

# Muhammad Ali's Legacy

- Abby Schalck

This past Friday, June 3rd, the three-time heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali passed away at age 74. Ali was known not only as the first man to become a three-time heavyweight champion, but also as a civil rights and antiwar activist in the 1960s. Ali had suffered for three decades from Parkinson's, a progressive neurological condition that caused both his physical skill and verbal grace to decline. Nonetheless, Ali did not shy away from voicing his opinion on politics, making a statement this past December criticizing Donald Trump's proposal to ban Muslims from entering the United States. Ali stated, "We as Muslims have to stand up to those who use Islam to advance their own personal agenda."

Born Cassius Clay, Ali first came into the public view after winning a gold medal in boxing at the 1960 Summer Olympics, and shortly after he won his first heavyweight championship title. Following his early success in boxing, he converted to Islam and changed his name to Muhammad Ali. As he became seen as a more influential person in society, Ali acted out against racism. For example, after being refused services at a soda fountain because of his race, he threw his Olympic gold medal into a river.

In addition to his fight against racism, Ali also was an influential antiwar activist. In 1967, Ali refused to serve in the Vietnam War because of his religious beliefs. "My conscience won't let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, some poor, hungry people in the mud, for big powerful America," Ali stated, refusing to enter the draft. Because of his refusal to fight in Vietnam, Ali was stripped of his boxing titles and sentenced to five years in prison. Although he was released shortly after on appeal, he was not allowed to box for nearly four years. During this time, Ali turned to public speaking, speaking on college campuses, and getting in heated debates about his beliefs.

After a period of not being able to fight, Ali returned to the ring and in 1978 became the first three-time heavyweight champion in the world. In 1984, however, Ali was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. While Ali's health declined, he still continued to voice his beliefs and remained an influential figure in many humanitarian causes. In recent years, Ali's health began to decline dramatically. Towards the end of his life, Ali could barely speak. However, he still managed to get his opinions heard through letters and other forms of media. One of Ali's last public statements was released following the terrorist shootings in San Bernardino. Ali stated, "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. Speaking as someone who has never been accused of political correctness, I believe that our political leaders should use their position to bring understanding about the religion of Islam and clarify that these misguided murderers have perverted people's views on what Islam really is."

In all aspects of his life, athletic and political, religious and humanitarian, Ali was a man who transcended barriers and truly did "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee."