

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT

Lisa Tawil, ITVS	415-356-8383	lisa_tawil@itvs.org
Mary Lugo	770-623-8190	lugo@negia.net
Cara White	843-881-1480	cara.white@mac.com

For downloadable images, visit pbs.org/pressroom/

THE TRIALS OF MUHAMMAD ALI
PREMIERES ON *INDEPENDENT LENS*
MONDAY, APRIL 14, 2014

**How the Legendary Athlete Risked Fame and Fortune
to Follow His Faith and Conscience**

(San Francisco, CA) — *The Trials of Muhammad Ali* explores the extraordinary and complex life of the legendary athlete outside the boxing ring. From joining the controversial Nation of Islam and changing his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali, from 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 crosshairs of conflicts concerning race, religion, and wartime dissent. Directed by Academy Award-nominated director Bill Siegel, *The Trials of Muhammad Ali* examines how one of the most celebrated sports champions of the 20th century risked fame and fortune to follow his faith and conscience. The film premieres on *Independent Lens*, hosted by Stanley Tucci, on Monday, April 14, 2014, 10:00-11:30 PM ET on PBS ([check local listings](#)).

Focusing on some of the most noteworthy, provocative, and resonant aspects of the legendary athlete's life, *The Trials of Muhammad Ali* explores his lifelong journey of spiritual transformation. From his Louisville roots through his years in exile to receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Ali's path was that of poet to pariah to global ambassador for peace.

In 1964, when the 22-year-old Olympic gold medalist won his first heavyweight championship, he shouted, "I shook up the world!" But his earthshaking had only just begun. Soon he announced he had become a Muslim and a member of the Nation of Islam with a new name: Muhammad Ali. Drafted to fight in the Vietnam War, he made 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 being denied conscientious objector status, Ali refused military induction.

Convicted of draft evasion, he was sentenced to five years in prison and his passport was revoked. Stripped of his title and banned from boxing, Ali faced an American public enraged by his opposition to the Vietnam War and unwilling to accept his conversion to Islam. Although vilified in many corners at home, he became an international symbol of opposition to an unjust war. Filing round after round of legal appeals all the way to the Supreme Court, he supported his family via a nationwide speaking tour across 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.

Archival scenes highlight the forces that supported and opposed him, including his spiritual mentors, Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad, and critics of his stance, such as Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis. 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 had. Interviews shot exclusively for the film include his brother, Rahman; his former wife, 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.

Visit *The Trials of Muhammad Ali* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/trials-of-muhammad-ali>) which features information about the film, including an interview with the filmmakers and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

About the Filmmaker

Bill Siegel (Director) 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.

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 Fifer
Executive Producers for Kartemquin Films	Justin Nagan and Gordon Quinn

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The senior series producer is Lois Vossen. More information at www.pbs.org/independentlens. Join Independent Lens on Facebook at www.facebook.com/independentlens.

###