



Interview with **Floyd Patterson**

Date: March 13, 1989

Interviewer: Sam Pollard

Camera Rolls: 2104-2105

Sound Rolls: 248

Team: B

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

**Preferred Citation**

Interview with Floyd Patterson, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on March 13, 1989 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #2104]

[sound roll #114]

00:00:13:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mm-hmm.

00:00:19:00

Interviewer:

Mr. Patterson, as a champion, you were always considered a person who outside of the ring sort of led a quiet, reflective kind of life. When Cassius Clay first came on the fight scene, what did you think of him?

00:00:31:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, it was something different. In fact—

00:00:34:00

Interviewer:

Can you stop? When you—

00:00:35:00

Floyd Patterson:

Oh, yes, you're right. You're right. When Clay came on the scene—he was Clay then—when Cassius Clay came on the scene, he was something different. I had never seen anything like that before. I thought it was rather comical. In fact I got a lot of laughter out of it, how he would predict. But after a while, many of his predictions came true.

00:00:58:00

Interviewer:

Did you think he was brash or too, too much?

00:01:01:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, after a while I realized he was doing that to convince himself that he could do it, and he did a very good job in convincing himself because he did it.

00:01:10:00

Interviewer:

That's kind of the same.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, stop down?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yes.

[cut]

00:01:15:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:01:18:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mr. Patterson, you were considered a champion who outside of the ring, who had a sort of quiet, reflective life. Gay Talese says a life of solitude. When you first, when did you first hear Clay, and what did you think of him and his personal style?

00:01:32:00

Floyd Patterson:

When I first saw Clay was on television, and he was yelling to the top of his voice about what he was gonna do to his opponent. I found this very, very funny in the beginning. But after a while, I began to dislike it because he said demeaning things about his opponents, and that's something that in boxing I always thought was a no-no. You never downed another guy to up yourself. But then as time went on, I realized that he was doing this in order to give himself more confidence, convincing himself that he could do it. And Clay in my opinion, I felt was very, very intelligent because, I watched him fight once, and he had predicted that he would knock the guy out in four rounds. Excuse me, in six rounds. And then the guy had something derogatory to say back, and he said, Well, because of that, I'm gonna knock you out in four. Right after the fight, the fight went the distance. It was in the Madison Square Garden. It went the distance. And right away, the TV jumped into the ring and put the mic in front of him and said, Now, you said you were gonna knock him out in six. You failed. Then you said you were gonna do it in four. What happened? He said, What's six and four? So, what I'm trying to say, that was a very intelligent answer, I got a big kick out of that. After a while, of course we, we had differences as far as beliefs were concerned, and that's mainly why in the very beginning we weren't too friendly toward one another. Because well, he has his beliefs. I have mine. I respect his as long as he respects mine. And back then, he didn't respect mine.

00:03:02:00

Interviewer:

That's a good answer.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Stop down.

[cut]

00:03:05:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, new focal length, closer.

00:03:10:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mr. Patterson, in '64, I, I have this, an article from \_The New York Times\_ where you challenge Clay, you know, to fight. Now, how did that come about? Where you challenged him, and, and you challenged his belief in the Black Muslims?

Floyd Patterson:

Well, first of all, call me Floyd, OK?

Interviewer:

OK, Floyd.

00:03:29:00

Floyd Patterson:

Secondly, I didn't challenge him. *I just expressed the way I felt about the things he believed, and he expressed the way he felt about the things I believe. And I only did this because of some of the derogatory things he was saying about my beliefs*, which indicated to me he did not respect what I believed. So, therefore I was not going to respect his belief. You see, if you respect what I believe, I'll respect what you believe. But if you don't show me the same courtesy then I can't show it to you. Well, that's the way life is.

00:04:05:00

Interviewer:

Yeah, right. Let's, let's cut a second.

[cut]

00:04:09:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:04:11:00

Interviewer:

Floyd, what was some of the things that Clay was saying that, that, you know, made you react to him by challenging him to a fight?

Floyd Patterson:

Well, some of the things he said was that—

Interviewer:

If you could include, I mean, Clay—

00:04:24:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, some of the things Cassius Clay said about me, this is going back when he was Cassius Clay, he called me a White man's champion. Now, I had always, always respected what he believes, and I felt that he should respect my belief. And the fact that I didn't see colors, *he called me a White man's champion. And I resented that.*

00:04:49:00

Interviewer:

And so when you made the statement, what was his reaction to your challenge?

