

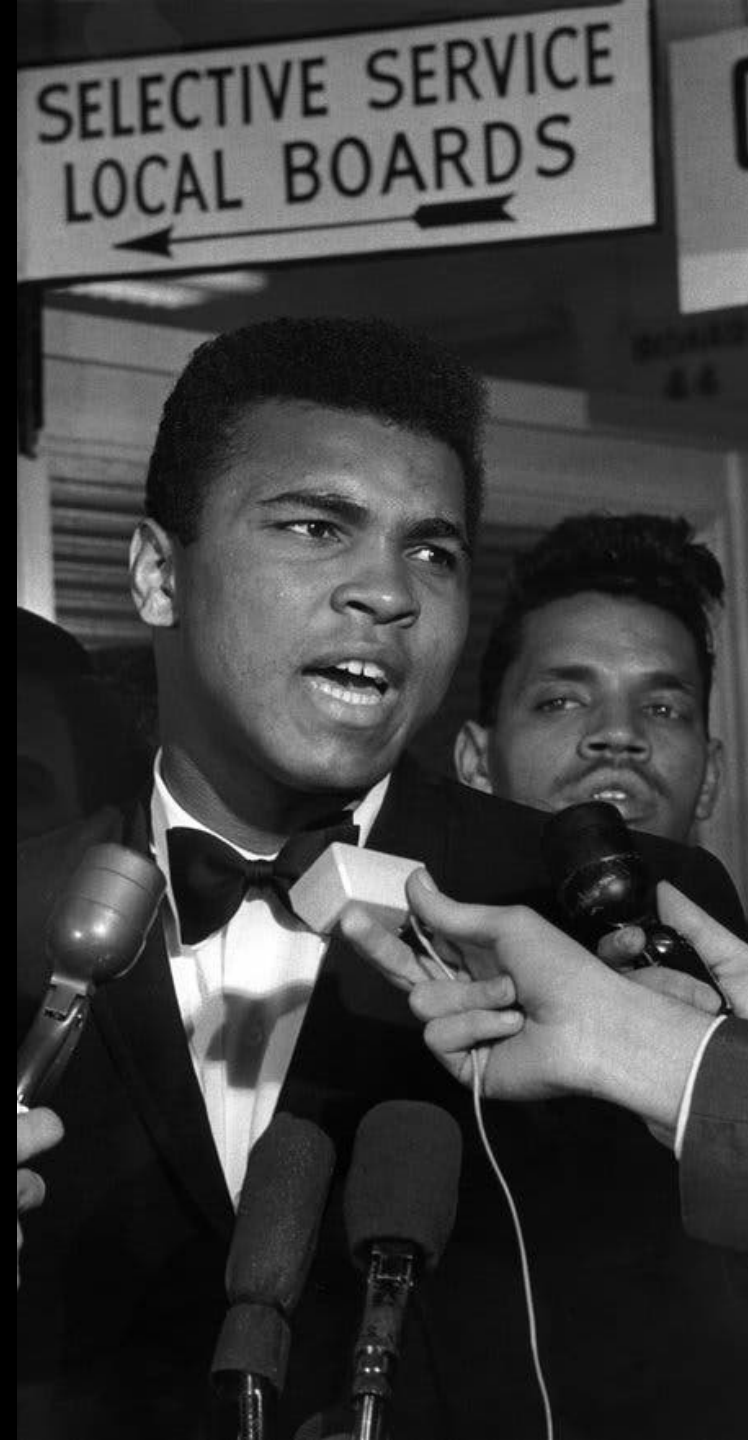
# **“The Trials of Muhammad Ali” From Boxer to Conscientious Objector**

