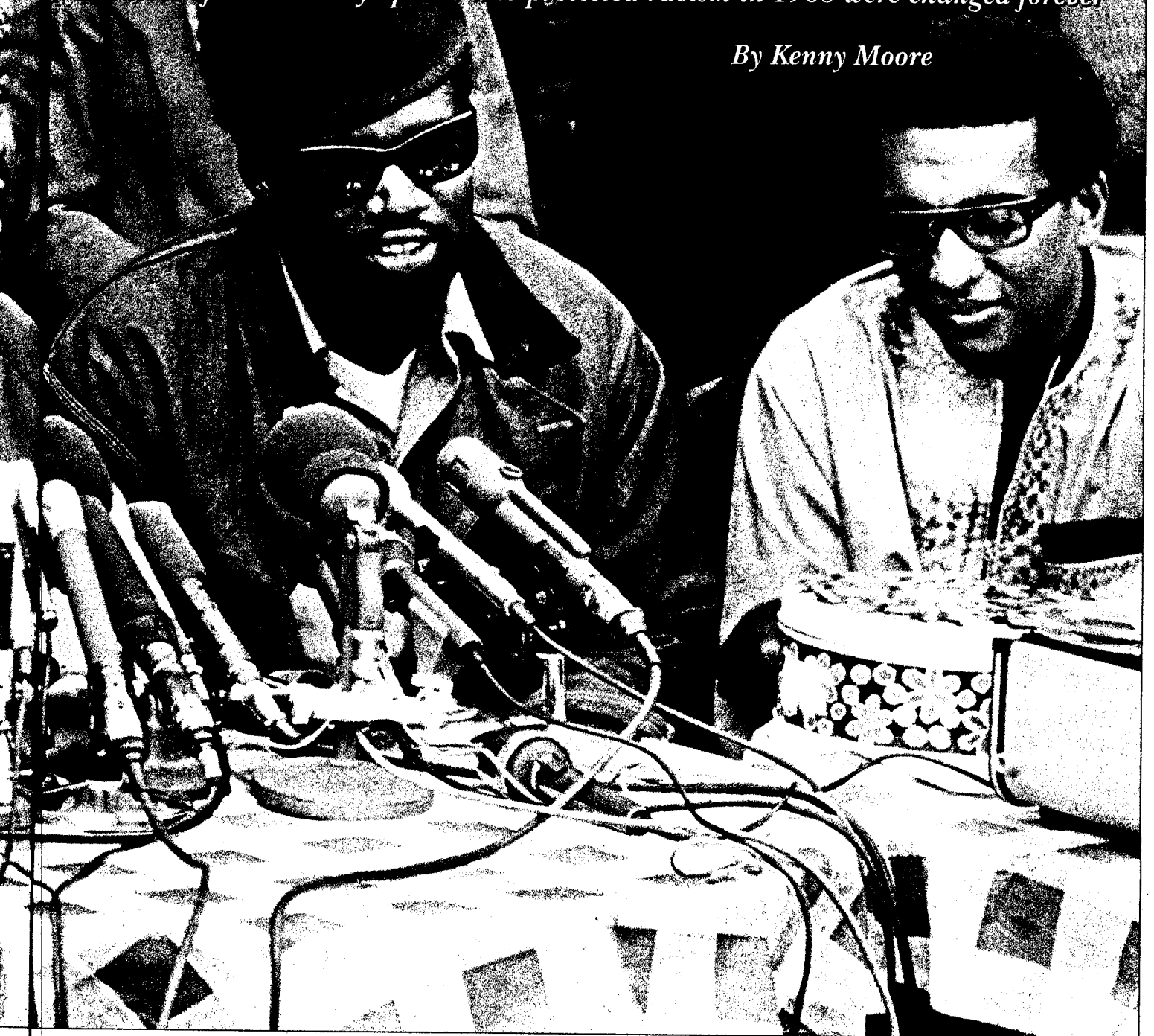


THE EYE OF THE STORM

The lives of the U.S. Olympians who protested racism in 1968 were changed forever

By Kenny Moore





**THE BLACK
ATHLETE
REVISITED**

AFTER HIS SUSPENSION
FROM THE U.S. TEAM, CARLOS ASSAILED
THE USOC WHILE ACTIVISTS (FROM LEFT)
H. RAP BROWN, EDWARDS AND STOKELY
CARMICHAEL LENT SUPPORT.



“It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them.” ✓

—MARK TWAIN

AS TOMMIE SMITH STOOD ON THE VICTORY STAND AFTER WINNING the Olympic 200-meter dash in Mexico City on Oct. 16, 1968, it struck him that he had enclosed his life in his black-gloved fist and lifted it up to become a symbol. The more powerfully he succeeded, the less that life would be his own.

He drove the fist as high as he could. Smith's arms span seven feet. He had drawn his uniform's sleeves above his elbows. To observers nearest the track, his bare right forearm seemed to tower to the height of the Olympic torch.

➤ Behind and below Smith, his left fist gloved and raised, stood bronze medalist John Carlos. Smith's eyes were cast down. Carlos's roved the stadium. Smith's arm was ramrod straight. Carlos could have been hanging on to a subway strap.

