

KINO LORBER
i n c o r p o r a t e d

presents

THE TRIALS OF MUHAMMAD ALI

Directed by Bill Siegel
Produced by Rachel Pikelny

EST. 1966
KARTEMQUIN 
FILMS

2013 / 1.85:1 / 94 minutes / Color / US / English

A Kino Lorber Release
Kino Lorber, Inc.
333 West 39 St., Suite 503
New York, NY 10018
(212) 629-6880

Publicity Contact:
Julia Pacetti
JMP Verdant Communications
julia@jmpverdant.com



SYNOPSIS

No conventional sports documentary, *THE TRIALS OF MUHAMMAD ALI* investigates its extraordinary and often complex subject's life outside the boxing ring. From joining the controversial Nation of Islam and changing his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali, to his refusal to serve in the Vietnam War in the name of protesting racial inequality, to his global humanitarian work, Muhammad Ali remains an inspiring and controversial figure. Outspoken and passionate in his beliefs, Ali found himself in the center of America's controversies over race, religion, and war. From Kartemquin Films - makers of such acclaimed documentaries as *HOOP DREAMS* and *THE INTERRUPTERS* - and Academy Award-nominated director Bill Siegel (*THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND*), *THE TRIALS OF MUHAMMAD ALI* examines how one of the most celebrated sports champions of the 20th century risked his fame and fortune to follow his faith and conscience.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“Why another film on Muhammad Ali? Because no Ali film has deeply explored his exile years, his spiritual transformation and his impact on the world beyond the ring. This is an intimate film weaving artful and unseen archival footage, with contemporary interviews from firsthand sources, resulting in an intense, focused narrative with hard-hitting relevance. *THE TRIALS OF MUHAMMAD ALI* uses percussive sounds of the speed bag and heavy bag to drive and punctuate the story. It has tensions involving faith, race, duty, and identity. And when you personalize those tensions through the humanity of Muhammad Ali, it gives them depth and definition in ways that resonate now. Ultimately, it is a story that has at least as much to say about our society and how Ali's principles continue to challenge us as it does about his own transformation. In many ways, he stayed true to his beliefs and identity while the country changed around him.”

– Bill Siegel

CREDITS

Directed by Bill Siegel

Produced by Rachel Pikelny and Bill Siegel

Edited by Aaron Wickenden

Original Music by Joshua Abrams

Executive Producers – Leon Gast and Kat White

Executive Producer for ITVS – Sally Jo Figer

Executive Producers for Kartemquin Films – Justine Nagan and Gordon Quinn



ABOUT THE FILM

THE TRIALS OF MUHAMMAD ALI explores Ali's lifelong journey of spiritual transformation. From his Louisville roots, through his years in exile, to receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the film traces Ali's path from poet to pariah to global ambassador for peace. At each stage, the challenges Ali faces go far beyond the boxing ring and ultimately encompass issues of power, race, faith and identity that confront us all. THE TRIALS OF MUHAMMAD ALI is not a boxing film and has no highlight reel. Instead, it focuses on Ali's toughest bouts: his decision to join a controversial religious group, his battle to overturn a five-year prison sentence for refusing US military service, and his struggle with Parkinson's disease.

While other Ali films focus on his heroic exploits in the ring, they tragically under-examine some of the most noteworthy, provocative and resonant aspects of Ali's life, such as his relationship with the Louisville Sponsoring Group, the Nation of Islam, and his Muslim faith. Most of the interviewees have never been featured in any Ali film before, yet are central to his life story and the global impact he has made. Prior to becoming the most recognizable face on earth, Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali and found himself in the crosshairs of conflicts concerning race, religion, and wartime dissent. In 1964, when the 22-year-old, Olympic gold medalist wins his first heavyweight championship, he shouts, "I shook up the world!" But his earthshaking has only begun. Soon he announces he is a Muslim, a member of the Nation of Islam, and takes a new name: Muhammad Ali. After Ali is drafted to fight in the Vietnam War, he makes his defining expression of resistance: "No, I will not go 10,000 miles to continue the domination of white slave masters over the darker people of the earth."

In 1967, after the US government denies Ali's conscientious objector claim, he refuses military induction. The government convicts Ali of draft evasion, sentences him to five years in prison, and revokes his passport. Ali is banned from boxing and stripped of his title. He begins life in exile within the U.S., vilified in many corners at home, while becoming an international symbol of opposition to unjust war. As Ali files legal appeals round after round, all the way to the Supreme Court, he supports his family via a nationwide speaking tour, amidst a country divided over the war abroad and racism at home. Rare and riveting archival footage of Ali's fiery speeches on college campuses and fierce exchanges during TV appearances, show him fearlessly speaking his mind as he fights for freedom.

THE TRIALS OF MUHAMMAD ALI delves deeply into a time when an emerging sports superhero chooses faith and conscience over fame and fortune. The fury he faced from an American public enraged by his opposition to the Vietnam War and unwilling to accept his conversion to Islam, has global implications for generations now coming of age amidst con temporary fissures involving freedom, faith and military conflict. Archival scenes highlight the life forces who support and oppose him, including his spiritual mentors, Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad, and critics of his stance, such as Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis. Interviews shot exclusively for the film feature those who were there: his brother, Rahman; his bride, Khalilah Camacho-Ali; *New York Times* writer, Robert Lipsyte; and Nation of Islam leader, Louis Farrakhan. What emerges is the hidden history of Muhammad Ali.



