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A prelude to the protest at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics

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A PRELUDE TO THE PROTEST
AT THE 1968 MEXICO CITY OLYMPICS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

David V. Gray

May 1997

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ABSTRACT

A PRELUDE TO THE PROTEST AT THE 1968 MEXICO CITY OLYMPICS

by David V. Gray

This thesis addresses the topic of the protest movement to boycott the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. It analyzes the conditions that led to the movement, the demands that changed from a local to a national level, and ultimately the movement's end. Furthermore, it examines the condition of the black college athlete, and black Americans in general.

The purpose of this paper is to present in narrative form the activities and events leading up to the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, and to trace events chronologically that culminated in Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their black-gloved fists in protest on October 16, 1968.

Research on this subject reveals that the movement was sporadic and ended because of a lack of unity among the athletes. It was also discovered that the athletes decided on their own what they would do once they got to Mexico City.

I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to Robert D. Clark for his invaluable insight, honesty and integrity, assistance and much needed help with my research. I would also like to recognize Tommie Smith and John Carlos, for their patience and interviews, and without whom, there would be no need for this thesis.

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Chapter I

"I am a human being first and foremost, and not someone to be defined mainly by the color of his skin. ... My potential is more than can be expressed within the bounds of my race or ethnic identity. My humanity, in common with all of God's children, gives the greatest flight to the full range of my possibilities."—Arthur Ashe

In the centennial of the Olympic Games, the subject of the protest movement (the Olympic Project for Human Rights) to boycott the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City piqued my interest. Since the protest movement had its origins at San Jose State, I was curious what the conditions were that led to the movement, how the demands changed from a local to a national level, and, ultimately, why the movement ended. (The official announcement of its end was on August 31, 1968, during a meeting of the Black Power Conference in Philadelphia.)

To understand the reasons for the boycott it is important to understand the conditions that existed at the time of the boycott—conditions which would stimulate events that culminated in Tommie Smith and John Carlos, both San

Jose State students, raising their black-gloved fists in protest on October 16, 1968, during the awards ceremony of the 200-meter finals.

For the fourth summer in a row riots had rocked the United States. Racial tensions were at their worst in the summer of 1967, and that summer provided a graphic display of urban violence as tanks rolled through the streets of Detroit and soldiers from the 101st Airborne used machine guns to eradicate tenement snipers.

In the summer of 1967, Detroit was the scene of the bloodiest and costliest uprising in riot history. The city was in flames for four days. There were 41 known dead, 347 injured, 7,207 persons arrested, and 3,363 charged with felony,¹ far surpassing the summer riot in the district of Watts, Los Angeles, in 1965. For almost five days mobs looted, burned and murdered as almost 15,000 city and state police, National Guardsmen and federal troops, sought to contain the violence. And on July 24 President Lyndon Johnson sent tanks and paratroopers into Detroit.² Riot costs for the summer of 1967 were more than \$100 million in property damage—\$83 million in Detroit alone.³

Racial tensions had gotten so bad that the first riot report ever compiled nationally was released by the Senate Permanent Investigations Subcommittee in November 1967. A Senate investigations committee reported that riots and other major racial disturbances in the United States had killed 130 people, wounded 3,623 and caused an estimated \$210.6 million in property damage since 1965. Twelve police officers were among those reported killed and 1,199 officers

¹San Jose Mercury News, 8 October 1967, 19.

²Time, 4 August 1967, 13.

³San Jose Mercury News, 8 October 1967, 19.

had been wounded.⁴ A presidential investigation of the disorders alleged that riots were essentially a protest against the conditions of Negro life, the denial of dignity, unemployment, bad housing, and bad city services.⁵

Before the rioting began in 1967, Congress was rejecting or drastically reducing almost every new proposal aimed at upgrading urban life. Contending with Vietnam war costs, huge tax loads, and the Great Society program, Congress had killed a rent-supplement bill, drastically cut the Model Cities proposal, and thrown out a bill to protect cities from rats.⁶ It seemed Congress, with all its study commissions and investigation committees, was passing bills to eliminate riots, not rats.

Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, a black psychologist, noted that the ghetto itself made it brutally plain to the black man how little his society valued him. Ralph Bunche, American statesman and undersecretary of the United Nations, said that ghettos symbolized the Negro as "unacceptable, inferior, and therefore kept apart."⁷ An example of the message given to blacks can be found in the words of a white banker who told a black audience in 1967: "In our country any American who gets an education and works hard can go as

⁴Statistics were based on a survey of 129 mayors, who reported 101 "major" disturbances in 76 cities since 1965. The panel said that there were 7,985 cases of arson, 28,939 arrests and 5,434 convictions; San Jose Mercury News, 2 November 1967, 1.

⁵"What Must be Done," Newsweek, 20 November 1967, 35.

⁶Stephen B. Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 429.

⁷"What Must be Done," Newsweek, 20 November 1967, 39.

high as he pleases." As it turned out, the speaker's own bank had refused loans to blacks attempting to buy homes in an all-white section.⁸

The target of the black revolt was different from the traditional white working-class upheavals of the past. The black revolt was not striking the mines, the steel mills, or the auto companies. Blacks were revolting against the city.⁹ The riots started in the cities, and in 1967 nearly half of the twenty-two million blacks in America lived in the North, with two thirds clustered in the cities, and they came to the cities "a peasant class."¹⁰ A federal district judge of Detroit alleged, "No one is poor in America because he is white. Many people are poor because they are black."¹¹

In November 1967 the magazine Newsweek came out with a special report entitled "The Negro in America—What Must Be Done." A task force of editors, writers and reporters toured the country, visiting experts on campus and at every level of government, in corporations, in church and state, and spoke with educators and civil rights leaders. They came back with the conclusion that no one really knew what to do. The task force wrote:

The Johnson years have produced a torrent of social legislation unprecedented since the Depression—civil rights bills, medicare, aid to education, the war on poverty, urban innovations like model cities—and for the time being Congress has had enough. Bitterness about Negro rioting is only one coefficient in the Congressional equation. The war, its concomitant budget deficit and the pressure for a tax increase have heightened resistance to more domestic

⁸Larry L. King, "Another Warning To Whitey," The New Republic, 20 January 1968, 22.

⁹"What Must be Done," Newsweek, 20 November 1967, 35.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹*Ibid.*

legislation.¹²

President Johnson had refused to call up the reserves and raise taxes because he wanted to save his Great Society Program. "When the country looks to Lyndon Johnson these days," the task force wrote, "it gains the inescapable impression that Vietnam is America's top priority." Furthermore, the task force stated that "the immediate obstacle to an all-out assault on the problem of the Negro and the poor is obviously Vietnam."¹³

In 1967 America spent \$75 billion on defense but only \$7 billion on welfare.¹⁴ Martin Luther King noted that the American government was spending approximately \$332,000 for every enemy killed in Vietnam, real or imagined, as compared to \$53 per person in its antipoverty programs.¹⁵ It was also a fact that the black soldier had a higher death rate than the white soldier in Vietnam.¹⁶

There was a correlation between the protest movement against the war in Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement. American ideals conflicted with reality and were also being tested. In 1966, pestered by reporters all day, Heavyweight Boxing Champion Muhammad Ali finally exploded when asked what he thought about the Vietnam War: "Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong." That was the statement. The headline. But Ali was making

¹²Ibid., 36.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 34.

¹⁵Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King Jr., 413.

¹⁶San Jose Mercury News, 30 April 1968, 14.

more than a statement, although the simple phrase, "I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong," said it all. To many Americans "I ain't got no quarrel" summed up how many blacks, and to a large extent many whites, were feeling. The United States should not have been in Vietnam, nor should it remain there. To many young blacks this statement reinforced the problems here in America: the enemy isn't over there; it's here in our own home. There were places in America where blacks couldn't sit at a lunch counter because of their race, and yet they were expected to go to Asia and kill people who had never done anything wrong to them. Ali said, "I'm expected to go overseas to help free people in South Vietnam, and at the same time my people here are being brutalized and mistreated." He added: "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs?"¹⁷

On April 28, 1967, at the United States Armed Forces Examining and Entrance Station in Houston, when the name Cassius Marcellus Clay was called, Ali would not step forward. One hour later the New York State Athletic Commission suspended his boxing license and withdrew recognition of him as champion, without his having been convicted of or even charged with any crime. All jurisdictions followed suit.

On May 8, ten days after refusing induction, Ali was indicted by a federal grand jury in Houston and released that same day on five thousand dollars bail. He was later stripped of his heavyweight title. On June 19 Ali's

¹⁷Thomas Hauser, Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 187.

trial for refusing induction into the United States Armed Forces began. The following day the evidence was presented, and twenty minutes later the jury returned with a verdict of guilty. On June 25 he was found guilty of all charges, sentenced to five years imprisonment, fined \$10,000 and released on bond.

At this moment the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement fused, and it was a black athlete who initiated the union. Tennis great Arthur Ashe, who won the first U.S. Open in 1968,¹⁸ later said that Ali was a great athlete but one who had become more than a mere sports figure: "He combined his athletic talent with social action during the 1960s."¹⁹ Ashe added: "And I really believe that, if Ali hadn't done what he did, Harry Edwards wouldn't have gotten a fraction of the support he got in 1968 to boycott the Mexico City Olympics. Tommie Smith and John Carlos wouldn't have raised their fists. ... He was largely responsible for it becoming an expected part of a black athlete's responsibility to get involved."²⁰

The United States was in the midst of turmoil revolving around the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, which seemed to be coming to a standstill. Even King, who was once silent on the war in Vietnam, could no longer remain so. King noted: "We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them 8,000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of

¹⁸Until it was opened to professionals, the champions before 1968 were winners of amateur competitions called the U.S. National Championships.

¹⁹Ibid., 204.

²⁰Ibid., 205.

watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools."²¹ And Stokely Carmichael was denouncing the war with expletives like, "Hell, no, we won't go!" and "Ain't no Vietcong ever called me nigger."

With the rising preoccupation with Vietnam and a white backlash against civil rights reforms, black Americans felt frustrated that the great hopes of the early part of the decade seemed to be dying away. "The murder of Martin Luther King seemed to galvanize this frustration, resulting not only in urban riots but also in campaigns to move black people away from reliance on the 'American system,'" wrote David B. Kanin.²²

Leaders in the black community were being killed. Five days after Johnson removed himself from seeking another term in office King was assassinated on the second-floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. There was a loss and a lack of leadership among black people when Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and, subsequently, Martin Luther King were murdered. The assassination of King somehow represented the end of the nonviolent movement. In fact, within two days of King's death, the Black Panthers were shooting it out with police in Oakland.

The social climate of the Sixties stimulated black pride and black consciousness. In 1967 black Americans began to assert themselves against a system that had not recognized them, and a new generation of black leaders

²¹Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King Jr., 418.

²²David B. Kanin, A Political History of the Olympic Games (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 93.

emerged in a fit of rage and power—Black Power. Carmichael, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, to name a few.

