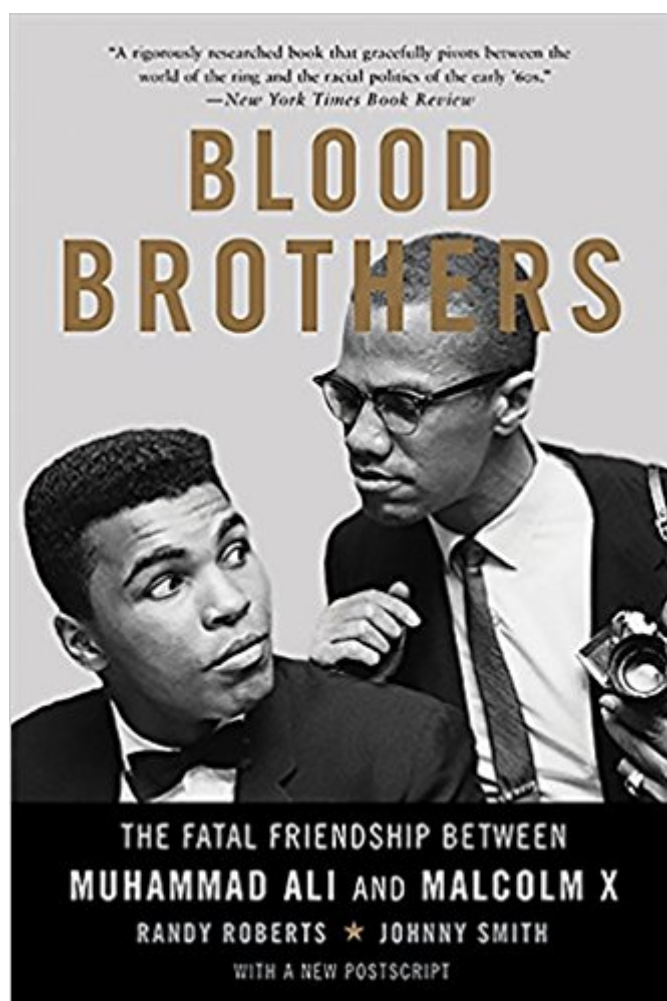


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Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship Between Muhammad Ali And Malcolm X



Synopsis

In 1962, boxing writers and fans considered Cassius Clay an obnoxious self-promoter, and few believed that he would become the heavyweight champion of the world. But Malcolm X, the most famous minister in the Nation of Islam—a sect many white Americans deemed a hate cult—saw the potential in Clay, not just for boxing greatness, but as a means of spreading the Nation’s message. The two became fast friends, keeping their interactions secret from the press for fear of jeopardizing Clay’s career. Clay began living a double life—a patriotic and good Negro in public, and a radical reformer behind the scenes. Soon, however, their friendship would sour, with disastrous and far-reaching consequences. Based on previously untapped sources, from Malcolm’s personal papers to FBI records, *Blood Brothers* is the first book to offer an in-depth portrait of this complex bond. Acclaimed historians Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith reconstruct the worlds that shaped Malcolm and Clay, from the boxing arenas and mosques, to postwar New York and civil rights-era Miami. In an impressively detailed account, they reveal how Malcolm molded Cassius Clay into Muhammad Ali, helping him become an international symbol of black pride and black independence. Yet when Malcolm was barred from the Nation for criticizing the philandering of its leader, Elijah Muhammad, Ali turned his back on Malcolm—a choice that tragically contributed to the latter’s assassination in February 1965. Malcolm’s death marked the end of a critical phase of the civil rights movement, but the legacy of his friendship with Ali has endured. We inhabit a new era where the roles of entertainer and activist, of sports and politics, are more entwined than ever before. *Blood Brothers* is the story of how Ali redefined what it means to be a black athlete in America—after Malcolm first enlightened him. An extraordinary narrative of love and deep affection, as well as deceit, betrayal, and violence, this story is a window into the public and private lives of two of our greatest national icons, and the tumultuous period in American history that they helped to shape.