FILMMAKERS BIOS

BILL SIEGEL - DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Bill Siegel has more than 20 years of experience in documentary filmmaking and education. He co-directed the Academy Award - nominated documentary *The Weather Underground*; was a researcher on the films *Muhammad Ali: The Whole Story* and *Hoop Dreams*; and a writer on *One Love*, a documentary on the cultural history of basketball by Leon Gast (*When We Were Kings*). Siegel is Vice President of School Programs for the Great Books Foundation, a non-profit educational organization dedicated to literacy and lifelong learning.

RACHEL PIKELNY - PRODUCER

Rachel is a producer affiliated with Kartemquin Films, where she produced *The Trials of Muhammad Ali* and co-producing *Mormon Movie*. She recently served as associate producer on *A Good Man*, which aired on PBS' *American Masters* in November 2011. Previously, she co-produced Kartemquin's films *American Arab* and *On Beauty*, both now in post-production.

With documentary production house The Kindling Group, Rachel recently served as production coordinator for "What's Your Calling?" - the companion web engagement campaign for *The Calling*, a four-hour documentary miniseries broadcast on PBS' Independent Lens in December 2010. Rachel spent several years at Kurtis Productions, creating episodes of *Cold Case Files* for A&E and *American Greed* for CNBC.

She also produces promotional content for Fortune 500 companies such as Pepsi and LKQ Corporation, and serves on committees for the News & Documentary Emmy Awards, the Chicago Short Film Brigade and the Hugo Television Awards.

AARON WICKENDEN - EDITOR

Aaron Wickenden is a filmmaker with extensive experience as an editor and cinematographer. His recent accomplishments include: Co-Editor and Post Supervisor for Kartemquin's *The Interrupters*, Documentary Cinematographer and Post Supervisor for Andrew Bird: *Fever Year*, and Producer and Cinematographer for multi-media content on *The New Yorker* website. Prior to that, Wickenden Co-Produced and Co-Edited Steve James' *At the Death House Door* for Kartemquin and IFC, and was Associate Editor and Post Supervisor on *The War Tapes*.

Wickenden's editing credits also include *Scrappers*, named one of the top 15 docs of 2010 by Roger Ebert. He is currently working on a number of projects in various stages of development. Wickenden is a Cinematographer for *Mormon Movie*, Editor on *Finding Vivian Maier*, Editing Advisor for *Street Fighting Man* and *Keepers of the Earth*, and a Consultant on WBEZ's *Curious City*. In addition, along with filmmaker Dan Rybicky, he is Co-Directing and Co-Producing a Kartemquin documentary titled *Almost There*, which has been six years in the making.



EXECUTIVE PRODUCER BIOS

KARTEMQUIN FILMS - JUSTINE NAGAN AND GORDON QUINN, Executive Producers

Kartemquin is a collaborative center for documentary media makers who seek to foster a more engaged and empowered society. With a noted tradition of nurturing emerging talent and acting as a leading voice for independent media, Kartemquin is building on over 45 years of being Chicago's documentary powerhouse. Kartemquin sparks democracy through documentary. Their films, such as *The Interrupters*, *Hoop Dreams*, and *The New Americans*, are among the most acclaimed documentaries of all time, leaving a lasting impact on millions of viewers. Kartemquin is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization. www.kartemquin.com

Justine Nagan, Executive Director, has led Kartemquin since 2008, guiding strategic vision and daily operations while serving as Executive Producer on new films. She also directed *Typeface* (2009), and was Associate Producer on the Peabody award-winner *Mapping Stem Cell Research: Terra Incognita* (2008).

Gordon Quinn, Artistic Director, is the co-founder of Kartemquin. He has been producing documentaries and mentoring filmmakers for five decades. A passionate advocate for independent media makers, he is a noted expert on issues of fair use, ethics and storytelling in documentary.

LEON GAST, Executive Producer

Leon Gast directed the Academy Award-winning documentary, *When We Were Kings*, about the Muhammad Ali-George Foreman 'Rumble in the Jungle' heavyweight title bout in Zaire. He has directed numerous other documentary films, including *Our Latin Thing* (1972) and *Salsa* (1977), both of which anticipated the huge influence Latin American music now has on American culture. His latest documentary about photographer Ron Galella, *Smash His Camera*, premiered at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival.

KAT WHITE, Executive Producer

Kat White is a principal in KatLei Productions and has enjoyed a multifaceted career supporting the film and dramatic arts, including current involvement in Broadway's *Kinky Boots* and *Macbeth*, and *Somewhere in Time*, premiering at Portland Center Stage summer 2013. In addition to serving as Executive Producer on *The Trials of Muhammad Ali*, she is an Executive Producer on Kartemquin Films' *Life Itself*, a documentary on film critic Roger Ebert, slated for an early 2014 release. Past film credits include *Grace is Gone*, *The Promotion*, *Drunkboat*, *Ca\$h*, and *The Merry Gentlemen*.