"Black Power" became the slogan when Carmichael first yelled it to a crowd of 3,000 people from a flatbed truck after he had gotten out of jail for trying to erect some tents on a Negro school ground in the 1966 Meredith March through Mississippi.²³ Carmichael subsequently joined the paramilitary Black Panther Party founded in Oakland that same year. H. Rap Brown succeeded Carmichael as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1967 and, ironically, openly suggested to a crowd in New York that Negroes were at war and immediately urged that they "better get yourselves some guns" and "burn this town down."²⁴ By September and October of 1967, Brown was under indictment on riot charges in Cambridge, Maryland, as well as under federal indictment for a weapons violation.

Black Power was replacing the nonviolence approach embodied by Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In open defiance of King and SCLC, SNCC dropped nonviolent from its name and actually lobbied against civil-rights legislation.²⁵ Black Power advocates were bereft of hope because they were convinced that blacks could not win equality in America. They instead championed black separatism, even an independent black state, which King had thought absurd.²⁶ King emphatically opposed any

²³Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King Jr., 386.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 431; also San Jose Mercury News, 26 November 1967, 40.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.* 409.

modern back-to-Africa movement in the United States: "We are American citizens, and we deserve our rights in this nation."²⁷ King wrote: "There is no salvation of the Negro through isolation ... In the final analysis the weakness of Black Power is its failure to see that the black man needs the white man and the white man needs the black man."²⁸ To King, the words "black" and "power" together gave the impression that "we are talking about black domination rather than black equality."²⁹ Many whites felt pushed out by Black Power, while many blacks felt they were indoctrinated into believing that things were improving.³⁰

Things were not improving. A survey released by the National Industrial Conference Board in July of 1967 revealed that one-fourth of U.S. families earned at least \$10,000 a year, while the median family income for the Negro was only \$4,000.³¹ A Labor Department study of ten of the nation's worst slums found one Negro in three either jobless or earning too little to live on.³²

In November 1967 an official study on "Social and Economic Conditions of Negroes," which was ordered by President Johnson, revealed that the Negro unemployment rate was at its lowest level since 1957—7.3 percent, but was still

²⁷Ibid. 115.

²⁸Ibid., 409-410.

²⁹Ibid., 388.

³⁰San Jose Mercury News, 15 October 1967, 17.

³¹Time, 4 August 1967, 12

³²"What Must be Done," Newsweek, 20 November 1967, 39.

more than double the rate of 3.4 percent for whites. It was also reported in the survey that 3 out of 10 Negroes lived in substandard housing, compared with 1 out of 10 whites.³³

By 1968 black militant groups were despondent and disillusioned. They were impatient with King's pacifist methods, as well as with the slow results from social legislation and policy that were not being enforced or exercised in the south and other parts of the country. Unfortunately, the civil rights laws passed by Congress did not change the attitudes or minds of many people overnight. Many southern states chose to ignore many of the decisions laid down by the Supreme Court. Despite the Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, decision in 1954, many southern schools continued to have segregation. Five years after the Brown decision Alabama did not have a single desegregated school. In 1967 former Alabama Governor George Wallace, in his continuing battle for states rights, publicly said that Alabama was considering using "police power" to override federal courts and protect its people. "I'm tired of political hacks like Earl Warren and Hugo Black running my life and my children's life," said the crass politician, who added, "We are sick and tired of federal judges ... playing God on the court benches." Wallace repeatedly brought up court-ordered desegregation saying that it had hamstrung educators.³⁴ It wasn't until 1969 in the case of Alexander vs Holmes County (Mississippi) Board of Education that the Supreme Court ordered that public school systems end segregation "at once."

³³U.S. News and World Report, 13 November 1967, 16.

³⁴San Jose Mercury News, 3 September 1967, 5.

According to Lance Morrow in Time magazine, King's principles of Gandhian nonviolence had "already begun losing their constituency among blacks by early 1968."³⁵ To many blacks nonviolence meant defenselessness. Martin Luther King, himself, was starting to move toward more aggressive nonviolent behavior and had become somewhat disgusted with the lag in civil rights legislation. "Justice for black people will not flow into society merely from court decisions nor from fountains of political oratory. ... I am not sad that black America are rebelling; this was not only inevitable but eminently desirable. Without this magnificent ferment among Negroes, the old evasions and procrastinations would have continued indefinitely."³⁶ After having testified in a closed hearing held by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder in October 1967, King said, "We have got to find a kind of middle road between riots and timid supplication of justice, a program of escalating nonviolence to the dimensions of civil disobedience."³⁷ Morrow stated: "As the atmosphere of violence and apocalypse deepened, King's moral style came to seem to many blacks to be irrelevantly noble, archaic, out of touch with the sharper realities."³⁸ A Black Power speaker in Atlanta said that "Martin King was trying to get us to love white folks before we learned to love ourselves, and that ain't no good."³⁹

³⁵Time, 11 January 1988, 23.

³⁶Playboy, January 1989, 131.

³⁷New York Times, 24 October 1967, 33.

³⁸Time, 11 January 1988, 23.

³⁹Ibid.

Black Power emphasized strength through unity, summoned the Negro to assert his manhood, take pride in his blackness and his African past, rid himself of his old fear and awe of the white man.⁴⁰ The Newsweek task force concluded that "the American Negro's problem is one of both class and color, and no one knows how to separate neatly the class problem from the color problem. ... blackness is synonymous with inferiority."⁴¹ A Detroit militant said, "... as the black giant awakens, he has trouble with his identification with whites as well as with his blackness."⁴² James Baldwin wrote there is no Negro "who has not had to make his own precarious adjustment to the 'nigger' who surrounds him and to the 'nigger' in himself." A Detroit psychiatrist said that the summer riot of 1967 was "not an expression of apathy, hopelessness and despair" but an expression of the black man's "growing identity, growing pride, growing esteem and an indication that the black man no longer is measuring himself in terms of the white man."⁴³

Some progress was being made in 1967 and 1968. For the first time in history, the U.S. Supreme Court had a black justice, the U.S. Senate had a black member, and so did the President's Cabinet; and two major cities, Cleveland and Gary, had black mayors. In March 1968 the Supreme Court, in order to force service to blacks at restaurants and other facilities covered by the 1964 civil

⁴⁰Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King Jr., 409.

⁴¹Ibid., 35.

⁴²"What Must be Done," Newsweek, 20 November 1967, 39.

⁴³San Jose Mercury News, 11 March 1968, 2.

rights law, passed an 8-0 decision that enabled blacks to go to court to end discrimination knowing that if they won the accused proprietor would have to pay lawyers' fees for the challenger.⁴⁴

Dr. Kenneth B. Clark addressed a national conference of three hundred elected black officials at the University of Chicago in the fall of 1967 and said that Black Power may be "the sour grapes phenomenon of the racial scene," but in the ghettos it is "a powerful political reality which cannot be ignored." He further said that the ghetto Negro was cynical, bitter, hostile and frustrated at the lack of progress in jobs, housing, schools and other problems of the slums.⁴⁵

Clark called the Black Power movement a "shoddy moral product disguised in the gaudy package of racial militance [*sic*]." ⁴⁶ But Clark, also president of the Metropolitan Applied Research Center in New York and a professor at City University, asserted that "Black Power does have tremendous psychological appeal for the masses of Negroes, who have nothing to lose."⁴⁷ The prevailing attitude of blacks was that they had nothing to lose by rioting, or by protesting.

The same constraints and limitations on opportunities in society were felt by black athletes, professional and amateur alike. Conditions that fomented riots—substandard housing and unequal job opportunities, racist real estate and housing practices, and the lack of worth and feeling of inferiority—

⁴⁴New York Times, 4 October 1967, 1; San Jose Mercury News, 8 November 1967, 1; 19 March 1968, 6.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶"What Must be Done," Newsweek, 20 November 1967, 40.

⁴⁷New York Times, 1 October 1967, 68.

were not restricted to the urban black, neither was the rage. The black college athlete also found himself victim of the same conditions.

Chapter II

"The only persons who really changed history are those who changed men's thinking about themselves."—Malcolm X

The impetus for the protest movement to boycott the 1968 Olympics had its origins at San Jose State College, the oldest public institution of higher learning in California.

The track coach at San Jose State at the time was Lloyd "Bud" Winter—the finest coach of sprinters of his generation. Winter attracted so many sprinters to San Jose State that it received the nickname "Speed City" during the Winter era. The nickname was no misnomer. During his career at San Jose State, Winter's athletes set thirty-seven world records, 102 were track All-Americans, and twenty-seven were Olympians. His sprinters won eighteen individual titles and set twenty-four world records in track and field. San Jose State finished among the top ten teams fourteen times at the National Collegiate Athletic Association championships. Winter coached an NCAA championship in 1969, and his teams finished second three times.¹

¹San Francisco Chronicle, 9 December 1985, 62; and San Jose Mercury News, 7 December 1985, 22A.

Winter was also an assistant coach of the U.S. Olympic team in 1960, and a consultant for the Olympic Games in 1964 and 1968. He coached Lee Evans, John Carlos, Ronnie Ray Smith and Tommie Smith (no relation), all of whom went to the Olympics in Mexico City and won medals; three set four world records. In fact, San Jose State sent seven track and field athletes to Mexico City in 1968, more than any other college in the nation. Said Tommie Smith: "San Jose State University had the athletes they did because of the tolerance of Bud Winter. ... we were all quivering with the beginnings of the politics of the black athlete, and he never said a word to us about any of that."² John Carlos added: "Bud was one excellent man, and one excellent coach. He worked by his own drummer's beat. He always respected his athletes as individual men."³

In 1965 Tommie Smith ran the 220 in 20.0 seconds tying Frank Budd's world record. In the fall of that same year Lee Evans transferred to San Jose State. In 1966, Smith set a world record of 19.5 in the 220 and Evans was ranked first in the world in the 400. Smith was dubbed Tommie "Jet Gear" by the press, and in 1967 he and Evans raced against each other in the San Jose State First Annual Invitational, timed in both the 400 meters and 440 yards. Smith won running 44.5 in the 400 and 44.8 in the 440, both world records. Before Smith would graduate, counting relays, he would tie or break 11 records.⁴

John Carlos transferred to San Jose State in the spring of 1967, in Smith's senior year, because of racism he had encountered. Carlos described

²Kenny Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 64.

³John Carlos, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 24 January 1997.

⁴Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 65; also San Jose Mercury News, 21 April 1968, 77.

how football coaches at East Texas State called black athletes "nigger" or "nigra" or "boy" during practices and that "a black man couldn't get a beer in a bar" in the Texas state capital of Austin.⁵

In Los Angeles that same year eight black students claiming to be members of the Black Student Union marched into the office of the California State College at Los Angeles student newspaper demanding that editor David Shelburne stop using the word "Negro" in stories. The group spokesman was Anthony C. Ashley, 23, a senior sociology major who preferred to be called Ayuko Babu. "Ashley [*sic*]," it was reported, "demanded that the paper instead use the words 'black' or 'Afro-American' instead of Negro" when writing in the paper.⁶ "A lot of militancy was rising in the black community," said Lee Evans. "We stopped referring to ourselves as colored or Negro."⁷ It seemed everyone was using the term, "Negro," except blacks themselves. "You were black or you were not black," explained Evans. "An Afro haircut was a statement of black nationalism. Nineteen sixty-seven was the first year I was proud of my skin being black."⁸

Harry Edwards, an Assistant Sociology Professor at San Jose State, who led the movement for the boycott, stated: "The roots of the revolt of the black athlete spring from the same seed that produced the sit-ins, the freedom rides, and the rebellion in Watts, Detroit, and Newark. ... The revolt of the black

⁵Ibid., 66.