00:04:55:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, he made a lot of derogatory things back then, but frankly I don't even remember, because they would go in one ear and out the other. You see, those things don't stick with me. A lot of the things he said about me. And I guess eventually, we, we fought.

00:05:10:00

Interviewer:

Yeah. OK, let's cut a second.

[cut]

00:05:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:05:15:00

Interviewer:

Now, let's take you back to this first fight you had with Cassius Clay, who by this time I guess was Muhammad Ali.

00:05:20:00

Floyd Patterson:

Yeah.

00:05:21:00

Interviewer:

What are some of your thoughts about that fight? What do you remember about that fight?

00:05:25:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, frankly I remember more about the second fight than the first fight. I prefer not to remember the first fight. However, I will tell you some of the things that happened in the fight. As you may know, I had a bad back then. In fact, it was a knot as big as my fist in the back of my back because the blood could not get through my spinal cord. I sustained an injury when I threw a left hook and I believe fell down. And when I got up—well, anyway. I took a very bad beating for many, for several rounds. Finally I think in about the tenth round, I said to myself, I'm gonna try to hit this guy at least one shot. So, I tried to tie up his left jab because he throws an awful lot of jabs. And as he was throwing the jab, I went to cross a right hand to catch him as the jab was coming back. Now, there are many things that you can do to avoid a right hand. You can bob, weave. You can take a step to the side, left or right. You can move back. You can do several things. He did every one of them. I never even threw the right hand. So, I said to myself, How do you hit this guy? Which led me to believe he was very, very fearful of getting hit. And the fact that he was so fearful of getting hit, he had a tremendous, a very, very good defense 'cause he took no chances when it came to getting hit. Then I realized why it was so difficult to hit him. Of course after the fight was all over, if you remember back then, Howie Cosell said that he carried me during, during the fight. That's not true. He did not carry me. It's just that he was aggressive at times, but he was very fearful of getting hit. And very, and anyone that fearful of getting hit very rarely gets hit. Clay never really got hit until he lost his legs. When he lost his legs then he started taking a lot of punishment.

00:07:21:00

Interviewer:

I see. Let's cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

Great.

[cut]

00:07:24:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:07:25:00

Interviewer:

Now, the legend goes that when Clay was fighting you, he kept saying, What's my name? What's my name? And at some point, you said Muhammad Ali. Now, tell me your version of this.

Floyd Patterson:

That is not true.

Interviewer:

I mean in terms of the fight.

00:07:41:00

Floyd Patterson:

While we were fighting, Clay had said maybe once or twice in the earlier rounds, maybe like in the third or fourth, "What's my name?" My reply was "Cassius." And finally in the latter part of the fight, I'd say maybe around the 9th, 10th, or 11th round, I was really taking a bad beating and suffering. And he said, "Now what's my name?" And my reply was, once or twice I believe, I said the same thing, "Cassius Clay," and that's what it's always gonna be regardless of the results of this fight. Cassius Clay.

00:08:14:00

Interviewer:

That's it. Good.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Stop down.

[cut]

00:08:17:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:08:20:00

Interviewer:

In '67, Clay refused to be inducted into the armed services. What did you think of that stance that he, that he took?

00:08:29:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, every man has his own rights to believe as he chose to believe, and I respect that. I could only speak for myself. I cannot speak for Cassius Clay because, well, he has his own mind, his own beliefs. [coughs] If I was asked to go into the service, I can only tell you what I would have done. The fact that my next-door neighbor lost her husband, the lady across the street lost her son based on that alone, I would have had to go.

00:08:58:00

Interviewer:

OK, OK.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Stop?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Floyd Patterson:

Didn't I just give you the answer?

Interviewer:

Yeah, but sometimes we like to have it again and you might have another thought that you—  
I mean, I need you to expound a little bit about, my neighbor next door, and—

Floyd Patterson:

Oh, OK. All right. OK.

[picture resumes]

00:09:13:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:09:18:00

Interviewer:

Floyd, in '67, Ali refused to be inducted into the armed services. And what was your reaction to it? What did you think?

Floyd Patterson:

Well, I was a bit shocked in the beginning, but then I thought about it.

Interviewer:

Say like, "When Ali refused to—"

00:09:31:00

Floyd Patterson:

When Ali refused to be inducted into the service, I was a bit shocked in the, at the beginning. But as I thought about it, I respect his, his opinion. He had his own thoughts about it, and perhaps he was right. I don't know. But I can only tell you about myself. See, and that is if I was asked to go in the service back then, the fact that my next-door neighbor lost her son, the lady across the street lost her husband, I would have had to go on guilt feelings alone.