## **Taking A Stand Speaking His Truth**

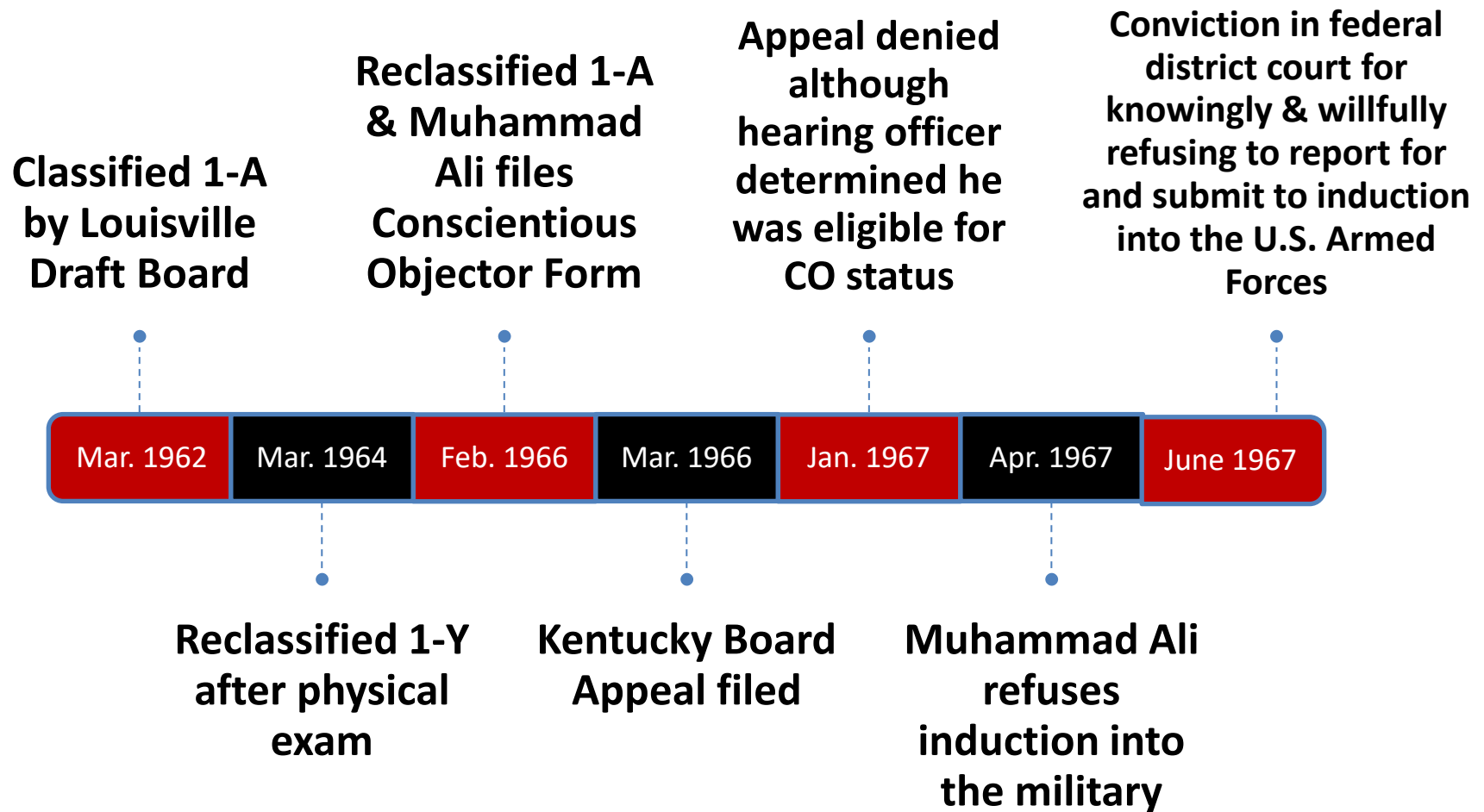
A Film Discussion Led By Enid Trucios-Haynes about the HBO Film  
Professor of Law, Louis D. Brandeis School of Law  
University of Louisville – February 27, 2014

# In His Own Words

- . . . I have searched my conscience and I find I cannot be true to my belief in my religion by accepting such a call [to be inducted]. . . There is another alternative and that alternative is justice. If justice prevails, if my Constitutional rights are upheld, I will be forced to go neither to the Army nor jail. . . .”
- (Press Statement Upon Refusing Induction, April 1967)



# The Facts



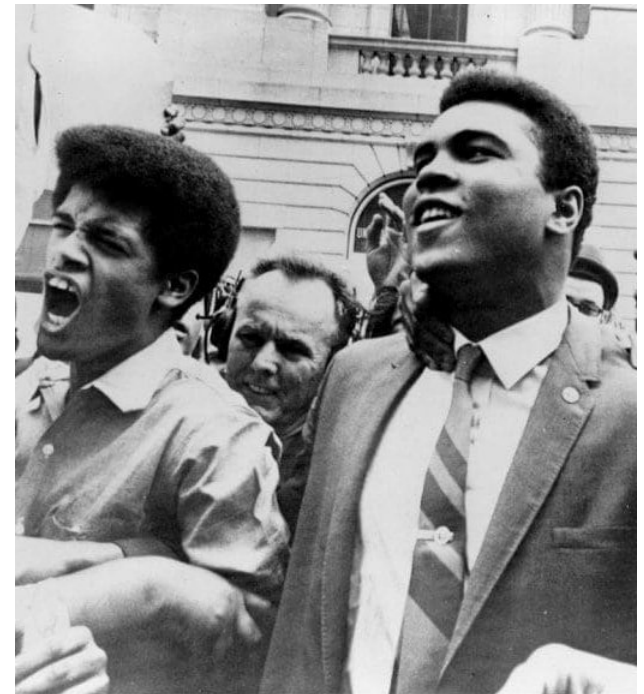


# Muhammad Ali's Legal Arguments Against the U.S. Government

- The draft board decision violated the U.S. Constitution's equality guarantee because of lack of Blacks representation on local Selective Service Boards
- The draft board decision was not impartial decision making due to political and other pressures
- His Conscientious Objector Exemption improperly denied
- His Ministerial Exemption as Minister of Nation of Islam improperly denied