⁶Spartan Daily, 13 November 1967, 1.

⁷Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 66.

⁸Ibid.

athlete arises also from his new awareness of his responsibilities in an increasingly more desperate, violent, and unstable America."⁹ Edwards had set a national junior-college discus-throw record of nearly 180 feet and one coach went so far as to call him "a terrific animal." The white sports establishment was "degrading and violating the basic human dignity and intelligence of black athletes."¹⁰

The attitude and treatment of the black athlete in America in 1968 was reflected by the magazine Sports Illustrated in a story which was the first in a series titled "The Black Athlete—A Shameful Story." The first article was titled "The Cruel Deception" and opened with a quote from the athletic director of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) who said, in apparent ignorance of the effect of his comments, "In general, the nigger athlete is a little hungrier, and we have been blessed with having some real outstanding ones."¹¹ A university president reiterated the same sentiment in the next paragraph: "Sure, the Negroes helped our image, but don't forget, they got built up too. Every one of them that's been here got out of the ghetto. ... and you can't just say that we got a bunch of cattle in here and milked them. It was profitable both ways."¹²

⁹Harry Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete (New York: The Free Press, 1969), xv.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, xiv.

¹¹Jack Olsen, The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story (New York: Time-Life Books, 1968), 7.

¹²*Ibid.*

Although it was true that UTEP (then Texas Western) had the first integrated team in Texas, blacks on the UTEP campus were not happy with the way things were. They had expressed a wish for the athletic department to stop referring to them as "niggers." In defense of the UTEP athletic program, Assistant Athletic Director Jim Bowden asserted, "This was the first institution in Texas ... that had a colored athlete, and George McCarty, our athletic director, was the coach who recruited him." Apparently not heeding the wishes of the black athletes on campus, he added in the very next sentence, "George McCarty's done more for the nigger race than Harry Edwards'll do if he lives to be a hundred."¹³

George McCarty, who opened the article with the quote about the "nigger athletes," bragged about "his nigger athletes" who starred for the school and also called them "nigra," and seldom used the word Negro, which he pronounced *knee-grow*. "It's a habit you don't change overnight," he explained.¹⁴ "They (coaches) can pronounce Negro if they want to," said Bob Wallace, a black athlete at UTEP. "*They can pronounce it*. But I think it seems like such a little thing to them. The trouble with them is they're not thinking of the Negro and how he feels. Wouldn't you suppose that if there was one word these guys that live off Negroes would get rid of, one single word in the whole vocabulary, it would be *nigger*?"¹⁵

The black college athlete in 1968 was dissatisfied, disgruntled and disillusioned. "Black students aren't given athletic scholarships for the

¹³*Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 50-51.

purpose of education," declared Edwards. "Blacks are brought in to perform. Any education they get is incidental to their main job, which is playing sports. In most cases, their college lives are educational blanks."¹⁶

Jack Olsen in The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story (1968)¹⁷ wrote that the "American college coach expects his Negro athletes to concentrate on the job for which they were hired. The aim is neither graduation nor education. The *sine qua non* [sic] for the Negro athlete is maintaining his eligibility." He further stated:

At the end of the last second of the last minute of the last hour of a Negro athlete's eligibility, he is likely to find himself dumped unceremoniously into the harsh academic world. Tutors who wrote his themes disappear; professors who gave him superior grades for inferior work stiffen their marking standards overnight; counselors who advised courses in basket weaving and fly casting suddenly begin pointing out that certain postponed courses in English and mathematics and history must be passed before graduation.¹⁸

The central issue was the exploitation of blacks by college athletic programs around the country. Edwards gave an example of a black athlete who merely had to pass out the basketballs and volleyballs for a coach who taught two "techniques of teaching" athletic courses to get four units of credit toward the twelve he needed to maintain his athletic eligibility. "... such lofty

¹⁶Ibid., 10.

¹⁷Olsen put his articles that ran in five consecutive issues of Sports Illustrated, starting with the July 1, 1968, issue, into a book of the same title of the series.

¹⁸Ibid., 10-11. Some administrators I interviewed admitted that this kind of "Mickey Mouse" course work in order for an athlete to graduate occurred on more than one occasion at San Jose State.

academic goals might jeopardize a black athlete's college career and thus wipe out the college's financial investment in him."¹⁹

As a result, few black athletes graduated within the four-year period of their collegiate eligibility, and many never graduated at all, lacking the personal funds to finish school after their eligibility had expired or the academic background to qualify for any kind of a scholastic aid. In the 1966 NCAA basketball finals, none of the five black starters for the winning school, UTEP (Texas Western), graduated.²⁰

In 1968 black college athletes rarely graduated with their classes and the majority of them did not graduate at all. Since the black athlete had not learned anything or been exposed to anything other than athletics, he was ill-equipped and ill-prepared for the harsh economic reality of survival in society. Professor Charles G. Hurst of Howard University said, "If these boys don't make it as professionals ... the system has not prepared them to engage in any other avenue of economic endeavor on a competitive basis."²¹

Black collegiate athletes in 1968 said they felt dehumanized, exploited and discarded.²² "The Negro needs to know that there are alternatives available other than athletics," Hurst stated. "There is nothing less wanted in our society than a worn-out Negro athlete."²³ "The black athlete was always

¹⁹Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 10.

²⁰Ibid., 11.

²¹Olsen, The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story, 12.

²²Ibid., 9.

²³Ibid., 12.

expected by the honkie to play the role of the responsible Negro, the good Negro, no matter what else was going on in the black world," said Edwards. "If blacks were being shot down in the street, the black athlete was expected to go ahead and play his basketball game and be quiet. ... What about human rights?"²⁴

David B. Kanin in A Political History of the Olympic Games (1981) said: "One of the most noted means for black social mobility was achievement in sport. Since Jesse Owens, blacks used athletic victory as a lever for individual recognition and social prestige." However, he added, "In 1968 ... some American black athletes and scholars tried to convince their fellows that the best way to use political sport was as a protest against the government, not a celebration of it."²⁵ And protest they did.

What started as an impromptu luncheon between Harry Edwards and a friend in the cafeteria of California's oldest public college turned into an organized protest against alleged racial discrimination on campus, and a proposed protest of the football home opener.

Edwards was an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and was also a doctoral candidate at Cornell University. He came from East St. Louis to San Jose State College on an athletic scholarship. Edwards, who is 6' 8", became a star center on the Spartan basketball team from 1960-1964 and set a record in the discus throw on the track and field team and had himself experienced discrimination in housing and fraternities on campus. He could not

²⁴Ibid., 19.

²⁵David B. Kanin, A Political History of the Olympic Games (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 93.

move into a men's dormitory "because the housing office had been unable to find a white boy who did not mind rooming with a Negro."²⁶ As an undergraduate, Edwards could not get into a fraternity, could not buy a meal at a better restaurant because he would not be served, and could not get off-campus housing, despite being a star athlete for San Jose State. For most of one semester he was even reduced to sleeping on the lobby floor of a dormitory.²⁷

After setting records in basketball and the discus, Edwards won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to do graduate work and was hired to teach in the fall of 1966. When he returned to San Jose State as a teacher, again no housing was available off campus. Vacancy signs were not vacant to Edwards. In the fall of 1967, while teaching two courses a semester as a part-time instructor, Edwards still could not find decent housing and was living in a converted garage he rented for \$100 a month, and campus administrators knew about it.²⁸

On September 15 Edwards and Ken Noel, a master's degree candidate and a former athlete himself (like most of the black males on campus), sat in the cafeteria eating and talking about the all-Negro campus fraternity Omega Psi Phi, which also pledged whites, and about Negro athletes forced to stay in motels because they could not find housing. They also talked about the special college regulation that allowed 2 percent of the student body to be enrolled

²⁶Joseph A. Palermo, "The Racial Discrimination Crisis at San Jose State College September, 1967" (Master's Thesis, San Jose State University, 1986), 14.

²⁷Harry Edwards, The Struggle That Must Be (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980), 130; also Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 14.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 158. J. Benton White confirmed that Edwards was indeed sleeping on the floor of a garage. J. Benton White, interview by author, Tape recording, San Jose, California, 5 December 1996.

without proper academic qualifications, which consisted mostly of Negro athletes.²⁹ After talking for about an hour, Edwards and Noel realized that the same social and racial injustices and discrimination, such as in the fraternities and sororities, and in housing, mistreatment of blacks in athletics, and a general lack of understanding of the problems of Afro-Americans by the college administration that they had encountered as freshman at San Jose State, still existed on campus.³⁰

They decided to approach the administration and were subsequently referred to the Dean of Students, Stanley Benz. Edwards wrote: "After attempting without success to see various administrators, we were finally granted ten minutes with the dean of students—as it turned out, not to be heard but to be *told*." After a "faint smile" had turned into a "toothy grin" then into a "chuckle," the dean laughed in their faces after hearing of their charges.³¹ Edwards and Noel also made several attempts to see President Clark and even tried to enlist the help of some liberal faculty members, but their efforts were to no avail. That's when Edwards decided it was time to go public with the allegations of racial discrimination. "Finally," Edwards wrote, "we felt we had no alternative but to denounce the situation and demand redress publicly."³² In the San Jose Mercury News they announced a rally planned for the

²⁹Spartan Daily, 28 September 1967, 1.

³⁰Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 14.

³¹Edwards, The Struggle That Must Be, 159. Dean Benz denied to the press ever having heard any complaints about housing for blacks from Edwards: San Jose Mercury News, 14 September 1967, 4.

³²*Ibid.*

following Monday, the first day of classes, on South Seventh Street to protest the abuses, and promised that black students would "picket, disrupt, and bring to a halt" the first Spartan football home opener if some progress was not made.³³ Said Edwards: "What activity is of more relevance to a student body than the first football game of the season? ... What activity is of more immediate importance to a college administration than the threat of stopping a game that had been contracted for under a \$12,000 breach of contract clause ... if the game were not played?"³⁴

Edwards had been able to speak with Clark about his allegations on the Friday before the Monday rally. That morning Edwards came into Clark's office and spoke with him for two hours, just before Clark was to accompany the football team to Tempe to play Arizona State. Clark was "very much impressed" by Edwards. He says Edwards was vigorous and insistent, but adds: "He was polite and yet he was firm in indicating that something had to be done." This was the first time Clark was aware of the problem, but he had no question that Edwards's charges were substantiated.³⁵

Nevertheless, Edwards and Noel decided the rally would commence at noon on the opening day of classes. Noel, who already had experience organizing black athletes at San Jose City College, distributed circulars stating the rally's aims and invited all students, faculty members and administration officials to attend.³⁶ Later that night, Edwards and Noel organized a meeting of

³³San Jose Mercury News, 14 September 1967, 4.

