

Muhammad Ali

The Loser and Still Champion

Muhammad Ali
John Lottier

Editor's Note: The following interview with Muhammad Ali appeared originally in two parts in the *Michigan Daily*. It was conducted by John Lottier of the Daily immediately prior to Muhammad's departure to Houston, where he was convicted of violation of the Selective Service Act and sentenced to the maximum of five years in jail and a \$10,000 fine.

The interview is reprinted with the permission of the *Michigan Daily*.

DAILY: How would you like to begin?

ALI: This is the heavyweight champion of the whole world, the fastest, the quickest, the most classiest, skillful, scientific creative fighter that was ever born. The onliest sport, the onliest prophet that ever hit the boxing game: Muhammad Ali, live, in color reporting to you from ABC's Wide World of Sports with Howard Cosell.

DAILY: More seriously now. What do you feel your religion offers you?

ALI: Well, number one: peace, peace of mind, being happy, a knowledge of self, a knowledge of my history, a knowledge of theirs, a knowledge of the times that we're living in today, and also it offers me a knowledge, of living clean, and offers me freedom, justice, and equality, it offers me a unity and brotherhood with some 750 million more people, that I couldn't cling to and recognize as brothers under the Baptist-Christian religion, and it offers me the brotherly love and unity of some 500 more thousand Muslims throughout the United States.

And I could go on days talking about the things it offers me. It offers me a dignity and race respect, it teaches me what to do and what not to do, where to go and where not to go, and this keeps me from getting into all the mob fights and riots and the racial conflicts that we have with the forced integrators and it keeps me out of that bunch, and it offers me, as I said, peace of mind, freedom, justice and equality.

DAILY: Now about the Negro working for himself, must he accept his role as depending only upon himself and refusing the help of the white man?

ALI: Number one. We don't use the term Negro.

DAILY: Black?

ALI: Yeah. Now I didn't say we can't trust the white man. It's good to have help. It's not all their own job (the black man's) they need help, they have to have help. But what I said, they should make some effort to do for self and offer to others who want to help, without just constantly begging and begging and laying on other men's doorstep, and run him out of his neighborhood and run him off his beaches and run him out of his restaurants, and you yourself won't clean up and do for your own self. Clean up yourself. We ask the people and the whites to clean up our slums, and ghettos, and rats. Well if you won't clean up your own rats and your own roaches you can't appreciate it. And then to turn around and ask the whites for equality; it's really silly for the slave to ask the master for equality, that would be embarrassing to the master and to the eyes of the civilized world, the intelligent world, to now recognize the slave as his equal when he's not ready to be nowhere near the master's equal.

So instead of asking the master to clean up the slums and the ghettos, what the Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us is that we should make some effort to clean it up and help ourselves... because, clean up the people mainly. The slum is not in the ghetto, the slum is in the people. You can take a people and put them in a trillion dollar housing project and if they're not right internally and mentally, they will take a trillion dollar project and in six months time make it a slum. But you can take the same people and put them in a slum, and clean them up mentally and internally, then they can make the slum a paradise. So the problem, and getting to the root of it is not in the slum, it's in the people. People make slums, slums don't make the people.

DAILY: It appears then that you somewhat follow the line advocated by Stokely Carmichael and the black power movement.

ALI:: Stokely Carmichael is repeating what the Honorable Elijah Muhammad has been teaching for 36 years. We don't follow Stokely Carmichael; he's a black brother of mine who means right and is doing a good job, but we follow Elijah Muhammad. I don't know who he follows, but what he's saying is from the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. He's been teaching us for 36 years in America. All this black power and new talk is nothing new to us.

DAILY: So then your object is to spread to youth the teachings of Elijah Muhammad?

ALI:: Right. And give them... and teach them about the history, discipline, cleanliness, and how to clean up self... respect self. Number one, we must be taught to respect the woman because this is another of the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, because the woman is like the field which produces our nation and if we don't protect and respect our womanhood we will produce a bad nation. A farmer will go out into the fields and he will spray anything that tries to kill his crops. We will even shoot one another for stealing the other one's crop. We will put up scarecrows to keep the enemies out of our fields. Now how much more important is a nation's women than its crops, when a woman produces your future; your daughters and your sons. And if we do not respect and protect our women, we can't be respected or protected by a white America.

DAILY: Just where does the black man stand?

