

Reality Check: Let's not whitewash Muhammad Ali's legacy

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MH: The death of my hero, your hero, Muhammad Ali, has rightly dominated global news headlines. Tributes have poured in from presidents, sports stars and celebrities worldwide. Liberals and conservatives alike have lined up to sing his praises.

Call me a cynic but sorry, I can't believe that all of it is truly heartfelt and genuine. Think about it, if a top black athlete today converted to Islam and then declared he wouldn't, quote, "help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters' because his real enemy was at home he would be denounced as a traitor, as anti-American. If that top black athlete today called for reparations saying the US government should admit its guilt over slavery and take \$25bn from its defence budget and build houses for black Americans, he'd be dismissed as a divisive crackpot.

If that top black athlete today declared his, quote, "support for the Palestinian struggle to liberate their homeland and oust the Zionist invaders", he'd annoy a lot of top politicians and might even be labelled an antisemite. But those are the exact things that Ali did say. And remember, back when he was saying this stuff, he was reviled too. He was attacked and demonised, "millions hated Ali", top sports writers called him a "punk" and a "white man's burden", the NSA tapped his phone, yet today he's lauded by the same types of people who slammed him in the 60's and 70's.

Today he's praised by media and political elites for supposedly transcending race and religion. As one commentator pointed out that throughout US history, white Americans have toned down the life stories of radical people of colour so they can celebrate them as they want them to be, not as they were. But the inconvenient truth for establishment types now jumping on the Ali bandwagon, is that he was a radical, a revolutionary, a proud Black Muslim American, who railed against both domestic racism and foreign wars.

And look, I'm not saying it's not a good thing that so many powerful people have either changed their views on Ali and what he stood for, or pretended not to notice what he stood for. Nor am I saying they're all hypocrites. No, all I want is a little more consistency and a little less whitewashing of history.

Let me finish with a line from the poet Mary Angelou who once said, "People will forget what you did but will never forget how you made them feel". Muhammad Ali made millions of us feel proud of our identity, our ethnicity, our political views our religious beliefs, and we will never forget him.

Rest in peace, my brother. Rest in peace.