

PRESENTED BY

KentuckyHistoricalSociety

CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS: MUHAMMAD ALI (BOXER, HUMANITARIAN)

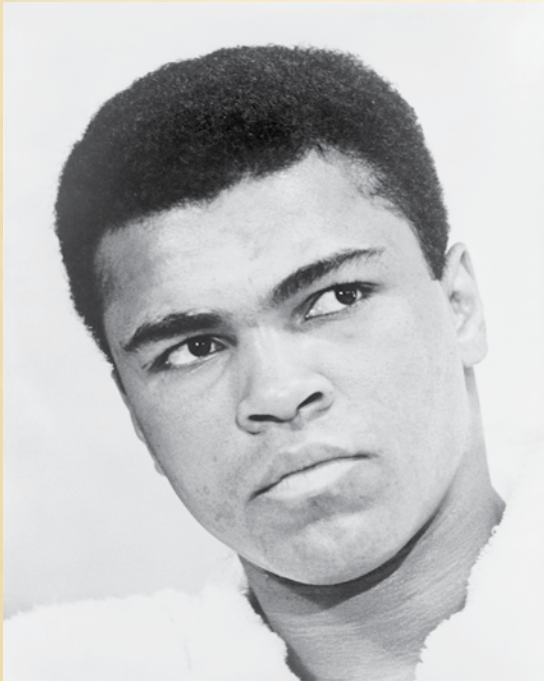


Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

LOUISVILLE — Heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali was born Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr., in Louisville's West End in 1942.

Ali's rise to prominence as a boxer coincided with the civil rights movement. In 1964, just before his fight with Sonny Liston, he converted to the Nation of Islam and changed his name. He publicly announced his conversion after the fight. Ali became closely associated with the Nation of Islam's spiritual leader, Elijah Muhammad, and its primary spokesman, Malcolm X.

Citing religious reasons, Ali declined to enlist in the U.S. Army when drafted. He was denied conscientious objector status, charged with draft evasion and, in 1967, stripped of his heavyweight title. His draft refusal inspired other civil rights and Black Power activists to also avoid military service.

Ali could not box for four years and spent that time speaking to college students, supporting open housing and ministering in the Nation of Islam. In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled in his favor in the army induction case, setting precedent for other draft resisters to have their court cases reviewed, and restored his right to box. Ali retired from boxing in 1980 with a 56-5 record.

Since then, he has focused on raising awareness of humanitarian efforts. In 2002, he was named a United Nations Messenger of Peace.

ExploreKentuckyHistory is a smart phone application and accompanying website that thematically links Kentucky's historical markers. By providing greater context about the stories behind the markers, photographs, and items from the Kentucky Historical Society's collections, ExploreKentuckyHistory puts the Commonwealth's history at your fingertips. For more information, see explorekyhistory.ky.gov.

KentuckyHistoricalSociety

100 W. Broadway | Frankfort, KY 40601
502-564-1792 | www.history.ky.gov



The Kentucky Historical Society is an agency of the
Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet.