonial African leadership. Long before he retired, Muhammad Ali was revered worldwide for his singular anti-war opposition.

Often Muhammad Ali’s global humanitarian efforts are linked to his retirement in 1981, however this is not entirely accurate. It is correct that after he was most well-known for his work helping to promote world peace, civil rights, cross-cultural understanding, interfaith relations, humanitarianism, hunger relief, and the commonality of basic human values. He was viewed as an ambassador for peace because his travels were dedicated to the world challenges he highlighted in his visits. The list of his efforts is long: he went to Lebanon to secure the release of four hostages; he went on goodwill missions to Afghanistan and North Korea; he delivered over \$1 million in medical aid to Cuba; and he traveled to Iraq to secure the release of 15 United States hostages before the 1990 Gulf War. When he could no longer travel easily, Muhammad Ali continued to be a vibrant force on global justice issues. He continued to use his influence to raise awareness through statements he issued and his infrequent visits to key locations. He journeyed to South Africa to meet Nelson Mandela upon his release from prison. He travelled to the site of the World Trade Center in New York City after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

B. Muhammad Ali and Africa

Muhammad Ali had a longstanding commitment and connection to many countries in Africa. In 1964, Ali embarked on his first visit to three African countries saying: "I want to see Africa and meet my brothers and sisters." His visit began in Ghana, the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to win independence from a European power. Ghana was formerly known as the Gold Coast having been under colonial rule by the Dutch and then the British. Ghanaians had gained their independence less than a decade before the visit. Muhammad Ali was welcomed to Ghana as a son of Africa, a hero and an inspiration to youth throughout

the world. His itinerary included Nigeria and Egypt, Africa's most populous state, where crowds welcomed him with chants of "king of the world".¹¹¹

"I am glad to tell our people that there are more things to be seen in Africa than lions and elephants. They never told us about your beautiful flowers, magnificent hotels, beautiful houses, beaches, great hospitals, schools, and universities," he said.¹¹²

Muhammad Ali became an inspirational symbol of anti-colonialism which he cemented on his 1964 visit to Ghana where he declared "I am an African." Muhammad Ali was idolized across Africa for his prowess in the boxing ring and for championing the rights of black people.¹¹³

Muhammad Ali's visit to Egypt in 1964 happened after he received an invitation from the Arab boxing federation.¹¹⁴ Ali prayed at the famous Al-Hussein Mosque in Cairo and also received a gold-inscribed version of Koran from Egypt's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. He also visited the Iron and Steel Mills outside of Cairo.¹¹⁵ When he visited the Pyramids in Cairo, it was said "he fused politics and religion, giving the black power salute while shouting in Arabic 'God is great.'"

He once said that if a boxer was to be big, he had to be a Muslim "or else he won't get to nations like Indonesia, Lebanon, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey - those are all countries that don't usually follow boxing."¹¹⁶

Muhammad Ali returned to Egypt in 1986 after he retired from boxing as a Goodwill Ambassador.¹¹⁷ He also visited the pyramids, prayed at the Mosque of Muhammad Ali Pasha Mosque of Muhammad Ali Pasha, and spoke to Egyptian media in a press conference at the Marriott hotel in Cairo.

¹¹¹ In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

¹¹² In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

¹¹³ In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

¹¹⁴ Ahmed Abd El Rasoul , When boxing legend Muhammad Ali came to Egypt (Jun 6, 2016) at <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/6/56/219280/Sports/Omni-Sports/When-boxing-legend-Muhammad-Ali-came-to-Egypt.aspx>.

¹¹⁵ Ahmed Abd El Rasoul , When boxing legend Muhammad Ali came to Egypt (Jun 6, 2016) at <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/6/56/219280/Sports/Omni-Sports/When-boxing-legend-Muhammad-Ali-came-to-Egypt.aspx>. Al-Ahram Foundation is the most widely circulating Egyptian daily newspaper that was compared to the New York Times in prestige by the Middle East Institute in 1950, however it also often has been seen as heavily influenced and censored by the Egyptian government. More at <https://arab.org/directory/al-ahram-foundation>.

¹¹⁶ In pictures: Muhammad Ali's love affair with Africa, BBC (June 9, 2016) at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36469288>.

¹¹⁷ Ahmed Abd El Rasoul , When boxing legend Muhammad Ali came to Egypt (Jun 6, 2016) at <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/6/56/219280/Sports/Omni-Sports/When-boxing-legend-Muhammad-Ali-came-to-Egypt.aspx>.

C. The 1960s

On May 15, 1966 Muhammad Ali visited with the children's group at the London Free School in the Notting Hill neighborhood of West London. The school was established by community activist Rhaune Laslett, who also helped in organizing the Notting Hill Carnival as a celebration of the area's multiculturalism. The Free School welcomed Muhammad who visited with and signed autographs for the children. When explaining why she invited him to visit the school in the wake of news reports describing him as a "white hater," Laslett said she extended the offer, "Because he is a kind and loving man and will help anyone he can."¹¹⁸ The London Free School was organized by a group of local activists, including emerging artists of the area with the goal of promoting cooperation and understanding between people of various races and creeds through education and through working together.

D. The 1970s – While a Professional Boxer

Muhammad Ali's humanitarian efforts often focused on the circumstances in which young people lived. Muhammad Ali's visit to a Palestinian Refugee Camp in 1974 illustrates his role in highlighting issues in the Muslim world, and raising awareness about global justice issues such as the impact of famine.

In 1974 Muhammad Ali's "Rumble in the Jungle" boxing match in the Democratic Republic of Congo, then Zaire, to regain the World Heavyweight Championship against George Foreman was an opportunity for Muhammad Ali to shine a spotlight on a post-colonial African nation led by an African leader. Ali also framed the boxing match in Zaire as a demonstration of black pride: an African government hosted the fight; black pilots flew him there; and his trip amounted to a kind of homecoming for a most famous African American. Muhammad Ali was idolized across Africa for his prowess in the boxing ring and for championing the rights of black people.

Muhammad Ali was one of the first notable people in the U.S. to support the Palestinians. In 1974 he visited a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Southern Lebanon.¹¹⁹ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was created by the U.N. General Assembly 70 years ago to deal with the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who had been driven from their homes or fled the conflict surrounding the birth of the modern state of Israel in 1948. The U.N. agency provides services and protection to 5.5 million Palestinian refugees including approximately one-third– more than 1.5 million - live in 58 registered camps as of December 2019.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Davina Hamilton, Rhaune Laslett: The true founder of Notting Hill Carnival, The Voice (Aug. 29, 2016) at <https://archive.voice-online.co.uk/article/rhaune-laslett-true-founder-notting-hill-carnival>; <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/hate-think-people-have-left-history-colour-remembering-rhaune/> (photo of Muhammad Ali).

¹¹⁹

<https://www.facebook.com/AlAwdaPRRC/photos/picture-of-muhammad-ali-palestinian-refugee-camp-lebanon-1974-where-he-stated-in/1297080520321746/>.

¹²⁰ Stephen Farrell, Side by side, glimpses of Palestinian refugee camps then and now, Reuters Wider Image (Dec. 18, 2019) at <https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/side-by-side-glimpses-of-palestinian-refugee-camps-then-and-now>.

In 1978, Muhammad Ali also travelled on a Soviet Union Goodwill Tour, a twelve-day visit to encourage Soviet-American relations. He also visited Muslim temples. He is the first foreign athlete to meet with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev. Muhammad Ali's unique global stature allows him to directly promote freedom in the former Soviet Union. Premier Brezhnev even recruited Ali as the Unofficial Ambassador of Peace with the United States, and gave him a verbal message to deliver to the White House.¹²¹

In 1975, Muhammad Ali arranged to donate the proceeds from a boxing match to famine relief efforts in West Africa. He donated 50 cents of each closed-circuit-television ticket sold for his title fight against Chuck Wepner to UNICEF and Africare to help aid the drought-stricken Sahel region of West Africa, which is an area historically characterized by strong climatic variations and irregular rainfalls. Between 1970 and 1993, the region recorded 20 years of severe drought with increased frequency and severity.¹²²

In 1977, Muhammad Ali went on an England Goodwill Tour. He visited northeastern England at the invitation of ex-boxer Johnny Walker in order to raise money for boys boxing clubs in the area. While there, he visited the Pendower School for Handicapped Children, sparred with young boys at the boxing clubs, and attended events hosted by local dignitaries. Ali also served as the Grand Marshal of the Parade of the Champions featuring boxing legends from all over England. In London, Muhammad presented a bus to the Hospital for Sick Children on behalf of the Variety Club of Great Britain. Johnny Walker, a painter and decorator from Whitburn, had known Ali from his boxing days.¹²³

In 1978, Muhammad Ali once again used his fame to shine a light on a global racial justice issue, the apartheid regime in South Africa. Muhammad Ali addressed the United Nations at a session of the U.N. Special Committee against Apartheid. He was part of the international campaign against apartheid at a critical time during the worldwide movement to ban apartheid which included:

1. On November 4, 1977, the U.N. Security Council unanimously imposed a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa
2. On December 14, 1977, the U.N. General Assembly passed an International Declaration against Apartheid in Sports
3. On December 14, 1977, the U.N. General Assembly declared an International Anti-Apartheid Year
4. In August 1978, the U.N. hosted a World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination in Geneva.

