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## Biographical Study and Personality Analysis-Muhammad Ali

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**Muhammad Ali**, formerly known as Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr was born in 1742 in Louisville, Kentucky, US. His journey to greatness started when he was only 12 years old following the theft of his bicycle. He reported the theft to a local police officer, Joe Martin, and as fate would have it the officer who was also a boxing coach suggested to the tearful young Clay to learn boxing. Consequently, Martin became Clay's trainer in a local gym and from the onset it was apparent that Clay was highly talented.

After graduating high school, he took part in the 1960 Summer Olympics held in Rome and won the gold medal in the light heavyweight category. When he returned to the US he began his much-hyped professional career at age 22. In one of his biggest victories as a young professional Clay shocked the world when he defeated Sonny Liston. After the victory he is famously remembered saying, "I am the greatest." He went on to fight other great boxers such as George Chuvalo, Ernie Terrell among others. He outshined all of them with a combination of his swift, heavy jabs and foot speed (Oates, 2017).

Outside the ring, Clay was widely admired for his charisma and great personality. He used his popularity to create public awareness by, for example, reading children's poetry. However, he started receiving some criticism when he began associating himself with controversial Islam leader Malcom X. He later surprised many when he announced that he had changed his name to Muhammad Ali. In 1967, the US government asked Ali to join the Army and serve in the Vietnam War but Ali declined to serve which led to his immediate suspension from boxing and stripping of his heavyweight belt. He was also fined \$10,000 and banned from sports for five years. However, in 1970 the New York Supreme Court overturned the decision and ordered the reinstatement of his license. Soon after the suspension was lifted he made a comeback and went ahead to fight for another 10 years. In that period he won some of the most

fêted fights in history (Oates, 2017). Ali retired in 1981 having won a record 56 fights including 37 knockouts and only five losses.

After retirement Ali remained a key public figure in the US. His highly regarded reputation was evident when in the 1966 Olympics he held the caldron-lighter at the inaugural ceremony. He also received the revered Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2005 and later in the year opened the multi-million Muhammad Ali center in Louisville, a nonprofit institution focusing on social responsibility and peace. He was equally a respected guest during President Obama's swearing in ceremony. He also continued to receive endorsements from big companies such as Louis Vuitton and I.B.M. Ali died in mid-2016 aged 74.

Regarding his personality patterns, Ali started his boxing career as an ambitious young man. Despite being born and raised in the American south which was at the time synonymous with discrimination against blacks he defied the odds and became a good boxer. As attested by his coach, Ali was the most hardworking of all the children he was training which shows his ambitious side of life (Oates, 2017). Later, when Ali became famous as a result of winning several titles he remained focused on his career and values in life. He did not allow his celebrity status to engulf him in pride and bravado. That is partly why he turned down the offer to join the military because it was against his Islam values.

The above personality patterns had a number of positive effects on Ali's life and others. Having established what he wanted early in life, Ali became very charismatic and extroverted. In this regard, he liked to engage with many people and have many meaningful discussions with them. He would also shake hands with many people including children and spent a lot of time signing autographs. This is an indication that he was happy with his life and was willing to share his happiness with others. His desire to become successful and great also drove him to become

motivated, self-disciplined, responsible and organized. For instance, despite being suspended for three years he was determined to go back to the ring and defend his titles. However, his strong belief in his life values also affected him negatively especially when he declined to join the army. As a result of his refusal to join the army he was fined and suspended from boxing for a while.

Overall, Ali regarded himself as the greatest boxer of his time, going by his famous pronouncements before and after major fights. He also regarded himself as an advocate of black people's rights and other minority groups, which is part of the reason why he joined the Islam religion. Other people also held Ali in high regard from the onset of his career. For example, as a young professional he was supported and financed by a group of seven wealthy individuals.

Wherever he went he attracted huge crowds, hence proving his celebrity status. Also, as earlier mentioned he continued to play a key role in the American society even after retirement.