00:09:59:00

Interviewer:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut.

[cut]

00:10:01:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:10:04:00

Interviewer:

Floyd, what did, what did you think of the, the Black Muslims at that time?

00:10:11:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, I'm not a racist in any way. I dislike anyone who is prejudiced, whether they be White or Black, see. So, I don't see any colors. So, as I said back then, and I'll say again, I think if you put all the KKK's along with the Black Muslims on an island somewhere, it would be a better world to live in.

00:10:41:00

Interviewer:

When, when, when Ali beat, Cassius Clay beat Sonny Liston, and then two days later announced that he was a Black Muslim, what did you, what did you think of that?

00:10:51:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, back then I didn't know what to think because I knew very little about the Black Muslims. Back then when Cassius Clay had said, when I found out that he was a Black Muslim, that he had just joined the Black Muslims, I didn't know that, that much about them. But it was then that I started listening to Malcolm X on television, and then I learned what they were representing.

00:11:16:00

Interviewer:

And what did you think they represented, I mean?

00:11:19:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, that's fairly obvious. You know?

00:11:19:00

Interviewer:

Well, yeah.

Floyd Patterson:

I mean, what did the Ku Klux Klans rep—represent?

Interviewer:

Let's, let's stop. Let's cut a second. I don't—

[cut]

[camera roll #2105]

00:11:28:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:11:31:00

Interviewer:

Floyd, two days after Clay fought Sonny Liston and won the heavyweight championship, he announced that he was a Black Muslim. What did you think of his announcement, and what did you think of the Black Muslims?

00:11:44:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, back then, I really didn't know that much about the Black Muslims. It wasn't until he joined, joined the Black Muslims and—

00:11:44:00

Interviewer:

Can you say, I, I need you to say Clay's name—

Floyd Patterson:

Oh.

Interviewer:

—when [unintelligible]

Floyd Patterson:

Oh, OK.

Interviewer:

OK.

00:11:59:00

Floyd Patterson:

Back then, I really didn't know that much about the Black Muslims. But when I heard that Cassius Clay has joined them, I began to read about them. I began to listen to interviews on television. And Clay himself had a awful lot to say about it, and I'd always try to catch any interview that he had made back then. And I guess it was through Clay and the Black Muslims themselves that I learned more about them and what they believed in.

00:12:25:00

Interviewer:

What did you think of what they believed in?

00:12:28:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well, I naturally disagree. You know? As I said before, I do not see colors. To me, we are all brothers and sisters. And on Judgment Day, God will judge us based on what we did for our brothers and sisters, not based on our color.

00:12:48:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:12:49:00

Interviewer:

He kept asking you what's my name—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rolling. Speed.

Interviewer:

—and you'd say Cassius Clay and by the ninth or tenth round, you were in the pain that you were talking about.

Floyd Patterson:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

OK.

[cut]

00:13:03:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:13:07:00

Interviewer:

Be-before the first fight with you and C-Clay, he had been saying a lot of things to the press, that he was gonna have you call him by his, his Muslim name. Tell me a little bit about what, what he had been saying and then the fight itself.

00:13:20:00

Floyd Patterson:

Well yes, he had, Cassius Clay had said this over TV many a times, and he had said it to the press at press conferences. That he was gonna beat me so bad he would have me, he was gonna ask me to, he was gonna make me call him by the name he wanted to be called. And during the actual fight, he did say during the earlier rounds, I believe he asked me once or twice, "What's my name? What's my name?" And I said, "Cassius Clay." But I distinctly remember the latter rounds when I was taking a bad beating, he said, "What's my name now?" And I, my reply was, "Cassius Clay," and that's what it will always be. I'm 54 years old now, and it's still Cassius Clay. Now don't misunderstand. I'm not being disrespectful. His mother and father, they still call him Cassius Clay. I ran into his father several years ago,

and he had said to me, I met you at such and such a place. Do you remember who I am? So I looked at him, and I said, Well, I don't quite remember, but you look familiar. He said, Well, I'm Cassius Clay's father. So, I said, Oh, you still call him Cassius Clay? And he said, Yeah. [laughs] So, anyway, to get back to what I was saying, Clay and I get along very well now. You know, I mean, I've seen him on several occasions. We talk, and we're friends. You know? All that's forgotten about. But he's still Cassius Clay, and I'm still the Rabbit. He calls me the Rabbit.

00:14:55:00

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:15:01:00

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