¹²¹ Steve Cady, Ali the Ambassador Returns Home With Positive Impressions of Russia, The New York Times (June 22, 1978) at <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/06/22/archives/ali-the-ambassador-returns-home-with-positive-impressions-of-russia.html?auth=login-email&login=email>.

¹²² André-Michel Essoungou, Africa Renewal- The Sahel: One region, many crises, United Nations (December 2013) at <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2013/sahel-one-region-many-crises>.

¹²³ http://www.bbc.co.uk/insideout/northeast/series5/muhammad_ali_boxing.shtml.

In 1978, Muhammad Ali also participated in the Longest Walk with American Indian nations at events in New York City, and walked with the group into Washington D.C. This was first of three Longest Walks. It was a 3,000-mile march across the U.S. to bring attention to the rights of Native people and to protest 11 anti-Indian bills introduced in Congress that threatened treaty rights. It was a peaceful spiritual protest of thousands of Native activists, allies, and community members. They stayed in Washington, D.C. for the following week to ensure that their voices were heard and to conduct workshops to educate others about Native people, bringing together members of different Native nations to share knowledge and experience.¹²⁴

This historic movement attracted support from every walk of life. Ultimately, not one of the 11 bills before Congress was passed. Since the original Longest Walk, there have been four additional major walks. The Longest Walk II, in 2008, called attention to environmental rights and the protection of sacred sites. In 2011 the Longest Walk III: Reversing Diabetes focused on the health of Indigenous peoples and working against diabetes, a disease that many Native people struggle to combat. In 2013 the Longest Walk IV: Return to Alcatraz was unique in that it began in Washington, D.C., and ended at Alcatraz. This walk focused on reaffirming Native sovereignty in the United States, recognizing that Native Americans are still nations with inherent rights to govern themselves.¹²⁵

E. The 1980s – Beyond Retirement

In 1980, Muhammad Ali met with African leaders on behalf of U.S. President Jimmy Carter who had called for a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics as part of his diplomatic efforts on behalf of human rights. President Carter's goal was to rally opinion against the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. U.S. international relations were a flashpoint during 1979 and 1980. In November 1979, the Iranian government seized U.S. hostages after taking control of the U.S. Embassy in Iran. In December 1979, the Soviet Union reignited Cold War tensions by invading Afghanistan. On behalf of the United States, Muhammad Ali visited Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia, and Senegal to persuade them to boycott the Olympics with the U.S. He was not successful; only Kenya refused to send a team and Liberia withdrew from the games after marching in the opening ceremony.¹²⁶

In 1981, Muhammad Ali talks a young person out of committing suicide. In January, Ali talks a 21-year-old Vietnam veteran out of jumping off a nine-story building in Los Angeles. Howard Bingham, Ali's close friend stated: "I told Ali there was a guy up here on a building about a mile from his house and maybe he could get through. "About four minutes later, Ali comes driving up the wrong side of the street in his Rolls-Royce with his lights blinking." He said: "You're my brother. I love you and I wouldn't lie to you. You got to listen. I want you to come home with me, meet some friends of mine." Ali wrapped his arms around the

¹²⁴

<https://blog.nmai.si.edu/main/2016/07/the-longest-walk-activism-and-legislation-in-indian-country.html>

¹²⁵

<https://blog.nmai.si.edu/main/2016/07/the-longest-walk-activism-and-legislation-in-indian-country.html>

¹²⁶ Tim Ott, Why Jimmy Carter Ordered the U.S. to Boycott the 1980 Olympics, Biography (Mar 12, 2020) at <https://www.biography.com/news/jimmy-carter-1980-olympics-moscow-boycott>; Muhammad Ali's 1980 visit to Africa, Public Diplomacy Council at <https://www.publicdiplomacycouncil.org/2019/07/08/muhammad-alis-1980-visit-to-africa/>.

distraught man and drove him to the hospital. Bystanders chanted “USA! Digs Ali! USA! Digs Ali!”

