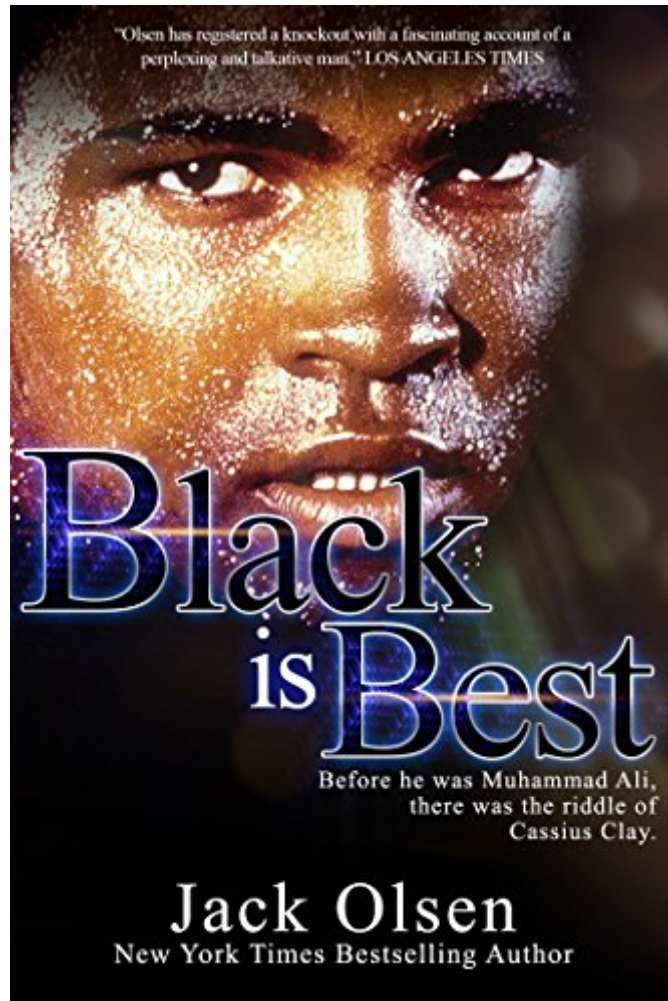


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Black Is Best: The Riddle Of Cassius Clay



Synopsis

Before he was Muhammad Ali, there was the riddle of Cassius Clay. Jack Olsen's book on Clay was called one of the best sports biographies of all time by the editors of Sports Illustrated. Although perhaps the world's best known athlete, Cassius Clay is far more important as an American phenomenon of the 1960's than as a prizefighter. In his career as a boxer, he followed a traditional, even a stereotyped road to the top for a Negro, but his distortion of the American rags-to-riches story is peculiarly his own. When he defeated Sonny Liston for the world's heavyweight championship in 1964, he was hailed by press and public alike as the clean-cut kid who would, by his exemplary life, restore wholesomeness to the tainted world of boxing. Now, three years later, he has made a hash of these earlier impressions. His affair with the Black Muslims, his outspoken support of black power, his inflammatory statements about Vietnam and his controversial draft status have all contributed to the vilification to which he is currently subjected. *Black is Best* is an attempt by Jack Olsen to put the contradictory images of Clay into a single focus. Olsen talked at length with those who have surrounded Clay -- his family, his first boxing coach, his trainer, his physician, the group of white businessmen who gave him his start and dozens of others, thereby allowing those closest to the champion to offer, through observation and anecdote, their own interpretations of what makes Cassius run. Even more to the point, the author dogged Clay's footsteps and his own account of what he saw and heard, including Clay's extensive conversations, presents a firsthand record of the life of a truly puzzling personality. What emerges is a character portrait that is an almost perfect distillate of many of the problems that confront America today. A confessed bigot, a part-time demagogue, pulled by so many opposing factions that he himself often seems confused about his real identity, Clay has sought to develop his own ideals and his own conscience. That they stand in sharp variance from the standards of White America is inevitable, and it is only slightly less inevitable that they should be in conflict with the beliefs of the majority of his own race, indeed of his own family. But behind this public pose, behind the hundreds of thousands of words, pro and con, that have been written about Clay, there lies yet another human being, a troubled and sensitive young man filled with doubts and fears and private dreams. It is this Clay that Olsen ultimately reaches, the man as well as the symbol. The award-winning author of thirty-three books, Jack Olsen's books have been published in fifteen countries and eleven languages. Olsen's journalism earned the National Headliners Award, Chicago Newspaper Guild's Page One Award, commendations from Columbia and Indiana Universities, the Washington State Governor's Award, the Scripps-Howard Award and other honors. He was listed in *Who's Who in America* since 1968 and in *Who's Who in the World* since 1987. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* described him as "an

American treasure."Olsen was described as "the dean of true crime authors" by the Washington Post and the New York Daily News and "the master of true crime" by the Detroit Free Press and Newsday. Publishers Weekly called him "the best true crime writer around." His studies of crime are required reading in university criminology courses and have been cited in the New York Times Notable Books of the Year. In a page-one review, the Times described his work as "a genuine contribution to criminology and journalism alike."Olsen is a two-time winner in the Best Fact Crime category of the Mystery Writers of America, Edgar award.

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Customer Reviews

Muhammad Ali is a beloved American icon, who bravely refused to fight in the Vietnam War before the majority of the country agreed with him, suffered a 3 year exile from boxing because of his convictions and upon his return cemented his legend with a trilogy of brutal fights with Joe Frazier and eventually regaining his heavyweight championship two more times. An adoring public transformed him into a plaster saint and admiring biographers would confer upon him mystical powers. In his prime, he was the most recognizable athlete in the world. Despite the millions of

words written about him, only one biographer ever attempted, as Jack Olsen does in this biography, to determine his "character, his attitudes, the fears and forces that drive him". This biography was published in 1967, before the general public even accepted his new Black Muslim conferred name of Muhammad Ali and he was still known as Cassius Clay. So who was the future Muhammad Ali? According to Mr. Olsen, figuring out who the real Cassius Clay is "parlor game that has proved unrewarding even for experts. Clay's personality is like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces were cut by a drunken carpenter, a jumbled collection of moods and attitudes that do not seem to interlock." He quotes his personal physician, Dr. Pacheco, who describes Clay as a "thoroughly confused person...there is no cohesion of thought from one personality to the others. He is capable of all kinds of paradoxes" What makes this the best biography written on Muhammad Ali is the author's access to the Clays of Louisville. He introduces us to the Clay family: Clay's father & mother and multitudes of uncles and aunts and 33 cousins. Mr. Olsen writes that "flair, energy, and a degree of class emanate from almost all of them".

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