Muhammad Ali Versus the USA
Muhammad Ali, the elder son of Cassius Marcellus Clay Sr. and Odessa Grady Clay, was born on January 17, 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky. It was a red and white Schwinn bike that steered the future for Muhammad Ali. When his bike was stolen, 12 year-old Clay went to the police and reported the theft. Clay told his friend, Joe Martin, that when he found the guy who stole his bike he was gonna beat him up. Joe Martin said, “You have to learn how to fight first.” What began as training in the gym turned into the greatest fight of Muhammad Ali’s life, the fight against the US, the fight against the draft.

The Vietnam War began on November 1, 1955. The north Vietnamese people, also known as the Viet Cong were fighting against the south Vietnamese people and the allied United States. The south Vietnamese fought for freedom from the Viet Cong, much like the Civil War in the United States.

The thoughts of society towards the Vietnam War were quite negative. Many Americans did not agree with the government sending American people to the draft. Typically, only people that had relatives in the armed forces had a positive attitude towards the draft. Muhammad Ali was one individual who did not support the draft. He stood up against the United States government enforcing the draft. Many people hated Muhammad Ali for this, including well-known people such as David Susskind and Jackie Robinson.

Muhammad Ali’s stand against the Vietnam War not only transcended the ring that he
had ruled, but also it transcended the realms of faith and politics. On March 9, 1966, at the height
of the Vietnam War, Ali’s status as an American citizen made him eligible to be drafted for the
war. When he changed his status to a Black Muslim, he was a conscientious objector, and would
not enter the war. “My conscience won’t let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or
some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America,”\(^2\) he said at the time. “And shoot
them for what? They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn't put no dogs on
me, they didn't rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father. Shoot them for
what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail.”\(^3\)

A little more than a year later, on April 28, 1967, Ali, then 25 years-old, was in Houston
for his induction into the draft, but the US boxing champ would not go up for his induction to the
army. Despite being warned by an officer, The Champ would not step up to get inducted. Ali was
arrested and fined $10,000. He was sent to prison for five years. Because he was in prison, Ali’s
title was stripped and his boxing license was taken away. Ali was unable to get a new license
until 3 years later. The war was very important and the sight of a man, especially a black man,
who not only refused to go but did so eloquently, intrigued the sporting community as well as
the media and political establishments. Ali instantly became a national pariah and perhaps the
most hated man in the country. Television host, David Susskind, addressed the actions of Ali.

“I find nothing amusing or interesting or tolerable about this man. He’s a disgrace to his
country, his race, and what he laughingly describes as his profession. He is a convicted felon in


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the United States. He has been found guilty. He is out on bail. He will inevitably go to prison, as well he should. He is a simplistic fool and a pawn,” said Susskind.

Susskind was not alone in opposing Ali’s actions. Jackie Robinson, the first black MLB player said Ali’s stand was hurting to African Americans who, unlike Ali, were fighting in Vietnam. “He’s hurting, I think, the morale of a lot young Negro soldiers over in Vietnam,” Robinson said. “And the tragedy to me is, Ali has made millions of dollars off of the American public, and now he’s not willing to show his appreciation to a country that’s giving him, in my view, a fantastic opportunity.” Ali, though, didn’t see it that way. “I would like to say to those of the press and those of the people who think I lost so much by not taking this step, I would like to say that I did not lose a thing up until this very moment, I haven’t lost one thing,” he said. “I have gained a lot. Number one, I have gained a peace of mind. I have gained a peace of heart.”

After Ali’s stand, the Civil Rights Acts were passed in 1964. Muhammed Ali appealed simultaneously to people and organizations who otherwise agreed on little politically. Ali once proudly declared, “I am America. I am the part you won’t recognize. But get used to me—black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours; my religion, not yours; my goals, my own. Get used to me.” Muhammad Ali stood up for his beliefs. That is something all Americans should do, but many do not have the courage to stand against society.

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Ali returned the ring on October 26, 1970. Shortly after his return, he knocked out Jerry Quarry in the third round. On March 8, 1971, he got another chance to regain the National Heavyweight Championship belt, but first he had to fight against the reigning champion Joe Frazier.

It was called the “The Fight of the Century.” The undefeated Frazier surprised Ali with a left hook to beat him. Even though he got up right away it was still counted as a lost. This was Ali’s first pro career loss that he had experienced. After this loss, he experienced his second loss to Ken Norton, In 1974, Ali beat Frazier in a rematch. Another extraordinary fight Ali had was the Rumble in the Jungle, which was against George Foreman in 1974. Ali was seen as an underdog in this fight, but he surprised the crowd with his new technique called the “Rope a Dope”. The Rope a Dope is a technique in which Ali would act as if he was tired from all the beating but really what he was trying to regroup in order to beat his opponent. This technique helped him become the Heavyweight Champion once again. Again, Ali and Frazier would meet in the “Thrilla in Manila,” with both people taking and giving a tremendous amount of punches in the 14th round. Frazier's coach threw in the towel giving Ali a hard fought victory. Three years later that, Ali lost his Heavyweight Champion belt in a loss to Leon Spinks in 1978 but Ali defeated Spinks in a rematch in September. Muhammed Ali was the first boxer to win the heavyweight championship belt three times. After a brief retirement, Ali returned to the ring and fought against Larry Holmes but unfortunately. Holmes was youthful boxer and Ali began to show his age. Following the final loss to Trevor Berbick, the great boxer retired from the sport.
on December 11, 1981. He had a career record of 56 wins, five losses, and an impressive 37 knockouts.

In 1984, Ali was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, possibly from all the head beatings he took in his fighting days. The motor skills in the great boxer were depleted and his movement and speech were very limited. Even though he had Parkinson, he still remained in the public spotlight and he still traveled the world to make humanitarian, goodwill, and charity appearances.\textsuperscript{14} He met with the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in 1990, to negotiate freeing American hostages. In 2002, he traveled to Afghanistan as a United Nations Messenger of Peace. Ali had the honor to light the cauldron in the 1996 Olympics. In 1999 Ali was voted as Sporting Personality of the Century by BBC and Sports Illustrated voted him Sportsman of the Century. Ali was also awarded the Medal of Freedom in a 2005 White House ceremony. He was also awarded $60 million which he used to form the Muhammad Ali Center, a nonprofit museum. In 2015, things began to take a turn for the worse. Ali was hospitalized with a urinary tract infection after having battled with pneumonia. He was hospitalized again in 2016 with a respiratory problem. The revered athlete passed away on the evening of June 3, 2016 at a Phoenix, Arizona facility.\textsuperscript{15}

Muhammad Ali took one of the biggest stands in American history. He stood up against the government and the armed forces for what he believed in. He felt strongly against the war draft and showed that people should stand for what they believe in and not what someone else chooses for them. I feel that if there were more people in the world like Muhammad Ali the world would be as free as the world could be.

\textsuperscript{15} #14
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