In 1985, Muhammad Ali sponsored the Children’s Journey for Peace, and was one of the founders of the Children’s Peace Foundation, together with Peter Georgi, then president of MTV and the president of Nickelodeon.¹²⁷ The journey included 50 children scheduled to tour 15 countries to ask world leaders to work for peace. At a press conference for the event, Ali said, “I’m fighting another tough fight.”¹²⁸

In 1985, Muhammad Ali also negotiated for release of four U.S. citizen-hostages and a Saudi Arabian hostage held by unknown captors held in West Beirut, Lebanon, reportedly on behalf of U.S. Vice President George H.W. Bush and the Reagan administration. Hezbollah had announced its existence in West Beirut Lebanon with a manifesto proclaiming its goal of the obliteration of Israel and a promise “to expel all Americans and their allies from Lebanon, putting an end to any colonialist entity on our land”. Muhammad Ali was then “the most famous American on earth sat across from [Hezbollah leader] . . . “and argued for the release of four of his compatriots [and a Saudi Arabian] then being held hostage in south Lebanon.”¹²⁹

In 1988, he traveled to Sudan for famine relief. He was invited by a relief group called the Islamica Dawa Organization to travel to Sudan on an American Society for Humanitarian Aid and Development (ASHAD) mission for famine relief. He visited several camps of refugees and internally displaced Sudanese, displaced by famine and war, particularly victims of heavy August 1988 floods that disrupted food production in large parts of the country.¹³⁰ At the time, relief workers reported that thousands of people were starving, as a result of five years of civil war in southern Sudan, two consecutive years of drought, and recent floods. A government spokesman said last week two million Sudanese had fled their homes in the affected areas of the South to seek refuge in the more prosperous areas of northern Sudan. A 1999 Human Rights Watch report about the famine charged that the Sudanese government’s abusive tactics, and the predatory practices of rebel forces and government-sponsored tribal militia, turned that famine into a disaster requiring the largest emergency relief operation in the world in 1998, and the largest airlift operation since the Berlin airlift. The report called on the Sudan government and rebel authorities to punish those guilty of such abuses.¹³¹

¹²⁷ From <https://www.childrenspeacefoundation.nl/in-memoriam.html>

¹²⁸ Bob Webster, Muhammad Ali leads children’s peace brigade (Feb. 6, 1986) UPI Archives at <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1986/02/06/Muhammad-Ali-leads-childrens-peace-crusade/96015080500/>.

¹²⁹ Dave Hannigan, How Muhammad Ali’s hostage negotiating led to an unlikely friendship: Boxer was sent a number of times to negotiate the release of American prisoners (Dec. 5, 2018) at <https://www.irishtimes.com/sport/other-sports/how-muhammad-ali-s-hostage-negotiating-led-to-an-unlikely-friendship-1.3721370>.

¹³⁰ Muhammad Ali visits Sudanese refugee camps, UPI Archives, Nov. 18, 1988 - <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1988/11/18/Muhammad-Ali-visits-Sudanese-refugee-camps/4784595832400/>.

¹³¹ Famine in the Sudan (1998), Human Rights Watch at <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiLvLKO8KXqAhVYhXIEHVG8AzQQFjAEegQIBRAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.hrw.org%2Freports%2F%2Fpdfs%2F%2Fsudan%2Fsudan992.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0mtiquYAvdz-1VGx6Bzgwu>

F. The 1990s

In 1990, Muhammad Ali traveled to Iraq to negotiate the release of 15 U.S. citizens including members of U.S. Indian Nations taken hostage by Saddam Hussein after his invasion of Kuwait. Among the hostages rescued were 6 American Indian elders, Chief Looking Horse, and their delegation. They went to Iraq on a mission to pray for peace and for the safe return of the American hostages that were being used by Saddam Hussein as “human shields.” Just before the Gulf War breaks out, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein seized American and British hostages as “human shields.” Ali traveled to Baghdad on his own accord to seek the release of these prisoners. For a week, he waited for a meeting with Hussein as he was running out of his Parkinson’s medication. A group of doctors from an Irish hospital in Baghdad replenished his medication just in time to meet with Saddam Hussein. All they asked in return was a group photo with The Champ. As a result of his intervention, fifteen hostages are freed on December 2nd after four months of captivity. The Gulf War started six weeks later.¹³²

In 1993, Muhammad Ali visited Nelson Mandela in South Africa upon Mr. Mandela’s release from prison after 27 years. Muhammad Ali arrived in the country on the same day that South African Communist Party leader Chris Hani was assassinated and departed a few days after ANC leader Oliver Tambo died. Ali visited Hani’s widow Limpho and attended Hani’s funeral in Soweto. A member of Ali’s security detail reported that he never forget how Ali carried a briefcase full of pamphlets with religious messages that he had signed and would distribute to anyone who asked for his autograph.¹³³

¹³²

<https://blog.nmai.si.edu/main/2016/07/the-longest-walk-activism-and-legislation-in-indian-country.html>

¹³³ Caryn Dolley, The day Madiba poured tea for Ali (Jun 5, 2016) at <https://www.iol.co.za/sport/boxing/the-day-madiba-poured-tea-for-ali-2030513>.