➤ “My arm was cocked because I wanted to be able to protect myself,” says Carlos. “We didn't know what would happen.”

Their gesture embodied black unity in the face of continuing black poverty and discrimination. To force his nation to see that its egalitarian promise had not been fulfilled, Smith made himself a beacon. He held up the unpleasant truth in a place where only he could stand, and from which no one could look away.

And then he wished it could all be over. Smith cared intensely about his cause, but he was not of a crusading temperament. He was attracted to a great gesture because it offered him a chance to do his part for social justice in one brave stroke rather than through years of speaking or organizing.

He knew he was plunging his gloved fist into a society that was already bleeding. The central conflict of the United States—the struggle over what it means to be American—had erupted on more fronts in 1968 than in any year since the Civil War.

In January, the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, which showed that massive U.S. troop infusions had not broken Vietcong and North Vietnamese strength or will, made Americans examine the character of the war. The consequent growth of the peace movement, which Senator Eugene McCarthy had harnessed to a presidential campaign, drove President Lyndon Johnson to announce in March that he would not run for reelection.

Civil rights and the Vietnam War were related because in each case, American ideals conflicted with reality. Battles over the two issues wrecked college commencements, wedding receptions and company picnics. One side wanted to turn the nation from folly and toward its stated principles (only Congress was constitutionally empowered to declare war, and the Civil Rights Act had been law since 1964). The other side was moved by anticommunism, prejudice or simple my-country-right-or-wrong patriotism. Each side called itself the good Americans, galling the other. The assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy heightened passions.

Into this caldron came Tommie Smith and John Carlos, attempting a Tet Offensive of race relations. While the U.S. anthem rang out in Mexico City, Smith thought of all the Americans tuning in to experience a moment of vicarious triumph and finding instead their nation shamed. Many would feel betrayed. He thought of his parents and family. “I worried how they would take this, and whether they would be hurt,” he says.

Smith told himself he would bear the consequences like a sprinter, whose victories are gained by driving himself into oxygen debt. When the race is over and he is heaving and nauseated, he tells himself he has won, and this is the cost, and it is worth it.

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Carlos was a survivor. "John didn't have the education of Tommie," says Lynda Huey, their old friend from San Jose State, "but in ways he was smarter. He could see people's motives. He was more suspicious. He had the better sense of humor. No matter how bad something was, he could make light of it, and nothing was so perfect that he couldn't find a flaw."

Others' loathing seemed a tonic to Carlos. "If they disliked me because they disliked my demanding respect, well, so be it," he said. To Huey, he seemed invulnerable. The one she worried about was Smith.

Smith took momentary sanctuary in his room in the U.S. dorm. His dominant emotion was relief. "I'm glad that's over," he said. He had overcome a cramped thigh, won the race and set a world record, and he had made his protest as planned. Now he could do nothing but await the reaction. He still shuddered a little at the hate-filled faces he had seen in the crowd.

"It was the fist that scared people," he says now. "Bowing wouldn't have gotten the response the fist did. It was a silent gesture. I never threw a rock."

The other black U.S. athletes were surprised but not shocked by the gesture. Smith had promised to do something, and they

knew him to be a man of his word. "I didn't think it was that radical at the time," says teammate Larry James.

The U.S. Olympic Committee of course disapproved, yet it was unwilling to make martyrs of Smith and Carlos. But the International Olympic Committee, led by Avery Brundage, threatened to expel the whole U.S. team if the demonstrators weren't severely punished. Abuse of the rule against political activity, the committee said, would cause the Games to degenerate into sociopolitical symposia.

"Recall," says Smith now, "that we chose to demonstrate only during the *existing* political activity, the anthem."

Early on the morning of Oct. 18, Smith and Carlos were suspended from the U.S. team and given 48 hours to leave the Olympic precincts. They went to the Hotel El Diplomático but returned to the Olympic Village.

They had to see teammate Lee Evans, who had decided not to run in the 400-meter final. "How could I?" he said a few years ago. "I was their friend. We went to the same college. Everyone would think I was a traitor to the black community."

San Jose State track coach Bud Winter, ever the master of relaxation, gave Evans no suggestions. He simply got him to sleep.



IN PALM SPRINGS, CARLOS COACHES HIGH SCHOOL TRACK AND, AT HOME, TRIES TO KEEP TRACK OF DAUGHTERS SHANA (LEFT) AND WINSETTA.

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When Evans awoke, Winter had arranged to have Smith and Carlos there.

Carlos gruffly reminded Evans of the team's deal, saying, "You run, *win* and *then* do your thing, man." Smith agreed. Evans felt like a free man.

Ten minutes before the 400, Bob Beamon, who had originally opposed any demonstration but who now was furious at Smith's and Carlos's suspensions, launched himself down the long-jump runway with a vengeance. He soared 29' 2½", destroying the world record by 21¾ inches. On the victory stand, Beamon and bronze medalist Ralph Boston, whose record Beamon had broken, would wear the black socks of protest.

