



Clay's handlers hold him back as he reacts after the announcement of his win over Liston. AP Photo

By the end of the sixth round, puffy-eyed with a broken will, Sonny had had enough. At the beginning of the 7th round, he refused to get back up out of his corner, and Clay became the Champion of the World with a TKO.

The jubilant Champion ran to the ropes to confront his nay-sayers – **"Eat your words!"**

**"Eat your words!"** Later as the press tried to interview him, the ecstatic and uncontrollable Champ professed to the world, **"I must be the greatest! I shook up the world! I'm the King of the World! I'm Pretty! I'm a baaaad man! I shook up the World! I shook up the world! I shook up the world!"**

service and became forced to have his next four fights outside the U.S. including a rematch with Henry Cooper which he won in a similar fashion as the first fight but in the sixth round. Ali left Europe somewhat of a folk hero, as for five decades Title fights had only been held in the U.S. His global appeal continued to grow.

Ali went on to defend his title three more times after the Cooper fight through March 22, 1967 when he beat Zora Foley. His next challenger would prove to be his toughest opponent yet, the United States of America.

On April 28th, 1967 Muhammad Ali showed up as required to the Houston Induction Center for the U.S. Armed Forces. When his name was called for him to be accepted into the armed services, Ali stood quietly and refused to step forward. Ali refused to enter the war. He refused as a conscientious objector, one who will not participate in military service out of religious or moral beliefs. He felt the war was morally wrong and vowed to stand behind his convictions. **"I'm just letting you know that I'm gonna stick 1000% to my religious beliefs. Even if it means dying."** Ali knew that if he were drafted, he would be treated with celebrity status and probably never see combat, but that mattered little to him; he would not compromise his beliefs. **"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?"** For that reason, he later threw his Olympic Gold medal into the Ohio River in disgust at the continued poor treatment of blacks in the United States.

**"By him standing up as he did. It gave men of us much more courage than we had; it gave us much more hope than we ever had before." - BB King**



Ali jogging 1972 AP Photo

## A New Name

After the fight, the new Champ continued to reveal more surprises as he changed his name to Muhammad Ali after converting to the Nation of Islam also known as the Black Muslims. **"Cassius Clay was my slave name. I'm no longer a slave."** Many, including his parents, were alarmed by this group. They were preaching there should be segregation between blacks and whites, that whites were 'devils' and many other tenuous teachings. Along with the inventor of the group, Elijah Muhammad, the group had other charismatic leaders such as Malcolm X, who became great friends with Ali. It might be understandable that Ali embraced this group because of his disgust with continued segregation and poor treatment of blacks, but many felt the Black Muslims were preaching hate and their own brand of racism, which was a huge blow to Ali's popularity.

The Ali vs. Liston rematch was held in Lewiston, Maine on May 25th, 1965. The fight was attended by only a few thousand fans as promoters stayed away due to the controversy surrounding Ali. Ali knocked out Liston in the first round with a fast punch that became known as the Phantom punch. A famous photo was taken of Ali standing over Liston as he yelled - **"Get up you bum, no one's going to believe this!"** (see cover)

Six months later Ali took on the former champ Floyd Patterson. Ali punished him for 12 rounds before the referee stopped the fight in Ali's favor.

## Uncompromising Principles

With the Vietnam War underway, the draft board classified Ali as 1Y because he did not pass the aptitude test, which meant he would not be drafted. "I said I was the prettiest, not the smartest" remarked Ali. However, on February 14, 1966, the Army reclassified his draft status as 1A making him eligible for draft service.

Ali first heard this from the media who were gathering around his home soliciting his political beliefs about the Vietnam War. Surrounded by media inquires, he popped out a statement from his heart - **"I got no quarrel with those Vietcong. No Vietcong ever called me nigger."** This statement was picked up and widely circulated in the press and he was vilified for his position. He was called a draft dodger even before he officially refused to enter the

**"All boxers would sell their soul to become heavyweight champion of the world. What did Ali do? He regained his soul by giving it up. He gave up the title!"**

- Richard Harris, Actor & Friend

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Ali all along said he was going to fight the case within the rules - "I said I'm going to be a man and fight it legally. If I lose it I'm just going to jail." Finally on June 28th, 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling was announced - a unanimous decision in Ali's favor and all charges were dropped. He had taken on the establishment and won.



Ali toys with his friend, television sports commentator Howard Cosell. AP Photo

**"Wars of nations are fought to change maps. But wars of poverty are fought to map change." - Ali**