³⁴Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 44.

³⁵Robert D. Clark, interview by author, tape recording, Eugene, Oregon, 11 January 1997.

SJS black students at the Omega House in what proved to be the first assembly of the United Black Students of Action (UBSA).³⁷

On the first day of school on September 18, what started out as 50 spectators soon turned into 700, with Benz, President Clark, and a few members of the Black Panthers in attendance. When Clark came back from Arizona that Monday, he has no memory of it being any different from the beginning of most school years—except for the rally.³⁸

"Faculty Member Charges Discrimination in Housing" the headline read. Edwards, instructor of sociology and anthropology, it was reported, had organized the black students of San Jose State College and San Jose City College to "fight bigotry and racism on our campus and in our community."³⁹ Edwards charged that two apartment buildings near campus refused him lodging in August despite the fact that both houses displayed "vacancy" signs. Landlords falsely told black students that they had no vacancies. "They say there's a housing shortage, I can show you vacancy signs all over, but they're not vacant to Negroes," he declared.⁴⁰ John Carlos says of the landlords: "They had some cowboys in town at the time, and didn't want blacks to use it [housing]." He adds: "When you're black, you can be four and five miles away, and as soon as you get out of the car they change the sign in the window."⁴¹ Edwards also

³⁶Edwards, The Struggle That Must Be, 159.

³⁷Spartan Daily, 28 September 1967, 1.

³⁸Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

³⁹Spartan Daily, 18 September 1967, 1.

⁴⁰San Francisco Chronicle, 19 September 1967, 12; also Spartan Daily, 18 September 1967, 1.

gave the names of five members of the SJS football team who he said had to live in a motel because they could not find housing. "... the housing situation is so bad that we have football players—athletes on this campus who give up their sweat and blood and broken bones and everything else for the glory of San Jose State—playing football out of a damn motel."⁴² Tommie Smith recalls a time he went apartment hunting and found a nice apartment five blocks from campus with a For Rent sign on the lawn. When the people came to the door and saw him, they said, "No vacancy." Smith says he got a blonde, blue-eyed girl from school to knock and ask if there was a room at the same apartment and there was a vacancy for her.⁴³

Hobert Burns, Academic Vice President of SJS, who worked directly with President Clark and became acting president when he left, thought the allegations were "essentially true." Burns recalls when Edwards came into his office one day and told him that in the football recruiting program the white players were being housed in the fraternity but the black players were given money to stay in motels. "And I didn't believe Harry," says Burns. "I didn't believe that the university or the athletic department could or would do such a thing. But I checked into it, and it was true."⁴⁴

⁴¹Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

⁴²East San Jose Sun, 20 September 1967, 1; also Spartan Daily, 18 September 1967, 1.

⁴³Tommie Smith, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 29 January 1997; Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 66.

⁴⁴Hobert Burns, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 15 January 1997.

The accusation followed a reported critical shortage of near-campus housing. In mid-September the San Jose Mercury News published an article on a housing shortage for thousands of collegians in the area. San Jose State College authorities, it was reported, admitted that few vacancies existed in apartment buildings and virtually none in college-approved quarters. San Jose State Housing Coordinator Robert L. Baron suggested that one of the reasons was that enrollment was the greatest in San Jose State history.⁴⁵ More students than ever wanted to live near the campus, but at the same time, the total number of housing facilities had not changed. In the six residence halls, Baron said only 10 percent of those who formally applied could be accepted. He reported no vacancies whatsoever in college-approved facilities for men, and that more than 6,000 written applications were received for six hundred spaces in men's and women's dormitories.⁴⁶ Apparently none of the six hundred spaces were reserved for blacks on the campus. Less than one-fourth of the black student population lived in the dormitories. In the three men's and women's residence halls there were thirteen and eleven black students respectively.

Peter Buzanski, a member of the Executive Committee of the Academic Council at the time, says:

They said that the students were segregated in the residence hall. The fact was they were segregated because they wanted to segregate themselves. They wanted to be with their own. I mean, that is, they asked to be housed in a block in the wing. And what the residence manager tried to do was intersperse them.

⁴⁵Student enrollment at SJS increased at a rate of nearly twelve percent annually throughout the 1960's. San Jose State University Archives. Box 154, file: "Enrollment;" also Box 191, file: "Enrollment Controlled 1966-67."

⁴⁶San Jose Mercury News, 14 September 1967, 1.

Still, Buzanski recognized the discrimination problem on campus. "We all were pretty much aware that there was a problem but it didn't come to a head until student activism started."⁴⁷

The week before Baron admitted that there was "a good possibility" of racial discrimination in near-campus housing.⁴⁸ However, an investigation by Baron into the situation had shown there was "no evidence to indicate any apartment house owners using the college listing are these persons."

According to college policy on open housing, all approved or unapproved houses listed with the Housing Office must agree to rent to any regularly enrolled SJS student "regardless of race, creed, or national origin."⁴⁹

The influx in enrollment exacerbated the housing shortage around the campus as 1,248 more students enrolled than the previous year.⁵⁰ There were an estimated ten to twelve thousand students living in the immediate campus area,⁵¹ with an estimated five hundred students searching for a place to live on the first day of school.⁵² Housing was scarce, and even scarcer for the college's two hundred black students. Increased enrollment, combined with

⁴⁷Dr. Peter Buzanski, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 13 November 1996.

⁴⁸Spartan Daily, 18 September 1967, 1.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹San Jose State University Archives. Box 209, file: "Discrimination—Newsreleases and Statements." Statement by San Jose State College President Robert D. Clark, 24 September 67, 1.

⁵²San Jose State University Archives. Box 154, file: "Edwards, Harry Pro.," also Palo Alto Times, 20 September 1967, 1.

tighter state budgetary constraints, weighed heaviest on students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds, who were mostly minorities. Billie Jensen, an associate professor at San Jose State at the time, believes there was discrimination on campus. Though not necessarily in the classroom, she definitely thinks there was discrimination in housing on and near the campus. With a student population of 200 out of a total enrollment of 23,095, she considered the black students on campus to be the "invisible minority."⁵³

The discrimination allegations against the Men's Physical Education Department were also outlined during the rally. Edwards charged athletic officials with "exploiting" Negro athletes at the same time coaches excluded them from social activities and practiced housing discrimination, and alleged that "a minority group at SJS are kept at a low point and this is done in collaboration with the Men's P.E. [*sic*] Department."⁵⁴

Edwards accused the coaching staff of racial segregation "as soon as social activities are involved." The white athletes, Edwards asserted, got set up with parties, dates, and other niceties while for the Negro athletes, Edwards said, "... they call in me, Tommie Smith, or S. T. [*sic*] Saffold, hand us \$20, and tell us, 'Show him a good time.'"⁵⁵ Edwards said the black escorts who escorted new black recruits did not have access to fraternities and sororities and "so cannot escort their charges to parties, dances, and other 'after game' activities that might be scheduled. ... even though all his white teammates and their

⁵³Dr. Billie Jensen, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 24 October 1996.

⁵⁴San Jose Mercury News, 19 September 1967, 1-2.

⁵⁵San Jose Mercury News, 14 September 1967, 1; and Spartan Daily, 18 September 1967, 1-2.

guests might be there. ... the coach will generally give the black recruit's escort ten or fifteen dollars and bid them farewell. ..."56

Edwards called it a double standard of treatment for incoming black and white athletes.⁵⁷ Says Burns: "The sororities would give parties for the football recruits, for the white football recruits. Or the athletic department would arrange parties with the sororities. ... Except that the white football recruits would get to go to sorority parties but the black football recruits were not invited." When asked if there was racial discrimination in the athletic department, Burns replies, "I don't think there's any doubt about," and adds, "If I'd had first hand knowledge I would have put a stop to it. And as soon as I found out it was true, I went to President Clark and we *put* a stop to it. ... And eventually we replaced a lot of people in the athletic department."⁵⁸

SJS Athletic Director Dr. Robert T. Bronzan denied the charge of bias in recruiting, housing and social activities: "I categorically deny that any member of the athletic department is now or ever has allowed, practices or condoned any form of discrimination." Bronzan continued: "Furthermore, I assert unqualifiedly that the members of the department of athletics have contributed more than any organization on or off campus to the total welfare of Negro students." He even stated that his coaches served Negro athletes as "counselors, advisors, and personal friends."⁵⁹

⁵⁶Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 14.

⁵⁷Ibid., 15.

⁵⁸Burns interview, 15 January 1997. (Emphasis added.)

⁵⁹In the next sentence Bronzan admitted he realized that discrimination existed in the area of housing conditions and social limitations faced by Negro students; San Jose Mercury News, 21 September 1967, 2.

St. Saffold, who played on the Spartan basketball team from 1963 to 1967 and was a teammate of Edwards (who was instrumental in recruiting Saffold to SJS) and is now Acting Vice President of Student Affairs at San Jose State University, says that Bronzan's statement was not inaccurate:

I think on the surface there's some truth to that. In terms of perception, I think that's an accurate perception. I think that in some cases, certainly more than probably most, that may have been true. I am reminded that there are a group of black alumni who were football players ... played for Bob Bronzan when he was coach going back to the 50's, who have come together ... to honor Bob Bronzan for what he did for them as students while he was here. I think in terms of Bob, himself, ... Bob did serve as an advisor. Bob did things which, some, were kind of nontraditional, but rather parental at the same time ... academically as well as athletically.⁶⁰

In fact, Saffold was on his way to "literally" flunking out of the university his first year—if not for the strong motivation of Bronzan. Bronzan had pulled Saffold into his office, closed his door, and spoke to him for almost an hour, and "never once did he smile." He gave Saffold a good ripping. "He jacked me up," says Saffold. Bronzan had met Saffold's mother and promised her that Saffold would be successful; he wanted to make good on his promise, and he did. Saffold did not flunk out and graduated in January of 1967. "I certainly did not come to San Jose State with superlative academic credentials," he says now. "I was an athlete first and foremost. I think I became a student athlete and the reason I became a student athlete is largely attributable to him."⁶¹

Among his allegations, Edwards also found fault with a college regulation allowing special admission for 2 percent of the total college

⁶⁰St. Saffold, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 5 December 1996.

⁶¹Ibid.

enrollment who would not otherwise be academically qualified. He claimed that the majority of Negroes admitted in the 2 percent bracket were not admitted for academic reasons but because of their athletic ability. The 2 percent was reserved only for athletes and not for general students, thus excluding academically qualified blacks. Edwards demanded that the "college administration either work to expand the 2 percent rule to bring underprivileged minority group members to SJS as students at least in proportion to their representation in the general population of California or that the administration utilize this 2 percent rule solely for the recruitment of minority group students."⁶²

Buzanski says, "One of the important changes that President Clark made very quickly after he came here at this point was to make possible [the] admission of African-Americans who did not meet the other qualifications for entry." He further states: "We had a formula, I think 2 percent of our new admits could be under the exception clause and essentially that was the athletes. And I think it was President Clark who suggested to the Academic Council to increase the 2 percent to 4 percent."⁶³

Bronzan termed Edwards's accusations on special admission an "oversimplification." "All colleges in California are authorized to use the two percent [*sic*] special admission in cases where it is deemed necessary to admit students with special talents," Bronzan stated, though he did admit Edwards's charge on social activities in athletics was "partially true."⁶⁴

⁶²Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 46.