Evans, running through the astounded cheers for Beamon and pacing himself perfectly, won the 400 in a world-record 43.86 seconds. James was a close second, in 43.97. It would be 20 years before anyone else would crack 44 seconds. Ron Freeman completed the U.S. sweep with 44.41.

All three American medalists were scrupulously correct during the anthem, for which they removed the black tams they were wearing. "We had to be careful," says Evans. "If we were thrown out, there'd be no U.S. 1,600-meter relay team."

Even so, they were booed. "What did they want me to do?" says James. "Wave the flag like George Foreman did? I felt like they should have given me a script. Then the first 20 questions in the press conference were not about our feat, which no one had ever done before, but about demonstrating. We were drilled with 'Are you holding back?' and 'Have you done enough?'"

Death threats against the 400-meter runners came in from around the world. The 1,600-meter-relay final was two days later. James and USOC president and IOC member Douglas Roby almost came to blows under the stadium before the start, when Roby sought to lecture James and his teammates on victory deportment. "By then, I could do without the ceremony," says James. "They could even keep the medal. It was the year and a half of getting ready for this that was important. The long siege of a season, the training at Tahoe, the air, the guys, the war stories. All that floods back. That's what I lived for. The victory ceremony? That seemed as if it were for someone else."

After winning in a world-record 2:56.16, the four sprinters smiled and waved their black berets. "It's harder to shoot a guy who's smiling," Evans had said. They stood at attention during the anthem.

Thus Evans, who had been prepared to boycott his final, to make any gesture, ended up making none. He would go home to San Jose as he feared, a pariah in the black community.

Black athletes won seven of the 12 U.S. men's track and field gold medals in Mexico, set five world records and tied another. Black U.S. women won three golds and set two world records. Wyomia Tyus became the first woman to win the Olympic 100 meters twice when she defended her 1964 title with a world-record 11.08. But the black women had been excluded from the men's deliberations over boycott and gesture. Tyus ignored the slight and dedicated her gold medal to Smith and Carlos.

The records were assisted by Mexico City's 7,350-foot altitude, but not enough to explain why it took so long to break them. Smith's 19.83 for the 200 lasted 11 years. Jim Hines's 9.95 for the 100 survived for 15 years. Evans's 43.86 for the 400 was not broken until 1988. The 1,600-meter-relay record of 2:56.16 and Beamon's 29' 2½" still stand.

Why? The summer of training had helped, but Evans and

Smith believe that the tension the athletes all felt over being free to improve in sport but not in society was what drove them. It seemed that when they ran to strike a blow for freedom, a great strength came upon them.

The media of 1968 didn't exactly conspire to bury Smith's and Carlos's gesture, but neither did they attempt to understand it. John Underwood's lengthy account in *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* of the Mexico Olympic track and field competition contained not a single sentence purporting to explain what moved Smith and Carlos to their act.

Underwood made much of Carlos's abrasiveness, writing, "He had stepped on a lot of toes, including those in the chow line, at the end of which he cared not to stand." The implication seemed to be that the athletes' gesture was inexplicable except as a self-ish fit of pique.

"I had *friends* in the chow line," says Carlos. "I don't think people disliked me. They disliked the guy they *read* about. But this wasn't about being liked. It was about respect."

The official U.S. Olympic book made no mention of, and printed no photograph of, the 200-meter awards ceremony.

"We got letters saying, 'You set us back a hundred years,' and others saying, 'You freed us,'" says Carlos. "The verdict is still out."

When Smith and Carlos arrived home from Mexico, San Jose



State president Robert Clark said, "They do not return in disgrace, but as the honorable young men they are, dedicated to the cause of justice for the black people in our society."

"I went to visit my father in Lemoore [Calif.]," says Smith. "He looked right through me, stone silent as usual. Then, for the first time in my life, he reached for my hand. 'I don't really know what happened,' he said, 'but what you did was right.'"

"I melted. From this severe man I'd tried to please all my life, that was worth a lot of suffering."

Third World support rolled in—most dramatically from members of the Cuban 400-meter-relay team, who sent their silver medals to Harry Edwards, the San Jose State sociology lecturer who had organized the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR). Cubans, however, were not the friends you would pick to charm Middle America.



BEFORE SIGNING ON AS A TEACHER, COACH AND WATER-FITNESS TRAINER AT SANTA MONICA COLLEGE (ABOVE), TOMMIE TOOK THE PLUNGE WITH DENISE (OPPOSITE, WITH, FROM LEFT, KIDS TIMOTHY, ANTHONY AND DANIELLE).

Smith began his final semester of college. When he tried to register for his ROTC classes, he was told to turn in his uniform. "Captain Cisneros, who was about the only one there who would talk to me, said if I did that, all would be forgotten," says Smith. "And it was." The Army would not have him.

Smith then called Jim Brown, who before the Games had lent Smith money against a future football contract to be negotiated with the Los Angeles Rams. "He wanted his \$2,000 back," says Smith. "He said I was 'too eager,' that the Rams wanted no part of me, and to pay the money back."

Smith surveyed other teams and found no interest. "I didn't have any money," he says. "I had a wife, and [his son] Kevin was one year old. I'd answer the phone and a voice would say, 'You are going to die.' I used to check under the hood of my car."

The fist had become a lightning rod.