Whenever he faced challenges such as the suspension he continued to push harder and fought for his rights with zeal and determination. Undeniably, such determination, ambition, zeal coupled with his charisma were some of his personal and interpersonal strengths.

Based on Erikson's stages of psychological development, Ali must have started his boxing journey when he was in the 4<sup>th</sup> development stage of industry vs inferiority. During this stage young children interact with their peers in school and in other social settings. Through the interactions the children start to develop a sense of pride in their achievements and capabilities. Children who are praised by their guardians and teachers develop a sense of competence (Syed & McLean, 2017). For Ali's case, it is apparent that he developed the feeling of competence in his boxing abilities because his trainer Joe Martin kept encouraging and cheering him on.

In his high school years Ali was in the 5<sup>th</sup> stage, which is identity vs confusion. This teenage stage is associated with soul-searching as a teenager tries to figure out his/her identity in life. Lack of identity leads to confusion in the teen's life. Identity refers to ideals, goals, and beliefs that guide a person's behavior (Syed & McLean, 2017). For Ali his identity was that he was a "great man." This identity was reaffirmed by his trainer and the celebrity status that he attained among his peers. As a young professional who won major titles Ali was in the 7<sup>th</sup> stage of generativity vs stagnation. This stage is associated with the desire to have a long-lasting impact in life. As such, individuals strive for success in their social and professional lives. For Ali, it is evident that the desire to leave a mark in the world pushed him to become a great boxer. This must have made him feel a sense of accomplishment instead of feeling stagnant. After his retirement and in his old age, Ali was in the integrity vs despair stage. He must have reflected on his conduct as a boxer and his refusal to join the military. Perhaps his philanthropy and engagement in social activities was meant to fill the void on matters he felt he could have done more to impact society.

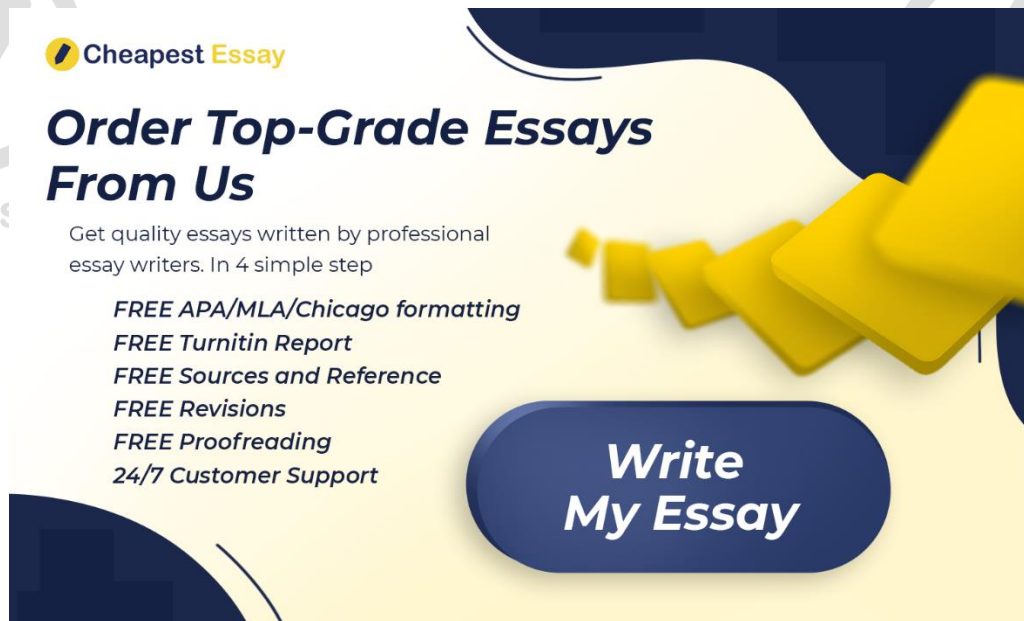
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