# Other Judicial Proceedings

- **March 1969 – U.S. Supreme Court vacates Muhammad Ali’s conviction and the convictions of many others to determine if any illegal electronic surveillance was used in the prosecution of his case.**
- **Department of Justice admitted that there were at least 5 illegally wiretapped conversations of Muhammad Ali.**
- **A later judicial decision found that wiretapped conversations had no impact, and Ali’s conviction was reinstated.**



*Ali surrounded by supporters and press outside  
Forces Examining and Entrance Station in*

Courtesy: Library of Congress

# During Ali's Judicial Appeals (1967-1971)



*Ali was an early critic of the Vietnam War*

Courtesy: Library of Congress

**EXILED FROM BOXING**

**He lost his ability to box during the appeals**

**His boxing license was rescinded in 1967**

**His passport was held by the federal district court**

## Ali – Exiled From Boxing

Muhammad Ali supported his family by lecturing on college campuses across the U.S. about his opposition to the war.



[Ali greets students at the St John's University campus in Queens, New York in May 1968](#)

# The Law Relating to Ali's Conscientious Objector Claim

## **Section 6(j) of the Military Selective Service Act of 1967 (1964 ed.):**

**'Nothing contained in this title \* \* \* shall be construed to require any person to be subject to combatant training and service in the armed forces of the United States who, by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.**

**In order to qualify for classification as a conscientious objector, a registrant must satisfy three basic tests:**

- **He must show that he is conscientiously opposed to war in any form.**
- **He must show that this opposition is based upon religious training and belief.**
- **He must show that this objection is sincere.**



# The U.S. Supreme Court Decision June 1971

- Muhammad Ali was wrongly denied Conscientious Objector status.
- The Kentucky Appeals Board was led to believe by the U.S. Department of Justice that Ali failed to satisfy each of the three basic tests for qualification as a conscientious objector.
- The Department of Justice recommendation to the Kentucky Appeals Board “was simply wrong as a matter of law in advising that the petitioner's beliefs were not religiously based and were not sincerely held.”

# The Supreme Court Decision

- **The Kentucky Appeals Board did not provide explicit reasons for denying the conscientious objector claim.**
- **Where it is not clear that an Appeals Board relied on some legitimate ground, a conviction must overturned.**
- **The integrity of the Selective Service System demands, at least, that the Government not recommend illegal grounds.**

# U.S. Supreme Court Justice Douglas' Concurring Opinion

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- **There is no valid reason to deny Conscientious Objector status**
  - **Muhammad Ali's "testimony adds up to ... that he believes only in war as sanctioned by the Koran, that is to say, a religious war against nonbelievers. All other wars are unjust."**
  - **"That is a matter of belief, of conscience, of religious principle."**

# Final Notes on the Case

- Some say Muhammad Ali won his case on a technicality since the Kentucky Appeal Board did not provide reasons.
- Four Justices were willing to find that the beliefs of the Nation of Islam were against war in any form which would have meant all followers would be eligible for Conscientious Objector Status.
- Justice Douglas was willing to state this publicly in his concurring opinion.
- The Supreme Court always relies on more narrow grounds for its decisions whenever possible to ensure its own future legitimacy.

# Muhammad Ali's Truth

*“We all are searching for truth. . . We all look back at the crossroads of our lives. . . Did I make the right choice?*

*Did I stand for what I believe in?”*

- When announcing his conversion to Islam after winning his first championship fight: “I don’t have to be what you want me to be. I can be who I want to be and think what I want to think.”
- Referring to other civil rights leaders: “We are all fighting for freedom & equality.”
- After the Supreme Court decision: “I was 100% representing my people. I am here to show you can be yourself, be 100% free and get respect from the world.”

# Ali's Six Core Principles from the Muhammad Ali Center

- Confidence -- Belief in oneself, one's abilities, and one's future.
- Conviction -- A firm belief that gives one the courage to stand behind that belief, despite pressure to do otherwise.
- Dedication -- The act of devoting all of one's energy, effort, and abilities to a certain task.
- Giving -- To present voluntarily without expecting something in return.
- Respect -- Esteem for, or a sense of the worth or excellence of, oneself and others.
- Spirituality -- A sense of awe, reverence, and inner peace inspired by a connection to all of creation and/or that which is greater than oneself.

# Contact Information

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