"Then an Olympic Project for Human Rights lawyer talked to an assistant coach on the Cincinnati Bengals by the name of Bill Walsh," Smith says. "[Bengal head coach] Paul Brown loved speed and power, and took a chance. I was there for three years, making \$300 a week on the taxi squad. I kept my sanity." Smith relishes the time still. "I caught a lot of passes from [then quarterback and now Bengal coach] Sam Wyche," he says. "And a lot of hell from Bill, saying, 'Chop those steps at the sideline!'"

After the 1971 preseason, Walsh regretfully called Smith and told him he had been cut. "He suggested I try out in Canada, with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats. I was there a month. That was the same time John Carlos was with the Montreal Alouettes. We met on the streets of Hamilton."

Carlos, as usual, had had a wild ride. If anything, the Olympic

experience had made him more bombastic. At meets, he ordered the crowd around, moving people to the 40-yard mark so they could be nearby when he exploded.

"I saved my best for races that were important to me," says Carlos. "To me, the blackest meet, where even a lot of the whites understood and got into the speed, was the Fresno Relays." In the 1969 Fresno 100-yard dash, Carlos bolted away from a superb field to win by at least four yards. The world record was 9.1. One of the three official watches read 9.0.

"I know I ran 8.8," says Carlos. "Lotta watches in the stands were at 8.7, 8.8." The meet continued, with no announcement of the winning time. The crowd boomed and began to chant, "What did he run? What did he run?"

"The head timer had 9.1," says Carlos. "He canceled out all the other times and gave me 9.1." One more record. One more denial.

That summer, Carlos and Beamon were a dashing pair at European meets, traveling the continent in vests, spats and homburgs. "He must have known," says Huey of Carlos, "that this was his peak, and he was savoring it."

Yet Carlos's immense winning margins left him lukewarm. "There was no more challenge," he says. "The others were running to see who'd be second."

Carlos, born to confront, retired from track and went to football. "I thought I'd have a challenge in football, but they didn't give me a chance," he says. "Football doesn't have time to teach. Produce or you're out." He went from Philadelphia to Montreal and was out of the game by 1972. He made it to the Munich Olympics that year as an employee of a shoe company. There he



HINES (ABOVE, AT HIS HIGH SCHOOL TRACK IN OAKLAND) AND JAMES FELT STIGMATIZED BY THE '68 PROTEST.



"Professionally, it was an advance for me," says Smith. "But Jack was hated by the P.E. department, and I caught some of that. Still, we did well in track with Bud Winter's techniques. At first it was exciting."

And then it wasn't. Fuller resigned in 1973, and suddenly Scott was without a friend in court. The old guard asked Scott to go. He agreed, on condition that Smith and Jackson be hired for another three years.

"If I do nothing else of value," Scott says now, "at least I was able to assure Tommie Smith an academic career."

Smith taught sports sociology. "I was unpopular," he says.

dered. "We came together as athletes, and it worked for a while," Smith says. "Denise is a good person and forcefully supported the OPHR. But the consequences of the victory stand got to us in different ways. Her interests were fashion, dance and theater. It bothered both of us that I wasn't as financially successful as the pro athletes we knew in Cincinnati.

"As for me, I'm a family guy. But with the threats, and the pressure of no job, I began to not want to be home at six. We split without too much rancor. She kept the San Francisco house."

Smith, back to basics, moved in with Evans. "On a dead-end street in San Jose," Smith says. "I was comfortable there because no one knew where I was. I drove my Datsun 210 to Milpitas every morning and taught fourth and fifth grade. Then I was track coach at Milpitas High School. I might be there still, but Jack Scott asked if I wanted to go to a little college in Ohio, name of Oberlin."

Scott was, in Smith's words, "a foremost white radical." He would be notable for harboring Patty Hearst while she was in hiding in 1974-75, for acting as an adviser to basketball star Bill Walton and, later, for popularizing microcurrent treatment for injuries. But Scott first jolted sports in the late '60s and early '70s with the view, expressed in his books *Athletics for Athletes* and *The Athletic Revolution*, that the authority granted to college and high school coaches was at odds with good teaching.

In 1972, Oberlin hired a new president, Robert Fuller, a reformer. He hired Scott to be athletic director. Scott, with student input, hired three black head coaches: Cass Jackson for football, Pat Penn for basketball and Tommie Smith for track.

Scott opened Oberlin's gym to townspeople, stopped charging admission for football and basketball games, tripled funding for women's sports and began classes on sport in society, literature and politics. Tenured professors opposed it all. Camps formed.

"Students of mine kept asking difficult questions of the administration. Kevin was five and six years old, and I was coaching, teaching and being assistant athletic director. I know what single parents go through."

He felt, as the Scott reforms fell one by one, that he was presiding over the decay of a dream. He went through his days with a kind of rushed detachment. People saw more of his temper.

Smith began to let his weight climb, as if he could hide under a layer of suet the perfect body that had helped bring him grief. He hit 237. His racing weight had been 190.

Then he met Denise Kyle, a recent Oberlin graduate. "She knew I was fiery," he says with some astonishment, "but she kind of settled into a relationship anyway." They were married in 1976, at a Smith family reunion in Fresno.

