

EMILE GRIFFITH WORLD CHAMPION BOXER

b. February 3, 1938

d. June 23, 2013

*“I kill a man and most people forgive me ...
I love a man ... this makes me an evil person.”*

**He won five
world boxing
championships.**

Emile Griffith was an American professional boxer who won five world boxing championships. He fought more world championships than any other prizefighter.

Griffith was born in St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. One of eight children raised by a single mother, he moved to New York City as a child. While working as a 14-year-old in the heat of a garment factory, Griffith asked his boss if he could remove his shirt. His boss noticed Griffith's athletic physique and introduced him to Gil Clancy, the famed boxing trainer.

Griffith officially entered professional boxing in 1958, winning the Golden Gloves open championship the same year. Three years later, he won the welterweight championship, defeating acclaimed fighter Benny “Kid” Paret with a 13th-round knockout.

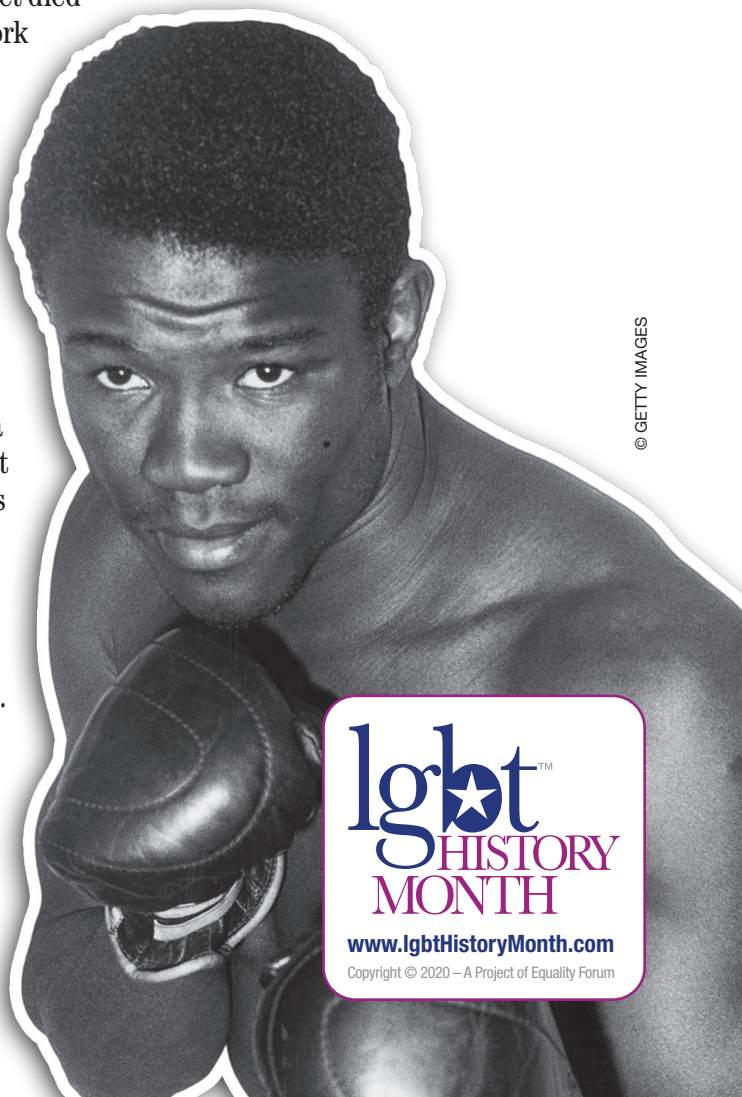
Griffith faced Paret in a nationally televised rematch in 1962 at Madison Square Garden. It was their third encounter. At a weigh-in, Paret taunted Griffith with a homophobic slur, angering Griffith. Although it was not publicly known, Griffith had sexual relationships with men as well as women. In the 12th round of the fight, Griffith pummeled Paret with more than two dozen blows, rendering Paret unconscious. Paret died in the hospital 10 days later. An investigation by the state of New York subsequently cleared Griffith of blame.

Haunted by guilt over Paret's accidental death, Griffith claimed he was never again as aggressive in the ring. Despite this, he went on to fight 10 world championships—more than any other fighter in history—during his nearly 20-year career. He held a lifetime record of 85 wins with 23 knockouts, 24 losses and 2 draws. He headlined at Madison Square Garden 23 times.

In 1971 Griffith married a dancer, Mercedes Donastorg. The union lasted less than two years, although he adopted Donastorg's daughter. After he retired from boxing, Griffith worked briefly as a corrections officer at a juvenile facility in New Jersey. There he met his longtime companion, Luis Rodrigo, whom he publicly called his adopted son.

Griffith straddled the hypermasculine professional boxing world and the Manhattan gay club scene for most of his life. In 1992 he was brutally beaten by a gang after leaving a gay bar in downtown New York. The attack left him near death from kidney failure. He spent four months in the hospital recovering.

Griffith was inducted into the World Boxing Hall of Fame and the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990. He was the subject of the documentary “Ring of Fire” in 2005. Griffith died from complications of boxer's dementia at the age of 75. The New York Times published his obituary.



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