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Customer Reviews

Winner of the 2017 North American Society for Sport History Book Award
Wall Street Journal, David Margolick: "[An] absorbing and provocative new book... An engrossing and important book."
New York Times Book Review: "A rigorously researched book that gracefully pivots between the world of the ring and the racial politics of the early '60s."
Washington Post: "Earnest and...smartly constructed."
National Review, James Rosen: "Exhaustively researched and tautly written, Blood Brothers marks a milestone in the biographical literature of Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, an invaluable addition to our understanding of America in the 1960s. In all it touches the far-flung but interconnected worlds of race, religion, politics, sports, cities, organized crime, and the news media...this sober and detailed book, a dual biography that alternates between protagonists like a suspense novel, renders profound service. The authors unearth reams of new evidence, shine light on long-overlooked episodes, and hack away at the barnacles of mythology, thereby giving us the finest portrait yet of the doomed relationship that transformed Cassius Clay into Muhammad Ali."
Economist: "Though their individual lives have been explored through previous books and movies, Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship Between Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X delves into the close kinship these men shared, and the reasons it ultimately fell apart."
Library Journal: "This book offers a significant contribution to serious studies of Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, and the Nation of Islam."
New York Post: "The authors give us a thorough examination of the relationship between the two icons in the context of the black experience and the turbulent 1960s. White America blamed Malcolm for Cassius Clay's transformation to Muhammad Ali, but the truth is more complicated, involving the split between Malcolm and the Nation of Islam. We're brought back to the champ's early boxing days and see how the brash Ali whom America came to know developed."
City Journal: "The broad outlines of the Ali/Malcolm drama are well known, but Roberts and Smith emphasize how crucial each was to the other's destiny: Ali's as a global figure of black pride and Malcolm's as a martyred black visionary. They provide more exhaustive detail than previously available, aided by newly released FBI files and personal papers. And they infuse the tale with sharp insights and an impending sense of tragedy...Blood Brothers reminds us of a time when an

heroic image of Ali would have seemed as unlikely as the idea that Cassius Clay could beat Sonny Liston, or that a big-budget Hollywood film would someday venerate the life of Malcolm X."Publishers Weekly:[A] provocative history...Roberts and Smith map the relationship between the troubled icons in painstaking detail and debunk long-held assumptions about their break...Roberts and Smith bring a fresh perspective to the story in the civil rights movement, and capture the ferment of the broader era."Kirkus Reviews:"[Roberts and Smith] sharply detail Malcolm's growing disillusionment with Elijah, his heartbreak at the loss of Ali's allegiance, and the ugly dynamic within the Nation that left the defiant minister murdered. A page-turning tale from the 1960s about politics and sports and two proud, extraordinary men whose legacies endure."The Times:"Thanks to Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith's enthralling narrative we now have a better understanding of how a complex relationship was born, and how it fell apart."Boston Globe, Allen Barra:A unique hybrid of race, politics, and sports; it is easy to read yet gives rise to sober reflection. It fills a gap in our understanding of one of the most fascinating relationships in American history."Louisville Courier-Journal:"Historians Roberts and Smith have written the first book examining the complex bond between the two men, who met in 1962 as the young Louisville boxer Cassius Clay was making a name for himself."Booklist:"Roberts and Smith portray both of these courageous and controversial, inspired and inspiring men with fresh, stinging clarity, and extend our perception of the interconnectivity of race, religion, sports, and media during this violent and transformative era, which is so very germane today."Los Angeles Times:"Armed with redacted FBI files and rare archival material, the historians challenge standard accounts of the friendship and use their revision to illuminate the moment when the civil rights era, anti-colonial struggles and the baby boomers' coming of age coalesced to reshape the world in ways that still resonate...In convincing detail, Blood Brothers traces Ali's rise to international celebrity while Malcolm was stalked and harassed by the Fruit of Islam, the paramilitary group that enforced obedience to the church."Dallas Morning News:"In the most detailed account to date of this fascinating bond, professors of history Randy Roberts (Purdue) and Johnny Smith (Georgia Tech) unveil a story few Americans know, arguing that Ali and Malcolm were much more than mere acquaintances; their symbiotic relationship, with Ali as pupil and Malcolm as mentor, was deeply important to each man. From beginning to end, Blood Brothers is a story of transformation."Washington Times:"Blood Brothers is shedding light on the secret friendship between boxing great Muhammad Ali and civil rights leader Malcolm X.""In earlier works, Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith have used their skills as professional historians to pierce the veil of myth, hero worship, and hype that mars so much sports journalism. In this illuminating joint effort, Blood Brothers tells the story of a strange friendship marked by initial affection, cold

manipulation, and ultimate estrangement. They show that Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X, so brave and assertive in their public lives, shared another bond stronger than friendship: fear of assassination by their spiritual mentor, Elijah Muhammad."-Howell Raines, former executive editor of the New York Times"There's brilliant history in this crackling story of two men whose tragic brotherhood changed America. Absorbing and essential reading."-Robert Lipsyte, former sports columnist for the New York Times"Well researched and spritely written, Blood Brothers is, by far, the most complete and detailed account of the friendship between Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X, and how black nationalist politics profoundly changed how black athletes saw big-time sports in America. Blood Brothers fills in important gaps for those who know the story and provides a gripping, informative history for those who do not."-Gerald Early, editor of the Muhammad Ali Reader and author of A Level Playing Field: African American Athletes and the Republic of Sports