In 1978, Smith was denied tenure at Oberlin. It was the academic equivalent of being fired. He was the last of Scott's people to go. "I fought it," he says, "because their excuse was to say my coaching and teaching were below department standards, and that was not true. But I found no support. They could say anything about me they wanted. That thing I felt bracing my spine was the wall."

Harold Smith, who managed the Muhammad Ali Track Club in Santa Monica, was looking for a coach. Tommie Smith drove out to see him and said, "Hey, I need a job. I can't pay the rent." The reply was one of the more galling phrases to fall on the ears of a desperate man.

"You're too good for us," said Harold Smith.

Tommie Smith returned to Ohio and was contemplating the last resort—selling life insurance. He went home to California for good just when Proposition 13, the taxpayers' revolt, drastically reduced school budgets in the state. "I borrowed from my family," he says. "We used Denise's insurance, and she sold her

saw murder enter the Games when Black September terrorists took Israeli coaches and athletes hostage. "People were upset over what I did in 1968," he said even as the helicopters were taking hostages and terrorists to their fatal shoot-out with West German policemen. "But I just expressed my feelings. I didn't hurt anybody. *Now* what are they going to say? Can they tell the difference?"

Every black Olympic teammate of Smith's and Carlos's was associated with their gesture in the public mind. Some suffered for it.

"The Olympic 100-meter dash decides who is the world's fastest human," says Hines, who won it. "When it's overshadowed by a political move, it's hard not to think about it, especially when people can't even remember you."

Hines had watched with a sinking heart as Smith's fist went up. "I was an activist," Hines says. "We were all black and a unit, and we set out to speak against the racism of the country, but I believed in letting our winning speak. Our winning. The '68 team was the best in history, but it was discredited by what Tom and John did. The glove situation cost us all a lot."

Hines's prime sponsor, Adidas, edged away from a pre-Olympic incentive of a lifetime contract if he won the 100. "They felt we were all in on the protest," says Hines. "Everybody did. I'd been drafted by the Dolphins, and I explained that that wasn't me with a glove. But they believed we all had to know about it. I would have tripled my money from the Dolphins if it weren't for that. The gesture cost me a total of \$2 million."

Hines was with the Dolphins, the Chiefs and the Raiders for five seasons. ("An achievement," says Olympic teammate Leon Coleman, "considering that our nickname for him was Oops.") Hines directed the social-services program of the city of Austin, Texas, for 11 years. In 1985 he returned to his childhood hometown of Oakland.

TOMMIE'S DAD, JAMES, TOOK HIS SON'S HAND AND SAID HE DID THE RIGHT THING IN MEXICO CITY.



It seems to grind at Hines that he always did the right thing, took the pressure, ran and won without controversy, and yet made little impression on people. "In 23 years, I've done maybe a thousand speaking engagements," he says. "And after each, I've had the question: 'Were you one of the ones. . . ? The ones who. . . ?' Hines lifts his arm. "I guess that's forever. Yet Tom and John will always remain my friends." He thinks of how they were back then, at the pinnacle. "Maybe they just felt their grudge more deeply."

Larry James returned to Villanova with some of his heroes deflated because they had gone more for the gold than the goal. But he found that Mexico's events had excited people. "Pictures of us wearing the black tams, with the fists, appeared in Black Panther newspapers," James recalls. "And in the main media, we'd won for our country. We had something for everybody. We were agents of change, but ones *made* so, and we were so unprepared. We were suddenly expert on everything, man, on *tooth-paste*. You get caught up in it, the love affair the public has with athletes. You learn how it embraces you, and then you learn how it tires of you."

James lost his bearings. "The old Larry James, the naive sophomore of '68," he says, "was determined to be a college grad with a gold medal, a new job on Wall Street and a secretary. But after Mexico I wasn't like that anymore. I really withdrew. People had to figure me out anew."

For a year, he was angry. "You got shell-shocked," he says. "You got tagged with '68, and you had to explain who you were and what you'd done without dishonoring the others. It wasn't until years later that I was able to have a verbal comeback when people started to impose on me their ideas about what I should have done. The whole leadership thing waned for me. The Villanova team suffered from it. I started to question everything."

"I remember in '69, [Villanova coach] Jumbo Elliott said I was to race in New York and Boston indoor meets back-to-back on one weekend. I said no. I did one meet, New York. And I got a letter from someone in Boston saying, 'You have the audacity not to run a double. . . My son would be happy to run a double. My son died in Vietnam.' I thought, Wow, this guy is putting this all on me. I was really *mad*. But I tucked it away. Not to be guilty about, but to help me ask, as I finally did in 1970, *What are you going to do?*"

James joined the Marines and then, in 1972, went to work at Stockton State College, a liberal-arts school tucked into the New Jersey pine barrens 12 miles from Atlantic City. Today he is Stockton's assistant dean of students and director of athletics and recreation. "I think I'm one of the few who skated," he says of his Olympic teammates. "A lot have had it rough."

