

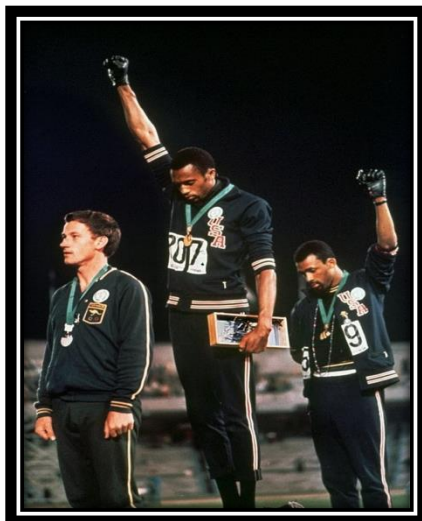
PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

John Carlos

athlete, activist

"I wanted to do something so powerful that it would reach the ends of the earth and yet still be nonviolent"

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CRAWFORD FAMILY U.S. OLYMPICS & PARALYMPICS ARCHIVE

Background Information

Born: June 5th, 1945

John Carlos was born and raised in Harlem, New York. His parents were from Cuba. In high school, Carlos proved himself as a top track-and-field athlete. He received a sports scholarship at East Texas State University. Then he went to college in San Jose, California.

After college, Carlos qualified for the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. He and his American teammate, Tommie Smith, won medals in the 200-yard dash. He can be seen on the far right of the picture.

Carlos's Resistance

Prior to the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, Carlos met with Martin Luther King Jr. in New York City. King encouraged Carlos to bring attention to the treatment of Black people in the United States. Inspired by King's words, Carlos engaged in a nonviolent protest with his teammate, Tommie Smith. After winning the bronze and gold medals in the 200 meter event, Carlos and Smith walked onto the podium without shoes, and raised his black-gloved fists in protest. They did not wear shoes to represent the experience of Black poverty in the U.S. Their raised fists represented Black power. Many people were upset by their actions, but the two sprinters never backed down. Carlos used his new fame to draw attention to the problem of racism in the U.S.ⁱⁱ

Lasting Impact

John Carlos inspired a generation of athletes, including NFL players like Colin Kaepernick. Similar to Kaepernick, Carlos and Smith both faced major consequences for their protest actions. They were both banned from competing in future Olympic events.

Carlos and Smith's protest at the Olympics is an iconic moment. It happened as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s transitioned to the Black Power Movement of the 1970s.ⁱⁱⁱ Carlos and Smith paved the way for other athletes to use their fame to make a difference in the world. There is a statue in their honor at the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.^{iv}

Essential Questions

1. How has John Carlos inspired future generations of athletes?

2. Why do you think Carlos and Smith were banned from competing in future Olympic events?

3. ***"I wanted to do something so powerful that it would reach the ends of the earth and yet still be nonviolent"***
 - a. What athlete-led protests are changing the world today?

ⁱ Bates, K. (2018, October 16). Those Raised Fists Still Resonate, 50 Years Later.

Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/10/16/657548752/those-raised-fists-still-resonate-50-years-later>.

ⁱⁱ Watson, W. R. (2019, January 2). From Use Of Power To Mistrust In Government, 1968 Lessons Still Resonate. Retrieved from

<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/02/681643633/from-use-of-power-to-mistrust-in-government-1968-lessons-still-resonate>

ⁱⁱⁱ John Carlos and Tommie Smith, 50 years later. (2018, October 3). Retrieved from

<https://www.si.com/olympics/2018/10/03/john-carlos-tommie-smith-1968-olympics-black-power-salute>.

^{iv} Armour, N. (2019, September 23). Opinion: 'We were wrong,' as USOPC finally do right by Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/nancy-armour/2019/09/23/olympics-tommie-smith-john-carlos-get-recognition-they-deserve/2423576001/>.