⁶³Buzanski interview, 13 November 1996.

⁶⁴Spartan Daily, 18 September 1967, 3.

Although labeled demands by the press, Edwards used the word "goals" to describe what he wanted the college administration to follow in order to eliminate discrimination on the campus. "SJS Hit By Negro Demands" was the headline as the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) unit at SJS issued a formal statement in support of the Negro position and called for an immediate public hearing by the college administration.⁶⁵ Subsequently, the Sigma Chi fraternity chapter answered requests from the college administration to prove discrimination policies of its national organization were not followed at SJS. Edwards and other Negro leaders wanted the college administration to inform Sigma Chi and other fraternities that they must give equal treatment or be barred from the campus. Other goals stated by Edwards were: 1) Elimination of closed-door sessions held by administrators or others empowered to alleviate Negro grievances; 2) Establishment of machinery which will keep student groups from "functioning as racist organizations"; 3) Assurances from athletic personnel that Negroes will be given the same treatment as their white counterparts in all areas, including social events; 4) Orders from President Robert D. Clark that housing near the campus discovered as discriminatory be closed to all students; 5) Admitting more Negro students to the college.⁶⁶ At the time there were almost 200 students on campus who were considered "Negro," and of those 200, fewer than 100 were full-time, and more than one-half of the full-time black students were either current or former athletes.⁶⁷

⁶⁵San Jose Mercury News, 18 September 1967, 1.

⁶⁶Ibid., 2.

⁶⁷San Jose State University Archives. Box 154, file: "Enrollment."

At the rally Edwards told the crowd that they had until Friday to meet the anti-discrimination demand and repeated that they were willing to "do anything that is necessary" to end discrimination on campus. Edwards even compared San Jose to Mississippi and said the only difference between the two "is that there they put the Negro in a barrel with snakes while here the snakes crawl out of the barrel after the Negro." An intimidating presence at 6' 8", Edwards warned: "We are issuing a public statement to all black athletes considering coming to SJS. If you have an alternate, take it because any place is better than this."⁶⁸

A tide had surged beneath the calm surface at San Jose State. Edwards formally presented his list of grievances to President Robert D. Clark on behalf of 59 of the campus's 200 black students. The demands listed by UBSA included pledges from the SJS administration that housing—approved and unapproved, fraternities and sororities not open to all SJS students would not be open to any student and demanded that any student who insisted on living in segregated housing be suspended from the college until "such time as he conforms to the moral and ethical codes of this college." This included fraternities and sororities that refused to desegregate.⁶⁹ The ruling body of the SJS Academic Council issued a resolution in support of the Negro demands because, as Clark stated, "Students who are members of minority groups are becoming increasingly discouraged due to discriminatory practices, particularly in the areas of fraternity-sorority organizations and near-campus housing."⁷⁰ Clark

⁶⁸San Jose Mercury News, 19 September 1967, 1-2.

⁶⁹Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 45.

⁷⁰Spartan Daily, 20 September 1967, 2.

thought the demands by Edwards and the black students were reasonable and met with some of the faculty members and student leaders at his home to discuss them. They canvassed the issues pretty thoroughly: "... and I had in mind going out of all of those conversation's, and from what experience I had before, what I thought ought to be done."⁷¹

Clark arrived in the fall of 1964 as San Jose State's eighteenth president. It was his first job as president of a university. Before coming to San Jose State, Clark had spent twenty-one years at the University of Oregon where he was Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts, the university's first Dean of Faculty in 1961, and then Vice President of Academic Affairs. He would eventually return to Oregon as president after leaving San Jose State in 1969 and retire from that position in 1975.

The general feeling among professors, former students and athletes was that Clark did an outstanding job as president, and they were sorry to see him leave for the University of Oregon.⁷² Says Clark now: "I never thought I would leave," but he explains, "I had six more years before retirement, and eleven years is too long for a person to be in a college presidency. After a while, the decisions that he must make begin to accumulate and reduce his effectiveness."⁷³ Jensen, a professor at San Jose State since 1962, says, "Dr. Clark was certainly the best president of this university during my tenure here."

⁷¹Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

⁷²Of all the professors, administrators, and former athletes and students interviewed, not one had anything negative to say about President Clark, and most expressed a deep sadness when he left the university.

⁷³Ibid.

Another professor even states that Clark "could do no wrong," and adds, "He walked on water as far as I was concerned."⁷⁴

Clark had grown up in a small town in southwest Nebraska and eastern Colorado where there were "no black people." And it was the same at the small college he went to as an undergraduate. Eventually, when he went to graduate school at the University of Southern California, he encountered blacks. When he went to Oregon as a professor there were hardly any blacks there either, but he immediately developed a "growing concern" and was "conscious of" the problems minorities faced, especially with some of the "provincialism" in Oregon. Clark recalls taking a bus into Salem and, upon entering, reading a sign across the arch of the bus depot that read: SALEM, OREGON, 99 PERCENT WHITE, which "really turned him off." Clark had a sense of the disparity between the black minority and the white majority, and believes he had a very deep concern for what society was doing to blacks, "so I had that disposition as a background for whatever action I took at San Jose."⁷⁵

Clark was not insensitive to the problems of minority groups. When he first arrived at San Jose State, he found that the students were restricted from distributing political materials on the campus and speaking on behalf of their candidates. "We had an open platform at Oregon," says Clark, and he could not understand the restriction. It seemed to him to be an improper position; so he got in touch with a lawyer for the California State University system to see if there was a board policy that forbade distribution of materials on campus and

⁷⁴Jensen interview, 24 October 1996; the other professor was Robin Brooks: Robin Brooks, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 31 January 1997.

⁷⁵Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

found there wasn't. "I thought that was ridiculous," says Clark, "and changed it right then."⁷⁶

President Clark immediately scheduled hearings on the subject of racial discrimination on campus that afternoon of September 18. Hearings would be held concerning housing, fraternities, student government and student organizations to discuss the discrimination allegations relating to San Jose State athletes. San Jose State Executive Vice-President William J. Dusel was in charge of the hearings. Problems in housing were to be heard first, followed by those related to fraternities and sororities the next day, and athletics and the recruitment of minority faculty and students on the third day. Clark issued a statement at a hearing that said he would appoint a commission to deal with the problems and hear complaints and suggest remedies, and "primarily develop a positive program for equitable treatment of all students in our inter-collegiate athletic programs."⁷⁷

At the first hearing, Edwards, Tommie Smith, who was newly married, and other black students gave many examples of blatant discrimination and racism in off-campus housing. It was discovered that many owners of "approved" student housing units were guilty of discriminating against black students. Says Clark: "We approved renters who agreed not to discriminate, and they did. Our policy collapsed and proved it wasn't good."⁷⁸

Discrimination in off-campus housing was not new. In fact, as early as February 1962 a survey by the Santa Clara County Chapter of the Congress of

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷San Jose Mercury News, 19 September 1967, 1.

⁷⁸Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

Racial Equality (CORE) provided then-President John T. Wahlquist with a brief of ten approved campus houses to prove there was widespread discrimination in housing. Despite many of the landlords admitting "we don't rent to any colored," only one house was removed from the university's approved student housing list from the time of the survey to Edwards's allegations. Key San Jose State administrators kept copies of the correspondence, including Dean of Students Stanley Benz, who knew of CORE's findings and personally received a copy of the CORE survey.⁷⁹

When asked why campus Negroes waited so long to press their demands about conditions that had long existed, Edwards bellowed, "That is an unfair question. ... You cannot accuse the murdered person of not standing up and telling law enforcement agencies that murder had been committed."⁸⁰ John Carlos says of the racism in housing: "It wasn't as strong as where I just left. I think anywhere you go some form of discrimination takes place. ... That kind of thing always takes place, but it wasn't as bad as where I just left. Texas was the spot."⁸¹

The most emotion-charged hearing took place on Tuesday. At this second hearing "racist white" fraternities and sororities at San Jose State were placed on the chopping block and a special meeting was called by President Clark to discuss charges of discrimination in student government and student

⁷⁹Palermo, "The Racial Discrimination Crisis at San Jose State College September, 1967," 33-34; San Jose State University Archives. Box 174.3. President Clark was never informed of the CORE survey or its findings. Robert D. Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

⁸⁰Spartan Daily, 20 September 1967, 2.

⁸¹Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

organizations. Edwards claimed fraternities and sororities on the SJS campus "are and have been racist" in nature. Edwards attacked the Greek system itself as the breeding ground of racism on the SJS campus. He charged racial discrimination in campus housing, athletics, sororities and fraternities.⁸² After discussing the charges with Professor Edwards, even the ASB President, Vic Lee, admitted that the housing discrimination charges were true in all three areas.⁸³

The most telling example of racism practiced by the Greek system was when Valerie Dickerson, a 20-year-old senior journalism major who was selected snow queen of the Associated Students the previous year then was crowned San Jose State's first black Homecoming Queen in 1967, had revealed she had been barred altogether by one sorority after only one rush meeting, and was about to be pledged by three others before they withdrew their invitation. Dickerson, speaking at the hearing, said her "sole reason for rushing was to meet people because I was going to be one person alone in a school of 22,000 persons,"⁸⁴ which brought tears to Executive Vice President Dusel.⁸⁵

At the hearing on Tuesday fraternity and sorority spokesmen admitted that they did practice racial discrimination. A Greek representative of

⁸²Spartan Daily, 20 September 1967, 1.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴San Jose Mercury News, 20 September 1967, 1-2; and Spartan Daily, 30 October 1967, 1. Dickerson was chosen for the title in a vote of the student body and was the first Negro to reign as Homecoming Queen at San Jose State.

⁸⁵Brett H. Melendy, "An Oral History," Robert D. Clark, President, 1964-69, San Jose State College. June 1983, 27.

fraternity alumni at SJS very candidly admitted they practiced discrimination: "Yes, we discriminate, I will say very bluntly we do. We discriminate in favor of who we want to live with."⁸⁶ Other fraternity members conceded instances of discrimination, and like the off-campus housing that promised not to discriminate, the Greek system had also promised to abide by the Board of Trustees policy of non-discrimination and had signed an affidavit promising that they would not. Yet none of the twenty-eight fraternities or sororities had a single black member. No wonder Edwards termed the Greek system "racist," and the ruling body of the SJS Academic Council subsequently issued a resolution in support of the Negro demands.

Authorities at San Jose College admitted on Tuesday that large-scale racial discrimination was practiced. Blacks on campus demanded immediate elimination of discriminatory practices in the athletic program and in all campus-area housing, specifically in fraternities and sororities.⁸⁷ It was reported that a militant Negro student group, United Black Students for Action (UBSA) headed by Edwards, demanded that the university rule that housing and social and political organizations that were not open to all students not be open to any.⁸⁸ Should the demands not be met, Edwards threatened that he and the black students, most of whom were male athletes, would be prepared to disrupt the first home football game of the season the coming Saturday night against the University of Texas at El Paso by sending hundreds of demonstrators onto the playing field. Edwards did not demand the cancellation of the game, but he did

⁸⁶San Jose Mercury News, 20 September 1967, 2.

⁸⁷San Jose Mercury News, 20 September 1967, 1.

⁸⁸New York Times, 3 October 1967, 33.

promise to conduct massive sit-ins on the field if some progress was not made.

"If they won't rent to us, why should we run or play for them?" he declared.⁸⁹

On Wednesday night, September 20, after being informed that outside agitators threatened literally to "burn down" the stadium, President Clark issued a statement announcing the cancellation of the coming Saturday's SJS football game. "In view of disturbing threats from outside our college community to the peaceful conduct of Saturday night's football game, I have, after consultation with the director of athletics, ordered cancellation of the game." In defense of his actions Clark stated:

I consider the action necessary to protect our students, their parents and friends, from the possibility of violence in Spartan Stadium. I wish to emphasize that this danger is not from San Jose State students. ... The danger comes from the possible involvement of off-campus persons and groups, who by Saturday night, may be unaware of our progress towards a solution. ... We feel that we do not have the right to take chances with people's lives.⁹⁰

There had been a meeting at President Clark's house and a message was delivered by Edwards that there were threats that if the game was carried out, the stadium might be fire-bombed or that some other form of violence might take place. But no one believed it was Edwards message. "I don't think it was Harry's message," says Burns. "I think Harry was being an honest broker, an honest messenger. I don't think it was Harry or the black students on campus that made the threat. I think it was some off-campus militant groups." Burns adds: "... we had a meeting at President Clark's house. Ben White was there, Bob

⁸⁹Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 66.

⁹⁰San Jose Mercury News, 21 September 1967, 1.

Bronzan was there, I was there ... and we made the decision to cancel the game and pay the \$25,000 guarantee."⁹¹

The first person to suggest that Clark cancel the game was Bob Bronzan, and Clark's initial reaction was that he couldn't do that. "There would be too many repercussions from it, and it wasn't wise to do it," says Clark, who was also hesitant to cancel the game because he felt it would deprive the black students of the chance to protest and there might be violence over that. But when Clark considered the threats that had escalated, "and they were not from our students," and he considered that over the summer there were over 120 riots, he decided to cancel the game.⁹² Edwards said he emphasized to President Clark the burning threat "is an extremely serious one." After the meeting with President Clark on Wednesday night, he said, "I think it was an extremely serious threat and I had to impress this upon Dr. Clark."⁹³

This was the first time in the United States that a threat of racial violence resulted in the cancellation of a major collegiate football game. When President Clark canceled the game, it infuriated then-California Governor Ronald Reagan. Governor Reagan grabbed the headlines when he charged President Clark and SJS with "Appeasement" for canceling the football game at Spartan Stadium. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Max Rafferty also chided President Clark's decision to cancel the game and said

⁹¹Burns interview, 15 January 1997. The guarantee was never exercised and the school never had to pay the fine for canceling the game.

⁹²Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

⁹³Edwards informed Clark of the threats of violence from anonymous telephone callers who identified themselves as "soul brothers"; San Jose Mercury News, 21 September 1967, 1-2.

SJS had submitted to "blackmail" by calling off the game with UTEP because of threatened violence. Reagan's comments came when he was asked at a press conference if he agreed with Rafferty, who had told Education Department officials: "If I had to call out the Marine Corps, the game would have been played."⁹⁴ Clark laughs about it now and says, "Well, I thought if we called out the Marine Corps, we would have had the battle." Clark had appeared before the Board of Trustees, and Rafferty was the only one who dissented from the Board's approval of Clark's decision to cancel the game.⁹⁵ Reagan was an ex-officio member of the Board and was not present for the discussion, but he chimed in shortly after Rafferty made his comments and added he would have called out the "necessary force and law enforcement" to see that the game was played, stating that he had read in newspapers that 56 of the 59 members of UBSA were not satisfied with President Clark's solutions to the problems.⁹⁶

Edwards, somewhat in defense of President Clark and his proposals, responded by saying that the charges of appeasement leveled against Clark by Reagan and Rafferty indicated their lack of understanding, and to some extent their incompetence. "It proves," he added, "that a Neanderthal in a position of power is still a Neanderthal."⁹⁷

⁹⁴San Jose Mercury News, 27 September 1967, 1.

⁹⁵Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

⁹⁶In reality, the decision made by UBSA the previous Friday was 56 favoring the president's suggestions and three opposed; Spartan Daily, 27 September 1967, 1.

⁹⁷Spartan Daily, 12 October 1967, 3.

San Jose Mayor Ronald James said President Clark's decision to cancel the game "was correct in view of the many citizens that would be in attendance."⁹⁸ Three state legislators also supported President Clark's action, but State Senator Clark L. Bradley (R-San Jose) was not among them. "I'm mad," the legislator fumed, "... and I'm utterly opposed to President Clark's action in canceling the football game. I am firmly in the opinion that if we give in to this radical element, that we have simply created a 'Munich' situation that won't resolve anything and will lead to continued coercion and blackmail."⁹⁹

There were few, if any, at San Jose State, who disapproved of the way Clark handled the situation. One professor noted if Clark had not canceled the game and violence had occurred and someone had gotten seriously injured, people would have asked why he hadn't canceled the game.¹⁰⁰

On September 21 all fraternities and sororities at San Jose State College were placed on immediate probation, and were asked to set up procedures for eliminating discrimination. President Clark gave the SJS fraternity and sorority system until November 1 to present a plan of action implementing the already-established declaration that they do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, or national origin.¹⁰¹ Clark issued the order and an overall

⁹⁸San Jose Mercury News, 21 September 1967, 1.

⁹⁹San Jose Mercury News, 22 September 1967, 1.

¹⁰⁰I interviewed administrators, professors, students, and athletes, and not one of them disagreed with the way Clark handled the situation. Every faculty member and staff I interviewed thought Clark handled the situation extraordinarily well and thought canceling the game was the correct and intelligent thing to do. Dr. Billie Jensen is the professor who made the statement: Jensen interview, 24 October 1996.

program to eliminate prejudice was implemented that included creating the nation's first college ombudsman position to conduct "a continuous and aggressive campaign against racial discrimination practiced by our students."¹⁰² Of Swedish origin, the ombudsman's position was originally created to prosecute government officers and others who contravened the law.¹⁰³ Clark had his Executive Committee discuss the discrimination problem and someone suggested the ombudsman idea to him; he immediately researched the position and decided that was precisely what he wanted.

According to Clark, the ombudsman position was to "adjudicate matters before they came to a formal, legal confrontation." Says Clark: "I wanted to put the university in a position of taking the initiative in seeing that these discriminations were eliminated and not being, constantly, just reacting to complaints." How to do this Clark wasn't sure. He was sure that "given its history and its functions that the Dean of Students office couldn't do it." "I think Stanley Benz was a good Dean of Students for the old-time college," says Clark, but adds plaintively, "He simply was not at all sensitive to these new problems that arose."¹⁰⁴

The other problem was off-campus housing. A four-point program to deal with housing bias in the college area was advanced by Clark, including appointing an ombudsman, who would help find housing for minority students

¹⁰¹Spartan Daily, 22 September 1967, 1.

¹⁰²San Jose Mercury News, 22 September 1967, 1.

¹⁰³J. Benton White, "The Ombudsman in Higher Education" (Master's Thesis, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, 1969), 20.

¹⁰⁴Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

and would help students expose those who discriminated. Only 808 of the 22,500 students at San Jose State lived in dormitories controlled by the college, but none of the sixteen fraternities and twelve sororities had any black members.¹⁰⁵ President Clark ordered probation for all twenty-eight living centers for being "the locus of discrimination and prejudice and sometimes bigotry." He added: "Prejudice, bigotry, discrimination on the basis of race or creed are insidious, subtle, and pervasive."¹⁰⁶ Clark at the time called the college housing office's anti-discriminatory policy a step in the right direction, but in light of recent events, "feeble and inadequate."¹⁰⁷

Also contained in the program were new rules for treatment of SJS athletes and means for recruiting more minority group students to the college. Clark announced that black athletes in the future would have their lockers assigned randomly, that they would have equal availability to social events, and would be given help to find housing. To resolve charges of discriminatory practices among the college's athletes, Clark ordered: 1) Assignment of athletes to lockers or roommates for trips by number or other random method; 2) Social events or entertainment shall be equally available to black and white athletes or available to none; 3) Funds and personnel have been made available to assist in finding housing for black athletes; and 4) A committee would be named to advise on student grievances.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵New York Times, 3 October 1967, 33.

¹⁰⁶San Jose Mercury News, 22 September 1967, 1.

¹⁰⁷Spartan Daily, 22 September 1967, 1.

¹⁰⁸San Jose Mercury News, 22 September 1967, 1-2.

President Clark's proposals were aimed at discrimination in the Greek system, the athletic department, the 2 percent special admission program, and student housing. His corrective measures were accepted "overwhelmingly" by UBSA, and Edwards and UBSA members promised that no violence would be instigated. In fact, Edwards announced, "If a single, solitary cigarette butt is thrown in a john, if a single, solitary Wrigley gum wrapper is burned on campus, the person responsible better pray the authorities get to him before we do."¹⁰⁹

For the first time in the history of any institution of higher education in the United States a college president had admitted the existence of racial discrimination on a campus and took "positive steps quickly to alleviate the situation, which represents a start toward significant change in a social system that unwittingly or not perpetuates prejudice."¹¹⁰ John Carlos, who was part of UBSA, says:

We weren't getting anywhere for hundreds of years and you need someone on the other side of the street. We made it be known, but it takes someone on the other side of the street. What we did was one thing; but what Dr. Clark did made San Jose State as strong as it is today, strong in the long run. He truly had the initiative to do what was right.¹¹¹

"The first and most important step towards prevention of violence is to do right by people who are aggrieved," Clark said at the time. "We decided to talk and to try to achieve justice (for whites and blacks) before and not after a riot."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Spartan Daily, 25 September 1967, 1.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 2.

¹¹¹Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

¹¹²Spartan Daily, 28 September 1967, 1.

Edwards stated that he respected Clark's "integrity and sincerity of purpose," but would "not be satisfied until all segregation has been eliminated."¹¹³ He also said that the victory would prove to be a landmark in Negro student rights at San Jose State and colleges throughout the country. "And we did it without burning anything down."¹¹⁴

Ironically, while Negro student athletes were fighting on the campus of SJS for equality, Thurgood Marshall, who was appointed by President Johnson, took his seat on Monday, October 2, as the first Negro to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. If George Wallace was tired of Warren and Black, he must have been breathless with the appointment of Marshall.

The civil rights charges focused initially on the athletic program, but athletic director Bronzan said the Negro group "utilized the athletic program to strengthen their hand to bring about a solution to the whole problem" of discrimination in housing, fraternities and campus social life. Bronzan pointed out one problem: a "tendency" by coaches to assign Negroes as roommates in hotels when teams were on the road.¹¹⁵ President Clark placed blame on a larger scale and said that discrimination was not the fault of the coaches but rather of the entire college community. Edwards later said that he did not hold the coaches personally responsible for discriminatory practices because the situation had been around for so many years that it had become

¹¹³Spartan Daily, 2 November 1967, 1.

¹¹⁴Spartan Daily, 9 October 1967, 1. In a debate on the SJS racial problem with Senator Clark L. Bradley on November 5 Edwards claimed had President Clark not canceled the El Paso football game, Spartan Stadium would have burned and students would have been killed; Spartan Daily, 2 November 1967, 1.

¹¹⁵New York Times, 3 October 1967, 33.

"institutionalized" and thus was not noticed by athletic officials.¹¹⁶ St. Saffold gives an explanation of the situation:

Whether there was racism, I don't think it was conscious on his [Bronzan's] part. I can't speak for the other folks, given what he did for the black athlete. ... And yet I think that there was a natural line that people didn't question. We didn't refer to it as a line drawn by racism. It was just a natural line—that you were black, you were white. If you were white, you know, you were above that line, functioning; that was just the normal way of being. If you were black, you functioned, you know, up to that line. Maybe one or two instances, exceptional cases, might have crossed the line. Maybe one or two exceptional instances of crossing in the other direction as well. But there was that line that no questioned. You didn't refer to it consciously, or outwardly, as necessarily being racist above the line. They didn't necessarily refer to it as being inferior in any kind of context. But that was just kind of the natural order of things; that was just the way things are.¹¹⁷

On October 1 Methodist minister J. Benton White was appointed ombudsman by President Clark to conduct "a continuous and aggressive campaign against racial discrimination practiced against our students" and apply "all available legal and persuasive powers of correction."¹¹⁸ White, a native of Alabama, would be an assistant to the President and would handle racial complaints directly from the complaining parties, investigate the charges, and personally oversee final dispositions.¹¹⁹ Clark had talked with campus ministers and was "more impressed with Benton White's sensitivity to these problems than I was with anybody else among the campus ministry." The irony of a Methodist minister from Alabama in charge of racial allegations

¹¹⁶San Jose Mercury News, 22 September 1967, 1-2.

¹¹⁷Saffold interview, 5 December 1996.

¹¹⁸Spartan Daily, 2 October 1967, 1.

¹¹⁹Spartan Daily, 25 September 1967, 1.

and discriminations was not lost on Clark. "It was an odd situation," Clark admits, but adds, "I think it's a marvelous story. The irony is correct and what a tribute to Benton White. ... I needed someone, so I turned to Benton."¹²⁰ "He was a man of integrity," Clark says, "and the blacks knew it and so did everyone else."¹²¹

White came to San Jose State from Nebraska as campus minister in 1961. Most major Protestant churches placed ministers on or around campuses in what were called campus ministries, and White was head of Wesley Foundation, the Methodist campus ministry. In 1969 White became the assistant to the president when President Clark left the university.

White became ombudsman partly because when he was the Methodist campus minister, he had participated in a study program to eliminate discrimination against Negro students in housing around campus. He sent test teams around approved student housing at San Jose State in the spring and summer of 1964. There were some students who believed that there was discrimination in housing, so he sent black students in and asked if there was housing available. They would be told there wasn't, and he would then send the white test team in, and ten minutes later they would be shown the housing, given the prices, and told it was available.¹²²

White sent a copy of the report to Dr. Clark two weeks after he arrived as president and hoped that "they could do something and not have approved housing" for people who discriminated. "Because," White states, "we felt that

¹²⁰Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

¹²¹Melendy, "An Oral History," June 1983, 31.

¹²²White interview, 5 December 1996.

the very fact of approved housing did give the seal of approval of the university on it." Clark agreed and put Dean of Students Stanley C. Benz and Housing Director Bob Baron on it, who were not as "sympathetic" and "did not get very aggressive about it."¹²³

After White became ombudsman, he and the university sent a seal of fair housing with black and white faces on it to every house that rented to students and asked them to display it. It was explained to the landlords that by displaying the seal they promised not discriminate on the basis of race.

Once appointed ombudsman White didn't sit in his office waiting for people to bring complaints about discrimination. He went to Edwards's office everyday, talked to the athletes and got to be friends with Smith, Evans, and Carlos. White didn't think there was overt racism in the athletic department, but replied when asked if there was racism on campus: "Was there racism? Well, there was racism in all of us," and added, "We weren't as conscious as we ought to have been."¹²⁴

White, like Bronzan, acknowledged that there were times when traveling athletic teams faced discrimination in housing and the teams had to be separated. "But," White said, "when Bronzan was football coach, there was a game in Texas, where the black athletes were banned from a white hotel, and Bronzan went with the black members of the team to a segregated facility; he

¹²³Ibid. Clark had no memory of this meeting but said, "I suspect that he (White) is right, but that I was overwhelmed with so many responsibilities. I suspect that his memory is correct;" Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

¹²⁴Ibid.

didn't abandon them and send them off someplace alone, and determined he would never take them back and put them in that situation."¹²⁵

White said the football game against UTEP was canceled because "we were afraid of violence ... not because of Harry and his group, but because the Black Panthers had come from Oakland and had simply said that there would be bloodshed if we had the game." White and Clark had a meeting with Chief of Police Ray Blackmore and Deputy Chief of Police Ross Donald, and Chief Blackmore said that they couldn't assure that everybody would be protected under the circumstances.¹²⁶ Hobert Burns says, "I remember Ray telling us and Chief Donald telling us that they couldn't guarantee protection for the stadium."¹²⁷

Spartan Stadium would have burned and students would have been killed if the El Paso football game was not canceled, said Edwards, as he debated the SJS racial problem on radio KEEN's "Human Rights Hotline" with Senator Clark L. Bradley on November 5. "Burning the school or the state would have been immaterial to me as long as rats are crawling over babies and SJS black students can't find adequate housing." Bradley said Edwards's "theory that one person segregated against justifies burning down a stadium doesn't accomplish anything."¹²⁸

On November 13 the San Jose State chapter of Sigma Chi fraternity was expelled from campus because of discriminatory practices by national officials

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Burns interview, 15 January 1997.

¹²⁸Spartan Daily, 7 November 1967, 1.

in the selection of local members. While most of the national fraternities signed an agreement that they would not discriminate, Sigma Chi did not. The decision to withdraw recognition was part of a statewide action by college presidents to expel Sigma Chi from the state college system. Sigma Chi chapters were also expelled from San Diego State, Fresno State, and San Fernando Valley State.¹²⁹ The basis for the action was a hearing held in May which found Sigma Chi to have "a policy of review permitting the national organization to deny membership based on race, religion, or national origin," according to SJS Executive Vice-President William J. Dusel. The fraternity openly admitted it practiced discrimination, yet had received full recognition from four California state colleges which had local chapters.

The fraternity's expulsion from San Jose State was termed "long overdue" by Edwards, who added that Sigma Chi was "not in a bag by themselves." The expulsion of Sigma Chi followed the lifting of probation for all campus fraternities by President Clark.¹³⁰ In response to a question about the fraternities, Edwards said that Negroes wanted an equal opportunity to get in. "I wouldn't want to be a member, anyway," said Edwards. "But I would like to have the equal opportunity to join, that everyone else has."¹³¹ He added: "I don't give a damn about integration. Don't call me that. Integration is a matter

¹²⁹These were the only Sigma Chi chapters in the state system; Spartan Daily, 14 November 1967, 1.

¹³⁰Sigma Chi would be reinstated in late September 1968, a month before the Olympic games were to begin. The ban was lifted and state colleges could again consider application from the chapters for recognition.

¹³¹Spartan Daily, 3 October 1967, 1.

of personal choice. I couldn't care less about joining a fraternity—black or white—but I don't want to be segregated against."¹³²

It was a semester of student unrest in the fall of 1967 for San Jose State President Robert Clark. However, there was to be no rest for the weary. President Clark not only had to contend with students protesting racial discrimination on campus, the draft and the Vietnam War, but he also had to contend with a protest that became a riot as students demonstrated for two successive days against the presence of Dow Chemical Company recruiters on the campus. On November 20 nearly three thousand demonstrators protested the campus recruiting by the napalm-making company and were convinced by twelve SJS College students not to break into the SJS Administration Building while almost 200 police with Billy clubs stood ready a block away.¹³³ President Clark was on official school business in the Caribbean Islands for the U.S. State Department. He flew in the night of the first day of demonstrations and was not present when a violent encounter erupted with police using tear gas on the demonstrators.¹³⁴ Twelve students were eventually arrested, along with Dave Eakins, the only faculty member arrested, who was also part of a group on the campus called Professors Against The War.¹³⁵

Students at SJS were in the second day of the protest against Dow Chemical when a few white students stopped by Edwards, who was speaking

¹³²Spartan Daily, 9 October 1967, 1.

¹³³San Jose Mercury News, 21 November 1967, 1.

¹³⁴Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

¹³⁵Dave Eakins, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose, California, 3 February 1997.

with some faculty members, and asked, "tell us what to do, Harry." Edwards smiled and replied, "Act intelligent."¹³⁶ That day President Clark spent two hours debating with leaders of the demonstration and hearing their complaints. He refused to order the removal of the company under duress and thought the company had a right to be there like any other company. Clark was unhappy with the Vietnam War and thought it was a mistake. He didn't think the school had a right to legislate against a company that was legitimized by the government, but he did promise to consider the whole concept of recruiting by businesses on campus.¹³⁷

To add insult to injury, on the very same day, November 21, Governor Reagan and State Senator Bradley both publicly demanded Clark's dismissal.¹³⁸ It seemed that Edwards's earlier assessment of the governor had been substantiated.

But the criticism did not stop with the state chief executive. Clark was publicly and privately asked to resign by the recently formed Committee for Academic Responsibility in Education (CAR), which claimed he had "avoided the responsibility he was hired to perform" and asked him to step down in favor of someone with "greater courage."¹³⁹ In fact, President Clark was still receiving criticism a year later when John Mooney, sports editor of the Salt

¹³⁶Johnathan Rodgers, "A Step To An Olympic Boycott," Sports Illustrated, 4 December 1967, 30.

¹³⁷Clark interview, 11 January 1997; also White, "The Ombudsman in Higher Education," 12-13.

¹³⁸Spartan Daily, 22 November 1967, 1.

¹³⁹Spartan Daily, 3 October 1967, 1.