Almost all members of the team have gravitated to community service or teaching, usually at modest schools. Beamon is a parks and recreation program coordinator for Dade County (Fla.). Major Charlie Greene, the bronze medalist in the 100 in Mexico City, retired from the Army after 20 years to work for the Special Olympics. Even Carlos, his bellicosity always soothed by the nearness of children, now coaches.

They seem to have inspired others to more career success than they themselves achieved, or were allowed. "I have people say, 'I'm a doctor or teacher or lawyer because of what you did,'" says James. "That kept me going at first, and I get it still, and I hardly did anything but run."

After Smith's football career sputtered out, his marriage foun-

house in Ohio to pay my brothers and sister back. She was pregnant with Danielle, the first of our three children. We endured some poverty. I applied to the Los Angeles sanitation department and the police department. We had to eat."

Then, Smith says, "The Lord helped." In September 1978, Santa Monica College, a two-year school with 23,000 students, hired Smith to coach men's track. He has been there ever since. "Protected," he says with a sarcastic grin. "Making it in respectable society."

Evans, meanwhile, had made the 1972 Olympic team as fourth man on the 1,600-meter relay. "Surest gold medal on the team," he said. But after Vince Matthews and Wayne Collett went one-two in the 400, they slouched with such pointed nonchalance on the victory stand that they were thrown out of the Munich Games by a supersensitive IOC for "disrespect." Since John Smith had been injured in the final of the 400, the U.S. couldn't field a full team for the relay. Evans never ran. "That was the biggest blow of my life," he says.

Evans went on to make a career of coaching in West African nations, developing sprinters and sending them to American



BEAMON, WHOSE JUMP RECORD STILL STANDS, LANDED AS A PARKS DIRECTOR IN FLORIDA.

universities. This was not his avenue of first choice, but no major U.S. school would hire him.

"I get the feeling that people are afraid of the class of '68 some," he says. "I feel I've been pushed aside because of that. I applied for the UCLA women's track position and was told that one reference had said he didn't know how I'd take NCAA pressure. I said, 'What? Do you know the notes I've gotten from Nigerian generals before the Uganda and Kenya meet?'" Evans is now the national coach of Qatar, a Middle Eastern emirate.

Evans, Matthews, Coleman, Freeman, Boston and high jumper Otis Burrell all coached in Africa or the Caribbean.

"You're simply *known* overseas," says Coleman, who was Nigerian national athletic director for six years beginning in 1977. "They treat you better. Here, they act in fear of their jobs or something."

No black member of the 1968 Olympic track team has become a head coach at an NCAA Division I university. "It forces a question," says Freeman, who consults with cities and corporations throughout the U.S. and the West Indies on sports and youth programs. "What is the worth of an athlete? Is he important just at his peak, as an example? The Olympic athlete, in a lot of countries, is seen as *useful*. Why couldn't Lee do a speaking tour, not in Africa, but Harlem or Watts? How many places can you be the best in the world at anything, and not be remembered, not called upon?"

In December 1985, the day before he was to be inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame, Bud Winter died of a heart attack. He was 76.

Smith, Carlos and Huey flew from Los Angeles to San Jose for the funeral. "John invited the fashion show in the hotel lounge to come to the funeral with us," Huey says. "We arrived in typical Carlos grand-entrance style—late, which embarrassed Tommie—and John worked the room like he always worked the stands in Europe."

Winter's death hit his athletes unexpectedly hard. Their last respects were tearful. "He gave us the home to do what we had to do," says Huey. "Bud would just show up and you'd start acting right."

The next morning, Smith, "fat and terrifyingly out of shape," in Huey's words, appeared at her door. "O.K., Huey," he said, "let's run."

Smith had started acting right. He vowed to reverse his physical decline. Over the next two years, he worked off 40 pounds. But for a pulled hamstring in training, he would have run the 200 meters in the 1989 World Veterans Games.

Carlos had no college degree to fall back on. "I lived in L.A. after 1972 and fumbled around," he says. He took odd jobs. He was a bouncer in a bar for \$65 a week. "People would love me to pick up a gun and rob," he says. "They'd love to say, 'That's what we expected.' But I will not give them the satisfaction. I will not confirm their prejudice."

In 1977 he started the John Carlos Development League to work with underprivileged kids. He became an aide to L.A. City Councilman David Cunningham. "The city wouldn't fund the league because I had a city job, and that was an apparent conflict of interest," Carlos says. "The question became, Stay with a sweet job or work with kids?"

He went with the kids. And suffered some more lean times. Then, later in 1977, his wife, Kim, committed suicide. "It had a lot to do with 1968," he says now. "If you were a woman with ideas of a nice life and you never knew if you were gonna eat or have a roof, and you saw your man having to pass a hat after giving a speech, and heard people inventing salacious lies to undermine your family, you would find it hard to handle. She felt she was in a no-win situation. She just couldn't take it."

Carlos kept his three children together. When the L.A. Olympic Organizing Committee got going under Peter Ueberroth, Carlos was hired as a community coordinator to work with local minority-group residents. He expected to receive a permanent position from Mayor Tom Bradley or Ueberroth after the

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Games. He didn't get one. "It was depressing," says Carlos. "I staggered around some more."

