

Evangelist Alveda King: The World's 'Greatest Boxer' Is Gone but Not Forgotten

One week ago today, on June 3, many Americans and people around the world mourned the loss of Muhammad Ali. Dead at the age of 74, Ali, perhaps the greatest boxer ever, died after a 32-year battle with Parkinson's disease. May we pray for the peace of his family, his many admirers and his critics. We pray that Muhammad Ali be remembered not only as a man who won in a boxing ring, but who tirelessly waged war on the battlefield for justice.

Ali was born with the name Cassius Marcellus Clay. That's who I met in the mid 1960s at a "Fair Housing Rally" led by my daddy, Rev. A. D. King, Pastor of Zion Baptist Church, in Louisville, Kentucky. Daddy and his brother, Martin Luther King, Jr., (Uncle M. L.) were Baptist preachers and Civil Rights Leaders. I was a "youth organizer" in the Civil Rights Movement in those days.

Ali, a native of Louisville was a headliner in the Kentucky "Open Housing Movement." As a contemporary of such civil rights icons as Uncle M.L., Daddy A.D., and yes, the prominent and dominant Malcolm X, Mr. Ali was making a lasting mark for himself inside and outside the boxing ring. Even though he was a contentious objector of the Vietnam War, he always loved America.

Perhaps even as Malcolm X recanted from his radical Islamic teachings of hatred of the Caucasian race, changing his name to Malik Shabazz after a visit to Mecca and adapting a message of universal peace and compassion, Mr. Ali also embraced that understanding as well as a love for "The Beloved Community" that my uncle and dad proclaimed during their lifetimes.

While Cassius Clay was raised in a Christian home, he later converted to Islam and changed his name to Muhammad Ali, in part, because he objected to the Western characterization of Jesus Christ. Yet, I believe in my heart that the Christian message that he learned from my uncle, Martin Luther King, and Daddy A.D. was impacting him too.

Ali was not only a great boxer, but also a great man; a man of character, integrity and faith. He loved his God, his family and the world. Yet he was a very complex personality; and like everyone, was subject to human failings.

Some may question my prayer that I'll see Mr. Ali in heaven. Yet God is ever merciful and judges the human heart. Mr. Ali is subject to the same grace and mercy that all humans seek.

Ali was devoted to his craft and was a fierce fighter who fought many battles, both in the ring and in his personal life. Although dealing with a debilitating disease in his later years, he always carried himself with dignity. Perhaps best remembered for being a great boxing champion, Ali will be remembered for coining the phrase, "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."

The world has lost a great fighter and champion for justice.

Rest in peace, Mr. Ali. {eo}

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