



Muhammad Ali was a true American Hero. He was an Olympic Gold Medalist, a Heavyweight Boxing Champion, a human rights advocate, and civil rights activist. How did this happen? How did a little boy from Louisville, Kentucky in the pre-civil rights 1950s become one of the most celebrated athletes and humanitarians in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? Acclaimed playwright Idris Goodwin explores these questions in his play, *And In This Corner: Cassius Clay*.

From the moment I finished reading the script, I knew that Childsplay had to present this important piece of theatre in Phoenix, Muhammad Ali's second hometown. While much progress came out of the civil rights struggles of the 1950's and 60's, sadly racism is alive and well in 2019. The same bigotry and hatred confronting young people of color in the Jim Crow south - and throughout the country at that time - still confront young people of color today.

Stories like that of Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali's name at birth) have the potential to inspire a new generation of heroes and humanitarians. Some of the dialogue and action of the play are difficult for audiences to witness. But these scenes are beautifully written to encourage action in today's audiences. We mustn't allow ourselves to let the uncertainty of the present divide America along racial, socio-economic, or gender lines. Mr. Goodwin included in the play that disgusting racial epithet, the n-word. But wisely, the word is used in the play not as an angry bigoted slur, but rather in a moment when Cassius quietly shares with a friend how hurtful it is when he is called that awful name. I believe this is an important message to be heard today, and hope that parents and teachers use this moment to discuss with young people the power of hateful words to cause pain. And the power of love to change the world.

Muhammad Ali found his calling, both in and out of the ring. It's my fervent hope that his story might encourage young people today to find their own passions and to nurture their own strengths. Let's change the world.

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