In December 1986, Carlos was arrested for cocaine possession. (He was found guilty, but after he attended a drug program the conviction was expunged from his record.) Two years earlier, he had married Charlene Norwood. "My wife and my life," he says now. In 1988, they moved to Palm Springs, Calif., where Carlos coached the sprinters at Palm Desert High School. In 1990 he was named boys' track and field coach at Palm Springs High.

Carlos is now the grandfather of three. He seeks a quiet life. "Of course, I'm going to be a whipping post the rest of my days," he says. "The '68 Olympics are *alive*. The juice, the fire of '68, that scared a lot of people. All of us were such strong personalities, and *that* scared people. It scared government and business, everybody. It *still* scares them."

But Carlos is tired. "It's ridiculous to feel you can fight the dragon for so long," he says, "and not be scarred. I just want to get away from it with my wife and kids. I've said enough and done enough. And it's not like we've made progress."

Over the last two decades, the greater social gains seem to have been made not by black Americans but by women. Indeed, the black male athletes' failure to include their sisters in the Olympic Project for Human Rights now seems curiously inhumane.

"It appalled me," says Tyus, "that the men simply took us for granted. They assumed we had no minds of our own and that we'd do whatever we were told."

Smith struggles with the truth of that. "They should have been involved," he says. "It just wasn't done, but it was not meant to be denigrating. So many things were happening, and there was so little time. It was an inadvertent oversight."

It may have been more than that. The heart of the black male athlete's mission was seen by many as affirming black manhood. A black man recoiled when whites called him "boy," because that echoed centuries of far worse emasculation. The topic is a

leitmotiv in Vince Matthews's book, *My Race Be Won*. "It was important," he wrote, "to reassert the basic masculinity of black men and force the controlling white forces in the United States to stop taking the black man's services for granted."

Yet athletic expression is not strictly masculine. Black female athletes such as Tyus and 1968 800-meter champion Madeline Manning must have confused the issue for the men. "We fought for all blacks, for black women and black babies," Smith says now, "not just men." But in the fighting, they stayed aloof.

The fact is that in 1968, America was far from recognizing the validity of women's sports in any color. It would take the Title IX guarantees of funding for women's programs and the great boom in women's participation of the late 1970s and the 1980s to fully establish that it is immoral to relate athletic progress to gender. Ours is a journey of stages.

And now Smith, Carlos and their country have arrived at a stage that seems to allow the good done by their gesture to be weighed against their sacrifice.

They, and the civil rights activists of their generation, made the American public understand that the thousand ways—in law and custom and language and stereotype—by which whites pressed blacks into subservience were unconscionable in a society of equals. They changed the terms of the debate.

But they cannot say that they won it. The plight of young black men today is in many ways worse than it was in 1968. A black man in the U.S. stands a one-in-21 chance of being murdered. Black manhood is affirmed less in sports and ever more in joining gangs, in pushing crack, and in children fathering children. In Chicago, 29% of black men between the ages of 20 and 29 spent time in the Cook County jail *last year*.

Smith sometimes wants to cry out to his own. "Black parents have not honored my times," he says. "Judging by the kids I see, parents have been too busy making it in corporate America to teach social issues. Kids come into my office spouting the rhetoric of ignorant fools, calling women bitches and all that, and they look at the pictures on my wall and they say, 'Who's that guy? Sure is skinny.'

"And I say that was me, at a proud time. And they see the portrait a friend of mine did, with the gesture superimposed on the head of Liberty, and they say, 'I think my father did say something about that. . . .'

"They won't believe I met Martin Luther King," says Smith. "So what do I teach? I coach women's cross-country and track, which is 95 percent white. Those women love me. They sit and look me in the eye and we talk."

