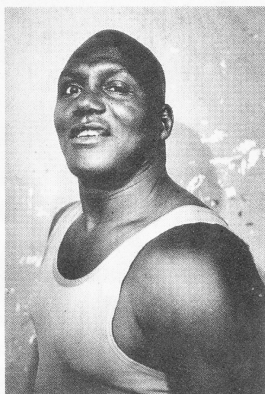
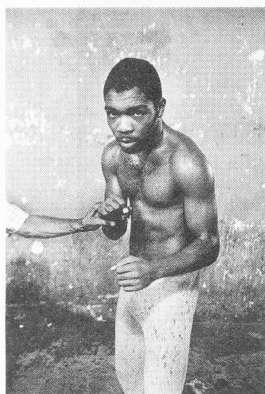


PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULES ALLEN



**POWER** The photographer Jules Allen said the world at Gleason's, at least in 1983, was beyond black or white, young or old. If you had the chops or the will, you stepped up. Even some old-timers took a swing, top.

## A Rough Equality In Gleason's Ring

**B**EFORE the multimillion-dollar purses, slowly panning cable documentaries and glitzy celebrity venues, there was this: a young boxer in a ring, surrounded by paint-chipped walls, hoarse-voiced trainers and smoke-shrouded promoters. If there was glamour to be found, it was in the dreams that struggled to survive against the odds.

Jules Allen first stepped into the famed Gleason's Gym in 1983 — when it was still in Manhattan, where he was a relatively new photographer. He had gone there to train — which he did with Bobby McQuillan, who had also put Miles Davis through the paces. Mr. Allen was in his own way as hungry as any up-and-coming boxer: he had a vision of how he wanted to document African-American culture. He wanted to portray his subjects as people who were powerful and in control.

He found that vision at Gleason's.

"Black men are on equal ground in the gym," Mr. Allen, 64, said. "There, you really were what you

did. Whatever racism existed, it did not seem to have much effect on the fighters in the room. It was a question of character. It was a place where people seemed to be more equal."

His photographs, which he recently self-published in the book "Double Up," betray an attention to detail that comes from immersing himself as a participant in this world. Perhaps it was one of the benefits of his previous career — as a social worker in the correctional system in California. Though Mr. Allen had an undergraduate art degree, he went on to receive a master's in psychology, which he said helped him understand his subjects and photographs.

It still does.

"Before, I had no way to approach a disciplined, organized body of work — I was just taking pictures," he said. "Psychology gave me a context in which I could actually look at the work, how I dealt with what I was looking at. How to talk to people. How to listen to people."

DAVID GONZALEZ



### RINGSIDE

Mr. Allen put in some time sparring. "Everything illegal on the street is legal in the ring," he said. Some habitués packed more than fists, left. Besides the fighters, there was a cast of characters at Gleason's. One of the regulars, below. "This cat would come to the gym every day and say: 'You ain't nothing! None of you are a Joe Louis! None of you!'" Mr. Allen said.



ONLINE: THE GRIT BEHIND THE GLORY

**LENS**

Amid chipped-paint walls and stogie-chomping trainers, young warriors dreamed of championship belts at the old Gleason's Gym. More photographs:

[nytimes.com/lens](http://nytimes.com/lens)