ALI:: We're the onliest people who have slave names, we're the onliest people who don't know our history, or our nationality, or our culture.

We have been put in the condition of a man in prison. When a man goes to prison you strip him of the clothes that he wore when he was free and you give him stripes. When a man goes to prison his food changes. He don't eat the smothered steaks, the mashed potatoes, the creamed peas, the butter-light rolls that he ate when he was free. He eats prison food. When a man is in prison his language changes...a room is no longer a room, but it's a cell. A policeman is no longer a policeman but he's a bull or a turnkey. His name is no longer George, William, or Edward but its 345678921 or its 1123456 or its 2245897. When a man's in a jail, he's patriotic towards that jail. When he's in Alcatraz and he plays football, then he plays in the name; he's patriotic towards Alcatraz. Same with the Negro here in the wilderness of North America.

DAILY: What can the white man do, or what should he do from the standpoint of the Black Muslims?

ALI:: Number one, I say this. From my understanding we are not Black Muslims; we are Muslims, Islam has no color distinction. But in my understanding, which is nothing compared to our leader, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, what I would say is that the white man should just answer to his (Elijah Muhammad's) solution to the problem, and that's just repay us for the 400 years of free slave labor, 310 years, I'd say, working 16 hours a day, which enabled America to be 50 of the richest states of this planet. By dividing the country or sending us back to our homelands and supply our needs to start and operate a new government for the first 20 to 25 years.

And a peaceful solution is the onliest way he sees; a total separation of the races with a good send-off, and to be allowed to do and deal for ourselves and to be doctors, lawyers, carpenters, technicians, mechanics... one Negro makes glass for cars, one Negro makes the motor, one Negro helps to make the rubber, one Negro helps to make the body, one Negro helps spray it, paint it... put it together and you have a Cadillac. Well, this is what we are taught.

We should be allowed now, with the cotton-picking machines doing the work of a thousand slaves, they no longer need us for that labor all we have to do is walk around with no jobs. Twenty-two million people got to eat every day. Twenty-two million people got to buy their clothes. Got twenty-two million people who got to feed the children, and still be deprived of equal employment. Well now why not, if we are free then, let us exercise the right of being free and go and do for ourselves. It's not hatred, it's not hatred or racist, we just want a chance to build and do for ourselves. This country is owned and controlled by America: the whites. Why not let us go to ourselves, since we

can't seem to get along in peace after giving America our sweat and blood for 400 years, working 310 years for 16 hours a day with no pay, and still being brutalized and kicked across the country for just the mask of equality.

DAILY: Would this, then, be for all of America's black men?

ALI:: For all that want to be free and live among themselves. The ones who don't want to go, the ones who want to integrate, the ones who want to get beat up, or shot and kicked around, well they can stay there.

DAILY: In short, you just want the opportunity.

ALI:: We just want to be free and go to exercise and do for ourselves like other nations. Since there's no more slave-labor work, machines and automation's taken over and we're not needed for slavery no more, so why not then go somewhere else and do for self. Don't give us nothing, just repay us, don't give us nothing.

DAILY: All so-called civil rights advances are, then, ineffectual.

ALI:: Well listen. What they say is "token." If you take a token to ride a bus... token is something in the absence of real money, see. They're not really fighting for integration, they're just asking for token integration, which is something that is not solid, there's no future in it, there's no security or nothing and it might collapse at anytime.

DAILY: What do you feel about Negroes working within the political system of white America, for example, Senator Brooke of Massachusetts?

ALI:: I don't know too much about them. I'm sure that if they're black men that they're doing what they think is right to help bring freedom, justice and equality to 22 million black people in America. And as long as their intention is to help the problem, then although their approach may be different from ours, I'm still with them if they mean right.

DAILY: Finally a very crucial point in what you just said is that the individual is doing what he thinks and believes to be right. Do you feel that white men are doing what they think is right, or have they become slaves of their prejudices, and their history?

ALI:: I don't want to condemn or name no movements or names. I'd say some whites do what they think is right, although they may be wrong, same as many of us might be.

Copyright, 1967, *The Michigan Daily*.



Muhammad Ali
John Lottier
Muhammad Ali
The Loser and Still Champion

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/33-july-1-15-1967/muhammad-ali>
Fifth Estate #33, July 1-15, 1967

[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org)