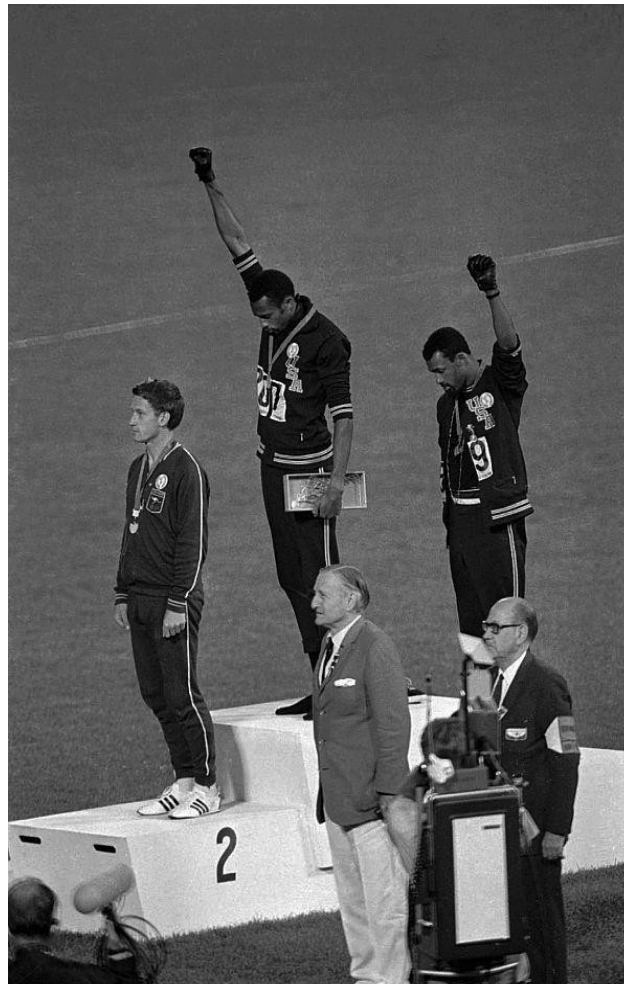


BLACK HISTORY MONTH

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: Tommie Smith and John Carlos



INTRODUCTION

This famous picture, taken from “Il Post”'s website, represents the 200 m race medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City: U.S. Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos — who’d won gold and bronze respectively— raising black-gloved fists became one of the most iconic sports images of the 20th century.

DESCRIPTION

The protest had been something the two athletes carefully planned: in the lead-up to the Olympics, Smith and Carlos helped organize the Olympic Project for Human Rights, a group that reflected their black pride and social consciousness. The group saw the Olympic Games as an opportunity to protest for better treatment of black athletes and black people around the world. Though the project initially proposed a boycott of the Olympics, Smith and Carlos decided to compete in the hope they could use their achievements as a platform for better change. As they walked to the

podium, they took off their shoes to protest against poverty. While the national anthem was played, they lowered their heads and raised their fists in a Black Power salute. "I looked at my feet in my high socks and thought about all the black poverty I'd seen from Harlem to East Texas. I fingered my beads and thought about the pictures I'd seen of the 'strange fruit' swinging from the poplar trees of the South," Carlos wrote in his book written with Dave Zirin, "The John Carlos Story: The Sports Moment That Changed the World." Smith put an olive branch on his left hand and a black glove on his right fist, Carlos another one on his left hand. Then they raised their gloved fists. "As the anthem began and the crowd saw us raise our fists, the stadium became eerily quiet," Carlos wrote. Straight after the spectators began to boo them. Then some people screamed the national anthem. The punishment for breaking Olympic rules was swift. When they returned to the United States, Carlos and Smith were suspended from the U.S. track team, and they received death threats. They agreed to use their medals as an opportunity to highlight the social issues hitting the United States at the time. Even the other man in the picture, Peter Norman, an Australian athlete who won the silver medal in that race, was punished by his national team because he supported Smith and Carlos' protest. However, Carlos and Smith were both gradually re-accepted into the Olympic fold, and went on to careers in professional football before retiring. Whereas Norman squallied for the Olympic team over and over again, but he was definitely snubbed in 1972. He immediately retired from sport and began to suffer from depression, alcoholism and a painkiller addiction. When Norman died in 2006, Carlos and Smith were his pallbearers at his funeral. It took until 2012 for the Australian government to apologize for the treatment Norman received in his home country.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In that period racial tensions were at a height, and the Civil Rights movement had given way to the Black Power movement. African-Americans like Smith and Carlos were frustrated by what they saw as the passive nature of the Civil Rights movement. They sought out active forms of protests and advocated for racial pride, black nationalism and dramatic action rather than radical change. Moreover, in the same year Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were murdered, then "the student protest" broke out.

CONCLUSION

I have chosen to analyze this document because I think this is one of the most powerful and strongest images about Black History. It has become the symbol of Black Power movement and Civil Rights movement and it "shocked" the world: nobody had never done a protest like this in such an important event like the Olympic Games. Although they were punished as they came back home, their gesture would have become legendary.

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