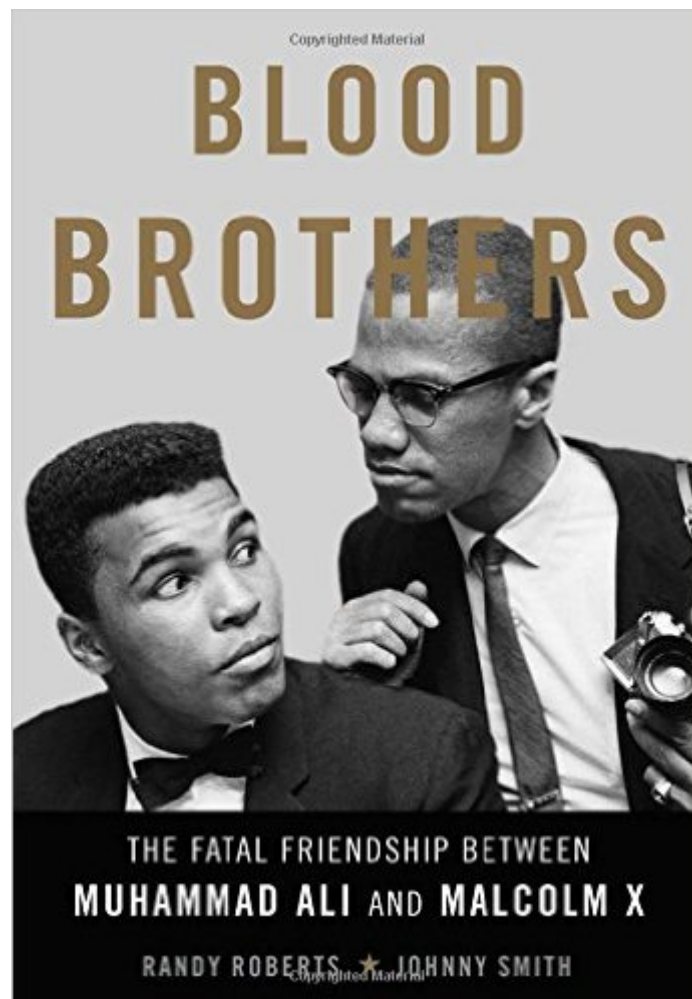


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# Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship Between Muhammad Ali And Malcolm X



## 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 “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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This excellent book paints wonderfully visual word pictures about the relationship between famed -- and now revered -- heavyweight champion Muhammed Ali and Malcolm X, the charismatic "minister" of the Nation of Islam who was assassinated by his former colleagues when he clashed with the NOI leader Elijah Muhammed. Co-authors Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith are eminently qualified to write this book, as both professional historians (Roberts is a professor at Perdue, Smith at Georgia Tech) and experienced biographers of sports figures. Using their powers of research and their connections in the world of sports, Roberts and Smith have done a superlative job of recreating the events surrounding Ali's (then Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr.) rise from the slums of Louisville, KY, to the Olympic Gold Medal in light heavyweight boxing, to the heavyweight boxing world championship, which he won at age 22. Concurrently, the authors trace the life of Malcolm Little from foster care to prison to follower of Elijah Muhammed. When their paths cross, Clay and Malcolm become close friends, with Malcolm's teachings and influence leading to Clay's joining what became known in the popular press as the Black Muslims. Racism was in the forefront of American politics in the early 1960s, with the main focus of the press on the non-violent efforts toward desegregation led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Nation of Islam and Malcolm X, however, had another view of racism -- they believed Elijah Muhammed's teaching that white people were "blue eyed Devils" who would eventually be overthrown by Allah's intervention. Far from wanting integration, they firmly believed in segregating the races.

Randy Roberts and Johnny Smith are historians with a passion for sports. This book embraces both the sport of boxing, the rise and fall and rise again with Cassius Clay turned Muhammad Ali and the relationship Ali had with Malcolm X, Elijah Mohammed. The civil rights movement and the rise of the Nation of Islam are in the background. The book begins with Ali's victory at the 1960 Olympics in Rome, his interest in Islam after hearing Elijah Mohammed speak, and his rise in the boxing world. While Ali shared a troubled childhood with Malcolm X, both had different philosophies about the struggles of American blacks and their roles in the civil rights movement. Malcolm X is devoted to

black supremacy. Ali just wants to win the world heavyweight championship and flaunt his greatness. Elijah Mohammed secretly vents over Malcolm's rise in the Nation of Islam (NoI) but keeps Malcolm X as one of his supreme ministers because his charm and articulation bring in many converts to the NoI. As history has shown, the NoI and the civil rights movement were at odds from the start. They were the more radical of the groups and in opposition to Martin Luther King's more pacifist ways. The FBI conducted surveillance on Malcolm X and later Ali. The authors write in an engaging manner. By 1963 it's clear that Ali has converted, but tries to hide his affiliation with the NoI from the public. Malcolm X and Ali meet and form a friendship at a time when Malcolm X was already sensing his days with the NoI numbered, after his rather dubious comment when President Kennedy was killed in Dallas. But to me Malcolm's fascination with Ali in early 1964 seemed more as a way to save his future, rather than as a true friendship.

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