In 1995, Muhammad Ali visited North Korea to attend a wrestling exhibition, the “Sports and Culture Festival for Peace,” that featured the Japanese wrestler Antonio Inoki who persuaded the Korean regime, then ruled by Kim Jong-il, that a festival consisting of the type of pro-wrestling you see on TV in the U.S. would enhance the North Korea’s global prestige. The group included Koreans from Canada and the U.S. who joined the trip to see if they could meet long lost relatives.¹³⁴

In 1998, Muhammad Ali traveled on Goodwill Mission to Havana, Cuba during which he gave \$1.2 million in donations and humanitarian aid to Cuba for local hospitals and clinics. While there, he and his wife Lonnie visit children at the Juan Manuel Marquez Children’s Hospital where Ali donated medical supplies. Muhammad Ali spent three days in Cuba with actor Ed Asner delivering \$1.2 million in medicines and medical supplies. Ali, along with officials of the Disarm Education Fund and Direct Relief International, also toured Havana and met with Cuban President Fidel Castro the night before their departure Saturday.¹³⁵

In 1993, Muhammad Ali traveled to Iran to negotiate a prisoner exchange of and freedom for approximately 25,000 combatants imprisoned since the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted from 1980 to 1988. He went as an independent goodwill ambassador in Iran. While there, Muhammad Ali laid a wreath at the tomb of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and joined worshipers at Tehran University for prayers.¹³⁶

G. The 2000s

Muhammad Ali visited Ground Zero on September 20, 2001, and he released a statement on September 12, 2001:

As an American Muslim, I want to express my deep sadness and anguish at the tremendous loss of life that occurred on Tuesday.

Islam is a religion of peace. Islam does not promote terrorism or the killing of people.

I cannot sit by and let the world think that Islam is a killing religion. It hurts me to see what radical people are doing in the name of Islam. These radicals are doing things that God is against. Muslims do not believe in violence.

If the culprits are Muslim, they have twisted the teachings of Islam. Whoever performed, or is behind, the terrorist attacks in the United States of America does not

¹³⁴ Donald Kirk, Muhammad Ali At N. Korea Sports Festival -- Unlike Rodman, He Spurned Regime, Forbes (June 4, 2016) at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/donaldkirk/2016/06/04/muhammad-ali-in-north-korea-unlike-dennis-rodman-he-spurned-regime/#376383f32357>.

¹³⁵ Ali, Asner deliver medical supplies to Cuba on CNN World News (Sept. 13, 1998) at <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/americas/9809/13/cuba.muhammad.ali/index.html?related>; Muhammad Ali Brings Humanitarian Aid to Cuba, Centr-Am News (Week of Sept.13-19, 1998) at <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43b/124.html>.

¹³⁶ Lucy Martirosyan, Tehran's city council wants to name a street after Muhammad Ali, The World on PRI (June 06, 2016) at <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-06-06/tehrans-city-council-wants-name-street-after-muhammad-ali>.

represent Islam. God is not behind assassins. Anyone involved in this must pay for their evil.

Muhammad Ali visited Ground Zero while it was still smoldering on September 20, 2001 just nine days after the terrorist attacks. At the time there were numerous anti-Islamic attacks on people in the U.S. suspected of being Muslim. One of the individuals who helped make sure that Muhammad Ali could make the visit reported that “[d]espite the sorrow of the crowd . . . Ali’s presence gave people something to smile about.” He spent time visiting all of the workers at the site including some time at the local fire station. Muhammad Ali held a press conference at which he was asked about he felt about the 9/11 attackers’ Islamic faith. Muhammad Ali is reported to have said:

“Rivers, ponds, lakes and streams. They have different names, but all contain water. Religions have different names but all contain truth.”¹³⁷

On November 17, 2002, Muhammad Ali, who was recognized as a United Nations Messenger of Peace, traveled on a three-day Goodwill Visit to Afghanistan with the goal of raising awareness of the country's needs and the U.N. work in the country. The visit was organized by the UNICEF and the World Food Program (WFP), and included a visit to a local co-ed school supported by UNICEF, and a WFP women's bakery project. He met with Hamid Karzai, then the President of the Transitional Islamic Government of Afghanistan. Mr. Karzai welcomed Ali to Afghanistan, saying "You are a great hero to many people, a lot of Afghans know you, and in my generation, everyone."¹³⁸

Muhammad Ali wrote an open letter to the young people of Kabul, Afghanistan published on that visit:¹³⁹

Dear Young People,

I want to share with you some of feelings about how bright your future is. My life and my success were built upon the preparation that I practiced when I was a young person growing up in a poor place in America. And just like myself, I know that you will succeed if you can always keep these three things in mind:

- 1. Have faith and be a good Muslim. Your faith will help you through the most difficult days.*
- 2. Prepare your mind for the challenges of life. Your education will be an important part of your life. You must study hard, respect your teachers, and follow their guidance.*
- 3. Prepare your body, by practicing physical activity and sports, because sports builds fellowship, character, and independence. I know that for many of you, it may be difficult to participate in athletic activity because you may not have all the opportunities now, but we must all work together to create more opportunities. I say these things as I prepare to leave your beautiful country, where it has been both an honor and pleasure to spend the past three days in my role as the United Nations*

¹³⁷ The day Muhammad Ali went to Ground Zero, By Emma Winowiecki & Stateside Staff, Sep 11, 2017 at <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/day-muhammad-ali-went-ground-zero>.

¹³⁸ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=5382&Cr=Mohammad&Cr1=Ali#.Veh4vaPD-po>.

¹³⁹ <http://www.unicef.org/media/newsnotes/02nn40aliletter.htm>.

Messenger of Peace. This is a trip to which I had been looking forward for so long, and I am pleased to say that it has exceeded my expectations.

There has been much that has been achieved so far in Afghanistan by the humanitarian community working together with the Afghan government and people. I saw that myself first-hand yesterday, when I sat among young girl students in a UNICEF-supported school. To see the girls studying, knowing that they had been denied opportunities to learn for many years, was inspiring.

I saw too how the most vulnerable people here in Kabul are being provided with support from the World Food Programme, through its women's bakery programme that provides both income to widows and of course vital food supplies to those most in need.

Above all, I believe I have seen - in the young people like yourselves that I met - not just the Afghanistan of today, but the Afghanistan of tomorrow. That tomorrow will be your tomorrow, and the world must not fail you. This is where the adults of the world can make a difference to your lives, by continuing their good work for the rebuilding of your country.

I want to thank you, my young friends, for showing me how strong you are in spite of the hardships your country still faces. You must keep that strength. You must continue to hope for a brighter tomorrow. You are the life and soul of Afghanistan.

With love,

Muhammad Ali

In 2003, Muhammad Ali helped to inaugurate the Special Olympics in Dublin, Ireland. Ali celebrates the spirit and accomplishments of the Special Olympics at the thirty-fifth anniversary games in Dublin, Ireland, a gathering of 7000 competitors from over 150 countries. The mission of the Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. This gives them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

In 2004, Muhammad Ali received the Kahlil Gibran Spirit of Humanity Lifetime Achievement Award from The Arab American Institute (AAI) Foundation's 2004 Kahlil Gibran Spirit of Humanity Awards ceremony May 4, 2004 - The final award of the evening was presented by AAI President James Zogby to longtime civil rights proponent and world-renowned athlete Muhammad Ali, who accepted the Award for Lifetime Achievement. Zogby praised Ali for the anti-war stance during the Vietnam War, for serving on the advisory board of the Palestine Human Rights Campaign, and for raising money for the hungry in U.S.-sanctioned Iraq.¹⁴⁰

In 2006, Muhammad Ali was awarded his first award from the Council of 100 Leaders: West Islamic World Dialogue Initiative of the World Economic Forum; awarded to an "individual who has made an especially noted contribution in promoting dialogue and understanding between the Muslim and Western Worlds."

¹⁴⁰ Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, p. 76-78 (July/August 2004) at <https://www.wrmea.org/004-july-august/arab-american-activism.html>.

In a 2011 letter, Muhammad Ali directly wrote to Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic of Iran, asking for the release of two American hikers held in Iran from 2009 to 2011. The two captured hikers were Joshua Fattal and Shane Bauer.¹⁴¹ Muhammad Ali offered to travel to Iran if his presence would help release the unjustly imprisoned hikers. The two hikers were arrested on the unmarked border between Iran and Iraq on July 31, 2009. They pled not guilty to spying charges. Muhammad Ali, who was described as the most well-known Muslim in the U.S., joined a dozen Muslim leaders in signing a letter to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini seeking the hikers' release.¹⁴² The letter said:

"I write you today to ask your mercy for the two men, Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer, who are currently being held by Iranian authorities. I am humbled by the compassion you gave to their young female friend Sarah Shourd, by allowing her to return to her family. I ask the same mercy and compassion be given to them as well."

In 2012, Muhammad Ali received the Liberty Award from the National Constitutional Center. He was recognized as an: (1) As an outspoken fighter for religious and civil rights; (2) A conscientious objector to war who took his battle to the Supreme Court and won; (3) An ambassador for peace and justice worldwide; and (4) a tireless humanitarian and philanthropist. The Liberty Medal is an annual award administered by the National Constitution Center of the United States to recognize leadership in the pursuit of freedom. It was originally founded by The Philadelphia Foundation.

