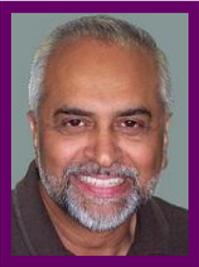


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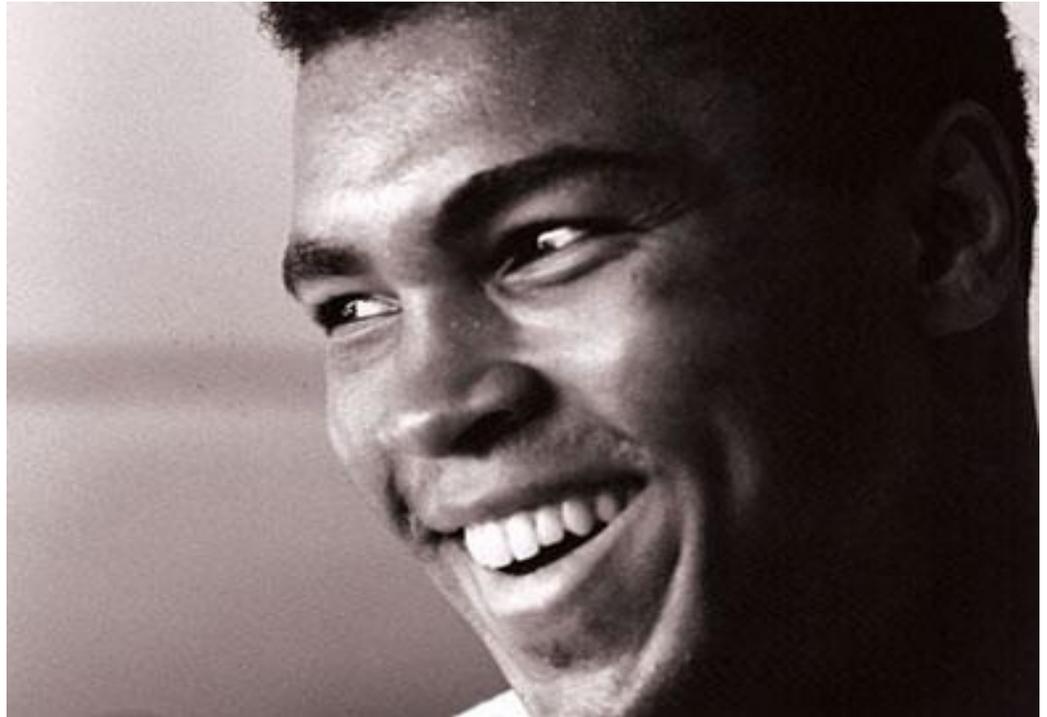
WRITTEN BY: ASHOK DHILLON



Ashok Dhillon has over 40 years of front-line business experience in Canada and International markets. His extensive experience gives him in-depth knowledge and intuitive insights into macro and micro, national and international, geo-political and economic realities and trends.

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The Greatest - The Power of Personal Conviction



Muhammad Ali.

Perhaps the most recognized name and face on Earth.

Born and raised in the deeply racist, bigoted American 'South' – Louisville, Kentucky, Muhammad Ali grew up acutely aware of the discrimination of "White" America against the "black" Americans 'his people'. His struggle and ambition to become great, was driven *more* from a deep desire to be free and equal, than to be just a great boxer. The tremendous success he attained in boxing gave him the platform and recognition to fight the real fight; the injustice, the racism, and the gross inequality of being black in America; *'the land of the free and the home of the brave'*, as he sarcastically quoted. His revulsion for open racism against the black people in America led to his open rebellion against following white America's rules (*including the Draft*), after becoming the heavy weight champion. The rest of his life would be defined by *that* fight.

"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 while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?"

*"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. 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...."*

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But, his hatred for race and color discrimination did not make him a reverse racist. All his life he was simply against all racism, and proved it by having whites as some of his closest companions in his personal and professional life.

"Hating people because of their color is wrong. And it doesn't matter which color does the hating. It's just plain wrong."

Even though he was one of the greatest boxers of all time, as boxing statistics and sport changing performance in the ring go, though it has been argued forever, but what is not argued at all, that as a celebrity/boxer/fighter/entertainer/poet/philosopher and political activist – as a human being and personalities go, he was undisputedly the 'Greatest'. And, perhaps more loved and admired around the World by people of all ages, nationalities and cultures, than any other human being in our times.

