



Clay v. United States (1971) - Free Exercise - 9/0.

This case is not particularly important as it did not set any new precedent. I thought you might like it for its “celebrity significance” and because it does set forth the “free exercise” tests for proving conscientious objector status.

Issue: Should Cassius Clay’s conviction (who later changed his name to Muhammad Ali) for willful refusal to submit to induction into the Armed Forces stand?

Held: Court of Appeals reversed. The conviction is Constitutionally flawed.

Reasoning: Clay’s petition for **conscientious objector** status was denied by the local draft board. He appealed to the State Appeal Board. A hearing was held and the hearing officer concluded that he should have been granted the status he sought. However, the Department of Justice advised the local board against such a finding. In order to qualify for conscientious objector status, a registrant must show (1) that he is conscientiously opposed to war in any form, (2) that this opposition is based upon religious training and belief and (3) that his objection is sincere. Since the Appeal Board gave no reasons for its denial of the claim, there is no way of knowing upon which of the 3 grounds it relied. [Citing to a long list of case precedent and consistent with same, the Court reversed Clay’s conviction.]