At the ceremony, President Bill Clinton, Chair of the National Constitution Center, said: "Ali embodies the spirit of the Liberty Medal by embracing the ideals of the Constitution – freedom, self-governance, equality, and empowerment – and helping to spread them across the globe." Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter, said: "For more than half a century, Ali has been committed to fighting for peace, justice, and civil rights for all in the spirit of this award."

In 2015, Muhammad Ali issued a public statement that advocated for the release of Jason Rezaian, Washington Post's Tehran correspondent, who was held captive in Iran for almost two years following accusations of espionage and other charges.¹⁴³ Mr. Rezaian was arrested at his home in Tehran by Iranian Security Forces on July 22, 2014. At the time, no other western journalist had been held captive that long in Iran. While detained, he was denied access to medical care and to a lawyer. Mr. Rezaian, a dual U.S. and Iranian citizen, had lived in Iran since 2008 and was Washington Post Tehran Bureau Chief since

¹⁴¹ Lucy Martirosyan, Tehran's city council wants to name a street after Muhammad Ali, The World on PRI (June 06, 2016) at

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-06-06/tehrans-city-council-wants-name-street-after-muhammad-ali>.

¹⁴² Boxer Muhammad Ali seeks Iran's release of US hikers (May 24, 2011) at

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/8534648/Boxer-Muhammad-Ali-seeks-Irans-release-of-US-hikers.html>.

¹⁴³ Statement By Muhammad Ali on Jason Rezaian, Washington Post Reporter Held in Iran, National Press Club (Mar 12, 2015)

(<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/statement-by-muhammad-ali-on-jason-rezaian-washington-post-reporter-held-in-iran-300049429.html>); Lucy Martirosyan, Tehran's city council wants to name a street after Muhammad Ali, The World on PRI (June 06, 2016) at

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-06-06/tehrans-city-council-wants-name-street-after-muhammad-ali>.

2012. Jason Rezaian reported later, after he was released, that Ali's efforts on his behalf improved his treatment in prison by Iranian prison guards. He was released January of 2016.

Muhammad Ali's statement:

With the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

"I am sorry that I cannot be physically present to lend my support in person but I pray my words will provide relief to the efforts to secure the release of Jason Rezaian.

Insha'Allah. It is my great hope that the government and judiciary of Iran will end the prolonged detention of journalist Jason Rezaian and provide him with access to all his legal options. During his time as the Washington Post bureau chief in Tehran, Jason used his gift of writing and intimate knowledge of the country to share the stories of the people and culture of Iran to the world.

To my knowledge Jason is a man of peace and great faith, a man whose dedication and respect for the Iranian people is evident in his work.

I support his family, friends and colleagues in their efforts to obtain his release"

Muhammad Ali

In December 2015, Muhammad Ali issued one of his final public statements about Islam after several terrorist attacks in the name of Islam.¹⁴⁴ He issued the statement to NBC News: "Presidential Candidates Proposing to Ban Muslim Immigration to the United States" which said:

"I am a Muslim and there is nothing Islamic about killing innocent people in Paris, San Bernardino, or anywhere else in the world. True Muslims know that the ruthless violence of so called Islamic Jihadists goes against the very tenets of our religion.

We as Muslims have to stand up to those who use Islam to advance their own personal agenda. They have alienated many from learning about Islam. True Muslims know or should know that it goes against our religion to try and force Islam on anybody."

H. Muhammad Ali - The Global Humanitarian and the Core Principles

Confidence: This lesson examines Muhammad Ali's statements opposing the military draft system and the Vietnam War including his conscientious objector claim that he was a Minister of the Nation of Islam who saw Ali as a representation of freedom of a Black man in the U.S. The lesson also highlights the brutal criticism Muhammad Ali faced in the media, particularly from media personalities such as David Susskind.

Conviction: This lesson focuses on Muhammad Ali's examples of highlighting global justice, human rights as the framework to identify issues, and how individuals can spotlight global issues to support meaningful change.

¹⁴⁴ German Lopez, One of Muhammad Ali's final public statements refuted Donald Trump's Islamophobia, Vox (Jun 4, 2016) at <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2015/12/10/9885616/muhammad-ali-donald-trump-muslims>.

Dedication: This module focuses human rights to frame Muhammad Ali's global humanitarian acts to spark a discussion about individual efforts in social movements and peace building.

Giving: This lesson is centered on how Muhammad Ali's conception of giving was characterized as a life dedicated to serving others as exemplified by critical events in his life.

Respect: This lesson focuses on how Muhammad Ali's life as a celebrated athlete shifted to him as a U.S. social movement figure and then to a humanitarian leader focused on systems of oppression on a global level.

Spirituality: This lesson focuses on the global influence of Muhammad Ali, his legacy of justice, peace, and compassion, and the legacy that participants would like to leave behind.

VII. The Eclectic Muhammad Ali

Muhammad Ali did much more than transform the world of sports during his lifetime, influence the civil rights and the anti-Vietnam War movement, and advance global justice. He has been called the most famous Muslim in the U.S. who has shown through his life journey how religion can transform and inspire.

Muhammad Ali was also a pop culture icon on the par with Frank Sinatra according to Rolling Stone Magazine. Rolling Stone.¹⁴⁵ Muhammad Ali has a star on Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame. It is the only one displayed on a wall and not on the sidewalk because he refused to have anyone step on the name of the prophet Muhammad.

He made a major impact on the entertainment industry with record albums and received two grammy nominations. The first album was issued in 1963 as a spoken word record on I Am the Greatest! This and his poetry have led many to refer to Muhammad Ali as the father of rap music. The album reached No. 61 on the record charts. Muhammad Ali was nominated for a Grammy in 1976 for a children's dental hygiene record called "The Adventures of Ali and His Gang vs. Mr. Tooth Decay."

Muhammad Ali's life has been chronicled in over ten 10 films including documentaries such as When We Were Kings, which won the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature in 1996, and The Trials of Muhammad Ali about his legal case to recognize his conscientious objection to the Vietnam War. Movies about Muhammad Ali have featured major actors including Will Smith in the 2001 movie "Ali." Smith's portrayal of Muhammad Ali was recognized with an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor. Muhammad Ali's 1975 boxing match against Chuck Wepner has been reported to have inspired the first "Rocky" movie written by Sylvester Stallone, although this connection has been denied by Sylvester Stallone.

Muhammad Ali has been called the "Spiritual Father of Rap" because of his freestyle poetry before boxing matches and in other media appearances.¹⁴⁶ His "early media appearances featured him holding court with the rhymes, flow, and braggadocio that would one day become typical of old school MCs like Run DMC and LL Cool J." Before his first title match against Sonny Liston in 1964, Muhammad Ali rhymed for the media:

"Who would have thought when they came to the fight,"
"That they'd witness the launching of a black satellite?"
Yes the crowd did not dream
When they put up the money
That they would see a total eclipse of the Sonny."

Others have said Muhammad Ali "was hip-hop before hip-hop existed. He is a father of hip-hop. He's one of the men who the young hip-hop generation watched as we shaped our

¹⁴⁵ Mike Rubin, Muhammad Ali: 4 Ways He Changed America, Rolling Stone (June 5, 2016) at <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-sports/muhammad-ali-4-ways-he-changed-america-155463/>

¹⁴⁶ Mike Rubin, Muhammad Ali: 4 Ways He Changed America, Rolling Stone (June 5, 2016) at <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-sports/muhammad-ali-4-ways-he-changed-america-155463/>

idea of what it meant to be a man.” Of course, there are others pivotal figures who have influenced hip-hop. One author would also recognize Malcolm X, Richard Pryor, James Brown, and Bruce Lee. "Ali was a core influence on the essence of hip-hop culture as broadly understood." A culture that includes performers such as Jay-Z and Rakim, as well as Jamie Foxx, Serena Williams and Leslie Jones. "Hip-hop culture is bold and brash and sometimes at war with the nation that's enthralled with it."¹⁴⁷

Muhammad Ali was an actor on Broadway in 1969 while he was banned from boxing. He starred in a musical, *Buck White*, in which he sang virtually all of the songs. In the play, Muhammad Ali "a militant black lecturer who addresses a meeting organized by a black political group." The play was a musical adaptation of an Off-Broadway play, *Big Time Buck White*.¹⁴⁸ The New York Times published about a dozen articles about the play at the time, and it was on the cover of Jet Magazine. The cast, including Muhammad Ali, appeared on famous "The Ed Sullivan Show."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Toure, How Muhammad Ali Invented Hip-Hop, Vice (June 6, 2016) at

https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/nkjvd/how-muhammad-ali-invented-hip-hop.

¹⁴⁸ Robert Viagas, Muhammad Ali, Broadway Musical Star, Dies at 74 (June 04, 2016) at

<https://www.playbill.com/article/muhammad-ali-broadway-musical-star-dies-at-74>.

¹⁴⁹ Adam Langer, Muhammad Ali in a Broadway Musical? It Happened, The New York Times (Nov. 28, 2019) (photo of Muhammad Ali performing a scene from the play on the Ed Sullivan Show)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/28/theater/muhammad-ali-broadway-buck-white.html>.