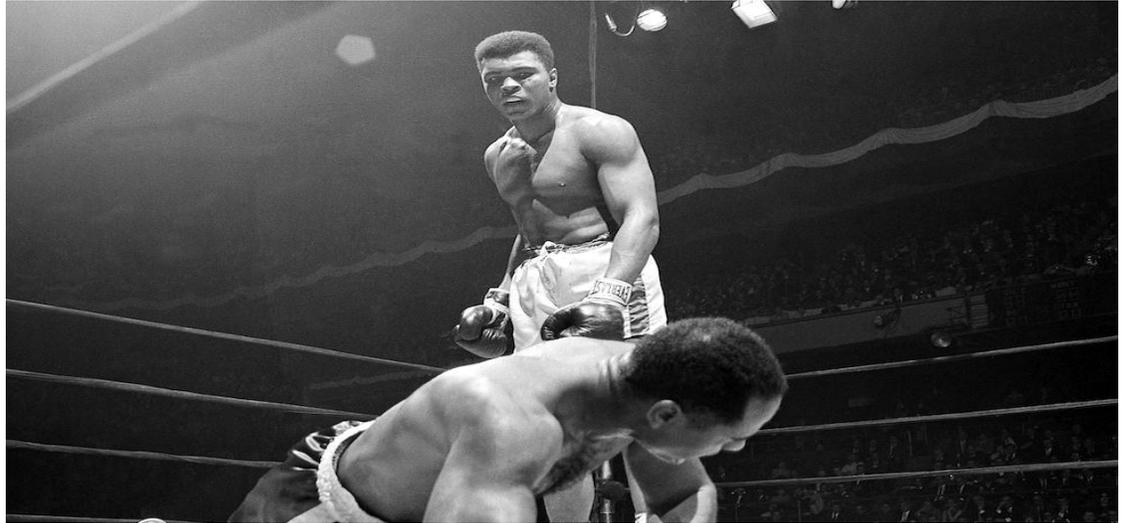
Muhammad Ali (*ne Cassius Marcellus Clay*) became a phenomena as a fighter (*boxer*), far outstripping the most famous fighters of his time and those who had come before him like Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis and even Sugar Ray Robinson, because of his phenomenal talent and style, and his precocious brashness and confidence at such a young age. Because of his style and dazzling speed and dexterity, he was called (*and we paraphrase*) 'a freak of nature, a 200 lb Bantam weight, instead of a heavy weight' by a boxing commentator ahead of his first Heavy Weight Championship fight. He had won the gold medal for America in the 1960 Summer Olympics as a Light Heavy Weight, but after, he was always a very credible heavy weight.

He won the World's heavy weight title at the age of 22 years, by beating one of the most feared fighters of his time, Sonny Liston. According to some experts and trainers, Sonny Liston was the hardest hitting heavy weight in history (*even more so than George Foreman and Mike Tyson*), whose fights seldom lasted more than a first round knockout of his opponents. Nobody expected this fight between them to last long.

For their first fight, Ali was a 7-1 underdog, and was widely expected to be knocked out in the first couple of rounds. But Ali beat Liston easily and convincingly in 7 rounds. In the rematch, Ali destroyed Liston quickly in the ring (*a lightning fast 1st Round knockout, at 1.44 minutes*), and demolished his fearsome reputation outside of it. Sonny Liston never came back from the defeats he suffered at the hands of Ali, a fast-moving, hard-hitting, fast-talking kid. The kid became a man and shook the World.

His over-the-top trash talking prior to the fight (*highly uncommon in those days*) had been taken for deep fear of Liston that he was trying to mask. A lot of boxing experts expected the young Ali (*in those days still Cassius Clay*) not to show up on the day of the fight, so convinced were they that he was just a blow-hard with no real power or skill to take on the destroyer Liston. They had seen his previous fights and had not been impressed. In defeating an intimidating, devastating and lethal fighter the undisputed Heavy Weight

Champion of the World, in the manner he did, someone with whom many top contenders refused to get in the ring with, Ali stunned the World. But that was just the beginning.



Source: boxing.com

From that time on, Ali's career as a Heavy Weight Champion became global legend, and the subject of endless discussion, debate, documentaries and film.

Movies have been made about his life, his fights, his marriages, affairs, religion, name change, and his defiance of the most powerful nation on earth, America, or more pertinently the 'establishment', "White" America.