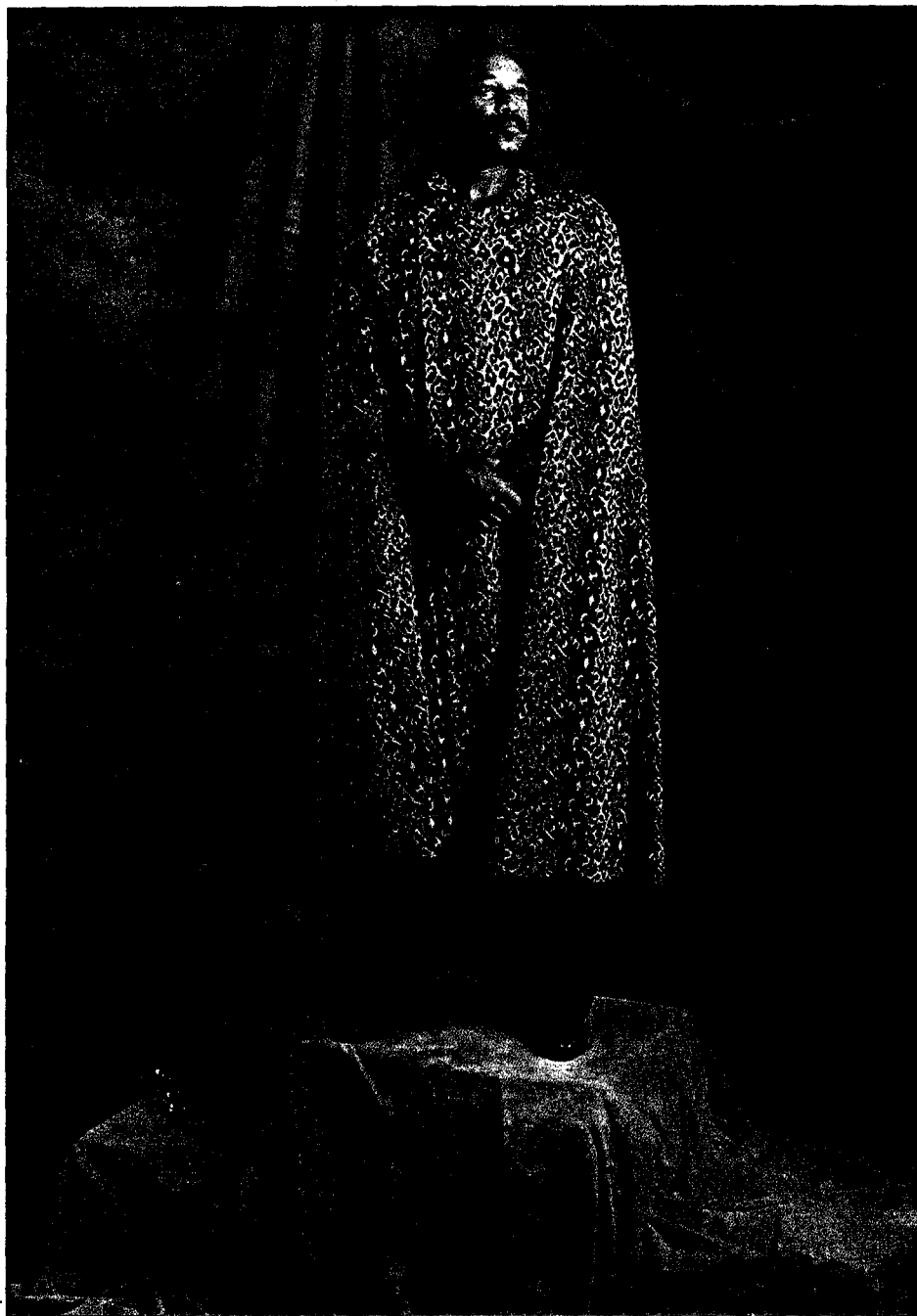
Smith tells them how Ronald Reagan, eternally cast opposite Tommie Smith, never told the American people any bad news. So now, after a decade of neglect that is hard to term benign, we need huge fixes in the environment, in our financial institutions, in our schools, in the budget and in the cities.

Smith does not believe his gesture has proved to be, as long-jump record holder Beamon puts it, "suicide, political suicide. Only it takes the rest of your life to die." When his students ask whether Smith would raise his fist again, he says, "Under the same circumstances, I could do no differently. It had to be done. I thank God I had the background to act. But I can't do it again. So I'll have to do something else. I'll have to teach you people one by one."

Smith has thought of how his life would have been different had he not acted. He sees it in the same shape. "I'd have come

AT PEACE WITH HIS PAST, CARLOS SAYS HE HAS NO REGRETS AND NEVER LOOKS BACK.





FOR SMITH, THE RESOLUTE STAND HE
TOOK AT THE '68 OLYMPICS WILL
ALWAYS BE, LIKE HIS LIFE, CLOAKED
IN PRIDE AND DIGNITY.

home to San Jose State with my medal, I'd have served in the Army, and I'd still have been a teacher. There were no instant millionaires from the 1968 Olympics."

Warding off regret, says Smith, is easy when you know you did the best you could. "I like what I did," he says. "It made me feel I did something for the cause, and it won't turn bitter if I don't let it turn bitter. It's not going to keep me from going home and hugging my wife. Look at this gift, these sweet kids and a wife who understands. And you know what? All but one of my 11 brothers and sisters are still living. This is not a sad story."

Neither is Carlos haunted by paths not taken. "I don't think of that," he says. "I think of all the billions who come through this bubble, this life. He could have made me Gladys Knight. He could have made me Michelangelo. But He made me John Carlos to make His statement in life."

Carlos, too, takes comfort in his family. His son, Malik, 21, is a Marine lance corporal. He is a hygiene equipment operator in

the 1st Medical Battalion, and he served in Saudi Arabia during the Persian Gulf war, helping to bag the bodies of combat casualties. "When he was in boot camp," says Carlos, "some Marine drill sergeants got him in a circle. They screamed at him, 'Are you the son of the guy who disgraced my country?' He kept his head up and took it. And he came home and said, 'Daddy, I'm a good Marine because of you. I'm a fighter, just like you.'"

Smith was right to worry about losing his life when he sent his arm into the Mexican evening 23 years ago. His and Carlos's lives were indeed caught and held by that act. They became their gesture.

In the ensuing decades, both men have demonstrated the truth of Twain's discouraging words about American freedom of speech and conscience. And now, perhaps, they have outlived most of the sting of those words. Now, their gesture becomes them.

When freedom called, they stood up. They still stand. ■