Randy Roberts is a distinguished professor of history at Purdue University. An award-winning author, he has written biographies of iconic athletes and celebrities, including Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Bear Bryant, and John Wayne. Roberts lives in Lafayette, Indiana. Johnny Smith is an assistant professor of American history at Georgia Tech. He is the author of The Sons of Westwood: John Wooden, UCLA, and the Dynasty that Changed College Basketball. Smith lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

Those of us who lived through the Sixties can remember the chaos which ensued as the federal government began to intervene in the segregation and racial discrimination which still existed in the American South. The Nation of Islam was a more militant response to the racial divide than the non-violent methods employed by Martin Luther King. Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X were the "true" names adopted by the two men as they entered the Nation of Islam and both were initially vilified by the white media. As historians, the authors extensively document the brief, but true friendship which existed between the men before Malcolm's assassination in 1965. Ali, of course, got the chance to completely redeem his image before his death this year. Sadly, Malcolm never got this chance. This excellent book provides a window into the character of each man without the veneer which acolytes are wont to provide.

Someone once said words to the effect of "Show me someone with heroes, and I'll show you someone in the third grade." That's a bit harsh, but there's more than a kernel of truth to the statement. For the last thirty years or so (since pugilistic dementia/Parkinson's had him in its grip),

Muhammad Ali's handlers have been speaking for him. Randy Roberts and his co-author take us back to a time when Ali could speak for himself, and, more importantly, act for himself. Ali, like any other man saddled with the label of "greatness" didn't always act like a great or even a good guy. The book does a good job of chronicling the two separate lives of men born Cassius Clay and Malcolm Little, respectively. The work charts, in strong journalistic fashion, the rise of one man through the ranks of the heavyweight boxing circuit, and the course of another man through the echelons of the Nation of Islam. At a certain point in the book, Malcolm X discovers that the man he worshiped and obeyed, Elijah Muhammad, was a serial adulterer, embezzler, and all around conman. It was at this point that X's life was in danger, and also at this juncture that Muhammad Ali was forced to choose between the Nation and Malcolm. He chose the former, and (the author argues credibly) helped seal the fate of his one-time friend and mentor, who was gunned down in the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem shortly after Ali defected from his friend's side. There are no heroes in this book, and the honor of now-canonized figures is even challenged at points. Malcolm used Muhammad to a certain extent, just as callously as perhaps Ali threw his old blood brother under the bus. I came away from this book with a better understanding of the black nationalist history of the turbulent 1960s, as well as with a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. The book is good, but it's not necessarily the kind of thing you want to read in the wake of Ali's death. Recommended, although be prepared to lose a little more faith in the American project and humanity in general.

Most history books can be boring if you do not have a vested interest in the topic. Blood Brothers is a well written and researched narrative of how Cassius Clay evolved into Muhammad Ali. We know about the influences of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X - these relationships have been well documented. What I found interesting was the relationship with his father, Cassius Clay Sr., and Gorgeous George, the famed wrestler. The book covers the period of the 1960's from the conclusion of the Rome Olympic Games to the assassination of Malcolm X. To document the life of Muhammad Ali would take volumes. The sports media plays a pivotal component in the persona of Ali. This book mentions journalists who are not as famous as Howard Cosell, but superstars of the written word. While Ali single-handedly resurrected the sport of boxing when it was on support life, he was in search of his true self. He was learning to differentiate between the man and the myth, the athlete and the entertainer. With Malcolm as his mentor, teacher, and brother, Ali was set on a path to become a worldwide icon. The postscript is not to be missed. While time heals wounds, it is the words of Malcolm's daughter, Attallah that ties everything together. Do not get caught in the trap of seeing Black Muslims and assuming negativity. Focus on the growth and change in the mind set of

Malcolm X and eventually Muhammad Ali. A Must Read for Black History Month.

An excellent, detailed, and highly entertaining history on the relationship between two complex, and important men. As an admirer of both men, I was delighted to learn that there was a scholarly work focusing exclusively on the relationship of Ali and X, and how that relationship evolved over time. In this unflinching look at the Champ and the Civil Rights icon, the authors provide the reader with a comprehensive and unbiased study of the men, their motives, and the world they inhabited. While some of what I learned made me take a more nuanced, and less admiring view of the men, in other respects I came to appreciate them even more than I did before I began Blood Brothers. For those who have an interest in Ali and X, or for those looking for a great book on an important chapter in the Civil Rights movement and its lasting legacy, Blood Brothers will not disappoint. I only wish it was longer

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