But, Ali transcended boxing and sports celebrity status, and became one of the most controversial influential persons that changed the United States by persistently, publicly and openly defying its most hypocritical aspects, when at that time anyone seldom did, with as much to lose as he did.

He infuriated "White" America, including the press, and even alienated most blacks because of his in-your-face, unapologetic confidence, and indiscreet rantings over blatant racism and inequality. In those days, in general, "Black" Americans were justifiably terrified by the potentially lethal and unquestioned white power, authority and dominance over them, especially in the South. He brought into sharp focus, not only in the States, but throughout the World, that *'the land of the free'* was anything but, for "Black" Americans.

In being defiant, over time, he not only highlighted America's hypocritical internal stance on race, color and religions, but also changed the public discourse on ill justified foreign wars, and the 'draft' to support them.

"No I'm not going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over."

"...Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail."

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And so it was, at the height of his career and the peak of his abilities, he defied US Government draft, and willingly paid the price of uncompromised principles, by being stripped of all his titles, and even his license to box, and was given a prison sentence for which he had to post a bond to stay out of jail. For the next three years he fought legal battles against the system, depleting his financial and emotional resources, but also used the time to tour American collages to speak to the young of America, of the gross mistreatment of the black people in America, about his conversion to Islam, and his name change from the "slave name, Clay" to Muhammad Ali.

The US Supreme Court eventually vindicated him and his legal challenge to the 'Draft', and overturned the lower court ruling, allowing him to return to the ring and resume his career. But the 3 year enforced absence from the ring, and the stripping of all his accomplishments, cost him heavily, both physically emotionally and financially. The fact that he was willing to unflinchingly stand his ground on his principals, and lose everything he had earned at such high price, gained him the respect of the World.

He had lost three prime years of peak performance of his life that could never be gotten back, and the forced idleness returned him to the ring somewhat diminished in physical condition and reflexes. Only his indomitable remained undiminished. The return was not smooth or easy, he won some but also lost some, but his wins with the best fighters of those times, made for legendary battles that are considered even today, some of the most anticipated, exciting and greatest fights in boxing history, around the World. Ultimately, over his life, he won the Heavy Weight Championship a record 3 times.

Muhammad Ali was no ordinary champion, nor an ordinary man. His years of subsequent fights, with all the greats, and the not so great, cemented his persona and his legend in the fight game for all time. But it was his extraordinary and out sized personality, his mental acuity and brilliance, and his highly amusing, and at times terribly stinging, constant and rapid-fire verbal darts, which galvanized the global audience to him, and eventually converted most if not all the skeptics. He was not shy, but:

"It's not bragging if you can back it up"

In a profession, till then not known for overt displays of high intelligence, supreme confidence, and an extraordinary communicative ability, Ali was stunningly different and awe inspiring. Coupled with an imposing physical power and presence, and an unusual grace of movement, the unique ability *"to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee"*, rare boxing skills and style, and oft self-professed good looks, Ali was a natural to be a generational icon.

But, in spite of suffering horrendous personal costs, based on his principles of fairness, justice and equality, it was his unyielding will not to submit to the will of the most powerful government on earth, and not to be the - intimidated, fearful and submissive black man - as was expected by the whites and most blacks, in an often harsh and cruelly racist "White" America, that ultimately defined him in America.

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Later, the same unyielding will made him fight, for decades, against the ravages of Multiple Sclerosis, the long and losing fight that robbed him of his all and best physical attributes, and ultimately even silenced him. But that fight, along with his undiminished and defiant spirit and uncompromised dignity, elevated him to the status of an enduring international icon, never to be forgotten.

Throughout his adult life while he ranted against inequality in America and the rest of the World, he lived his life as a larger than life humanist. He travelled and spoke extensively all over the World, and worked and lived his talk. Ever open to all shades of color, race and social class, regardless of where or with whom he was, Muhammad Ali lived his life to promote equality above all else. And while he committed to his chosen faith, Islam, with the same discipline and dedication that he had brought to his career, he never shunned other faiths or their practitioners, in fact, was as ambivalent to other's beliefs as he was to color, race or culture.

He was of course adored by the Muslims all over the World, for giving them such representation with such a great talent, and such a famous and loud voice to accompany it, but because of his open heartedness and generosity towards all, he was also embraced by peoples of all races and religions throughout his life. He gave to all and made his life a clarion call to racial and color equality. He summed up his inner calling in one of the most profound yet succinct lines ever spoken:

“The Service you do for others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth.”

