

Blood Brothers: exploring Ali and X's bittersweet friendship

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There are very few friendships that have attracted the public eye and provoked reactions of dread and rapacious approval in equanimity. One of those friendships - better described as blood brothers - is that of the charismatic militant civil rights activist, Malcolm X and the greatest boxer of all time, the ballistic and eyebrow raising trash talker, Muhammad Ali.

'Blood Brothers: Malcolm X & Muhammad Ali' is the latest documentary by Netflix showcasing the beginnings, intervals, and bitter endings of one of activism's long-lasting friendships. Both Black and Muslim, Malcolm and Muhammad's legacy touches on the lives of many people across generations. The film is inspired by the book, Blood Brothers, written by Randy Roberts which brings to full circle the friendship and mutual love and respect two of Black America's icons shared amongst themselves.

The documentary features the lives and



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trajectories of Malcolm and Muhammad from their days eking out an existence under intense Jim Crow laws to achieving prominence in the public eye, much of which was still colour coded. Malcolm X was seen as the veteran leader in the Black Muslim movement which stood in opposition to Martin Luther King and advocated for separation, contrary to King's pleas for integration.

Muhammad Ali, or Cassius Clay, as he was known back then was an Olympic gold medallist breaking out in the world of

boxing who had a knack of trash talking his opponents. Both men went to forge friendships that changed the landscape of the civil rights movement and beyond, whose impact lingers till this day.

The film produced by Simon Chinn, an Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker, pierces into the making and unmaking of a soured friendship. The documentary features members of Malcolm and Ali's families including their daughters, the author of the namesake book itself, and Nation of Islam members.

The friendship, thoroughly organic in nature and bound with love, was seen as a means of promoting Black excellence as well as Malcolm's propagation efforts to admit the young Clay to the Black Muslim movement. Thoroughly moving with testimonials, past interview footage, and newly declassified FBI documents, the documentary spins a narrative of a friendship of two great black men who gave and changed the vocabulary of activism in the world of politics, religion, art, literature and sports.

Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X's gradual falling out and Malcolm's subsequent conversion to Sunni Islam, alongside the deep-seated infiltration of spies in the Nation of Islam eventually paved the way for the breakdown of the friendship, so much so that, even after Malcolm's assassination, Ali refused to acknowledge his place in society.

It was in the '70s, a few years after the murder that Ali reached out to Malcolm X's family and in the words of Malcolm's daughter, Attallah Shabazz, "somehow sustained my dad's breath for me just a little while longer—51 years longer—until now."

The film with its permeating musical undertones and artwork to dramatise some key events in the lives of its subjects adds a new depth of reading and understanding of Black America's leading prophetic lights. It follows the trajectory of change and reinvention in the face of change enabling us to appreciate the men for who they truly were: giants of black manhood.

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