Lake Tribune, blasted him for his "handling" of the Texas-El Paso situation:

"Dr. Clark's abject surrender to the then-nobody professor (Harry) Edwards, a member of the San Jose State faculty, triggered a lot of racial problems on the college and university scenes."¹⁴⁰

President Clark's "handling" of the situation prompted the California State Assembly to ask him to address the problem of campus unrest. Clark delivered a statement before the California State Assembly Committee on Education in Los Angeles on December 18. In what was believed to be the first attempt by any college president to analyze in depth the problems of student unrest on the college campus, Clark spoke of the complexities involved in student unrest: "They (students) issue demands. Some of the demands will be unreasonable, intended only to test or undermine an administration. ... But inevitably some of the demands of the students will be just. And when they are, we ought not to be forced into peremptory rejection of the demands simply because they are demands not very politely stated by the upstart youth."¹⁴¹ Clark warned about future campus protest, possibly violent ones: "We must understand that these disruptions will continue until this nation can redress the grievances of an undeclared war and of unrealized civil rights, and that however irritating the disruption may be we must deal with them through due process." Clark published his statement on student disruption in a pamphlet and mailed it to parents of SJS students. "The College Crisis"

¹⁴⁰This statement by Mooney was made a year after the UTEP incident; San Jose Mercury News, 22 November 1968, 61.

¹⁴¹White, "The Ombudsman in Higher Education," 5.

contained Clark's philosophy of campus unrest and background of recent college protests and ways they could be contained.¹⁴²

In retrospect, Clark believes Edwards "acted responsibly, never irresponsibly in my opinion."¹⁴³ White also believes Edwards was reasonable during the protest against discrimination on campus. "If we had had other people more radical and less reasonable, there's no telling what would have happened, but not good things," explains White. "And Harry had a sense of what was right but also what was possible; and he was willing to accept what was possible more than other people were because he was a rational reasonable person." White says both he and Clark had very positive feelings toward "Harry," and in general, found Edwards to be a very helpful person during that period of time: "Many things would never have happened if Harry hadn't brought them to people's attention."¹⁴⁴ "In a way I wish he hadn't done what he had done. I think that it hurt some of the students," says Bert Burns, who adds, "On the other hand it certainly drew attention to many of the problems of racism that we had not only at San Jose State but in the United States."¹⁴⁵

After the incident at San Jose State, charges of racism by black athletes against coaches and athletic programs ran up and down the West Coast. The incident was a microcosm of what was happening on college campuses across the country. After the racial allegations at San Jose State, black student

¹⁴²San Jose Mercury News, 11 April 1968, 37.

¹⁴³Melendy, "An Oral History," June 1983, 30.

¹⁴⁴White interview, 5 December 1996.

¹⁴⁵Burns interview, 15 January 1997.

athletes at Berkeley, UC Santa Barbara, Washington, UTEP, Michigan State, Stanford and UCLA, came forward with racial discrimination charges against athletic programs.

In January 1968 a group of black athletes at the University of California asked for the dismissal of three coaches, William Dutton and Joe Marvin, two assistant football coaches, and head basketball coach Rene Herreria, over alleged racial discrimination charges, and demanded the improvement of conditions for blacks at California or they would consider boycotting sporting events.

Edwards's charges and activities led to numerous articles on the plight of black athletes in America, and athletic departments at more than a hundred colleges and universities around the country were changed forever. And it all started at San Jose State College when Edwards and black athletes protested and revolted against discrimination on campus. "I have to believe that that had some influence on the changing of the system across the nation," says White. "We were one of the first schools or colleges to do that."¹⁴⁶

White also thinks Edwards was one of the most effective leaders of a protest he had ever seen. "He did it without violence, without loss of dignity," says White. "He didn't make his opponents his enemies. He was able to accomplish his goals, almost all of them. ... And he was able to prick the conscience of not only San Jose State, but I think to a very great extent the broader world. ... a tremendous amount was done as a result of what Harry did."¹⁴⁷ And Edwards was only beginning.

¹⁴⁶White interview, 5 December 1996.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

Chapter III

"The bell of man's inhumanity to man does not toll for one man, it tolls for you, for me, for all of us."—Martin Luther King Jr.

After the success of the protest rally at San Jose State Harry Edwards moved the struggle from a local and national context to an international issue. Edwards organized a meeting in Los Angeles where he issued a series of demands, including advocating a Negro boycott of the 1968 Olympics.

During the World University Games in Tokyo in the fall of 1967, Tommie Smith was asked by a Japanese sports reporter about the racial situation in the U.S.; to the surprise of many, he suggested the possibility of a boycott. "Depending upon the situation, you cannot rule out the possibility that we Negro athletes might boycott the games in Mexico."¹ "I said there was a *possibility* of a boycott," says Smith now. "When I said that he disappeared. He had his story."²

¹Sports Illustrated, 25 September 1967, 11.

²Tommie Smith, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 29 January 1997.

Dismayed over receiving personal attacks for his comments in Tokyo, Smith made an appointment to talk with Edwards, with whom he was taking a course in race relations. They discussed the problems of the black athlete on campus, along with boycott possibilities, and decided to check the "attitudes of other world-class athletes toward a revolt of black athletes over the problems facing black athletes and the black community in general." They found that not only track and field athletes, but also other athletes in other sports had given "a great deal of serious thought to the idea of boycotting the 1968 Olympic games in order to dramatize racial injustice in America."³

Edwards's first step was to "form an organization that could plan and map strategy for the revolt," and a meeting was held at his home on October 7. Out of this meeting was born the Olympic Committee for Human Rights. The committee decided that the best way to mobilize was to announce a workshop, invite as many black athletes as possible to attend, and formalize the direction that the Olympic boycott phase of the revolt would take. That part of the revolt dealing specifically with mobilization to boycott the Olympics was designated the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), with Ken Noel the chief assistant to Edwards.⁴

The Olympic Project for Human Rights was directed against the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, and Edwards and Noel organized a meeting to be held in late November in Los Angeles. Workshops were scheduled on the rights of

³Harry Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 49.

⁴Ibid., 50.

black people under the provisions of the Selective Service Act. Also scheduled was an Olympic boycott workshop.⁵

The site chosen for the symposium was the Western Regional Black Youth Conference, and on November 23, Thanksgiving Day, Edwards met with sixty black athletes from around the country in a Sunday School room of the Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles.

After introducing himself as chairman of the workshop, Edwards gave a brief lecture of the reasons why a proposed boycott of the games should be considered. The workshop was then thrown open to discussion from the floor in which both pro- and anti-boycott opinions were heard. Arguments against the boycott, or for some compromise course, were raised by the older athletes present.⁶ By acclamation, the athletes voted to boycott.

The Thursday night Black Youth Conference adopted three resolutions: A black boycott of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City; a boycott of athletic meets in which athletes from South Africa and Rhodesia participate; and a boycott of the New York Athletic Club, which Edwards declared restricted its membership to white Christians.⁷

The group of black college athletes from across the nation, including two members of San Jose State College's world record 880-yard relay team, Tommie Smith and Lee Evans, voted on Thanksgiving Day to stay away from the 1968 Olympic Games. The decision was announced by Edwards who claimed to

⁵Ibid., 51.

⁶Ibid., 52-53; the arguments raised by the older athletes were in Sports Illustrated, 4 December 1967, 31.

⁷San Jose Mercury News, 24 November 1967, 71.

have had fifty to sixty athletes at the Los Angeles conference, including UCLA basketball star Lew Alcindor.⁸ John Carlos was also at the Thanksgiving Day meeting and says, "There was about 110-120 athletes, pretty much all the individuals who were going to make the Olympic team or had the potential to make the team."⁹

After the Los Angeles workshop, Edwards attended the National Conference of the Associated Student Government in San Francisco on Friday, November 24. Edwards was asked to address the conference on the topic, "Student Government Responsibility and the Crisis in Race Relations on American College Campuses." But it was there at the Sheraton Palace Hotel that he fully and publicly announced the results of the Olympic boycott workshop.¹⁰ Copies of the statement were given to the ninety reporters present. The statement, "Resolution Drafted at Black Youth Conference, Los Angeles Nov. 23, 1967 Olympic Boycott," declared: "Whereas: The United States has failed to use its powers—governmental or economic—to effectively alleviate the problems of 22 million black people in this country; Whereas the United States has openly and flagrantly carried out and endorsed acts which have operated—by plan—to the detriment of black people in this country; ... Whereas

⁸San Jose Mercury News, 29 November 1967, 9.

⁹John Carlos, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 24 January 1967; I have read anywhere from fifty to two hundred athletes gathered in Los Angeles on November 23, but most sources listed between fifty and sixty.

¹⁰Edwards had made a prior arrangement with a black sports reporter from a Los Angeles paper to record the first official release concerning the results of the workshop. The statement was given the same day as the one in San Francisco, but it was brief and lasted about five minutes and no copies of the statement were distributed; Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 54.

the United States has hypocritically put itself up as the leader of the Free World while right here in this country we have 22 million black people catching more hell than anyone in any communist country ever dreamed of." It was resolved that "black men and women athletes at a Black Youth Conference held in Los Angeles on the 23rd of November, 1967, have unanimously voted to fully endorse and participate in a boycott of the Olympic Games in 1968."¹¹

Civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King and Floyd McKissick, executive director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), expressed their support for the black athlete's cause.¹² Lincoln Lynch, CORE's associate national director, even said he thought the boycott "should be extended to all black athletes who take part in every phase of athletics in the United States."¹³

Famed baseball player Jackie Robinson sided with the boycott: "I say, use whatever means ... to get our rights here in this country,"¹⁴ and Muhammad Ali, 1960 Olympic gold medal winner, also supported the boycott and said that "anything they do that's designed to get freedom and equality for their people, I'm with 1,000% [sic]"¹⁵

¹¹Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 55.

¹²San Jose Mercury News, 1 December 1967, 1A.

¹³San Jose Mercury News, 29 November 1967, 9; also New York Times, 30 November 1967, 1.

¹⁴Kenny Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 68.

¹⁵Los Angeles Times, 25 November 1967, Part II, 3.

Other Negro athletes from around the country responded, but not all agreed. Charlie Greene of Nebraska, favored to win the gold medal in the 100 meters in Mexico City, said, "It comes down to a matter if you're an American or if you're not. I'm an American and I'm going to run." Art Walker, America's best triple jumper, said, "Personally, I'd be proud to represent my country. I love my country. I'm also proud to be a Negro." He added: "I'm not exactly sure what they are trying to accomplish. I don't think a boycott would accomplish anything. ... this country is no Utopia, by any means—but it's my country."¹⁶ Former heavyweight boxing champ Joe Louis said he disagreed with Negro athletes who were planning to boycott the Summer Olympics in protest of South Africa's admission to the Games, and added Negro athletes should consider themselves Americans first and Negroes second.¹⁷

"Ex-Olympians Blast Boycott" was the headline the day Edwards made the announcement. Former Olympians Bob Hayes, Rafer Johnson, Novell Lee, Ralph Boston and Jesse Owens, spoke out against the decision to boycott. Boston and Owens attacked the proposed plans for a U.S. Negro boycott as "deploring" and "unreal."¹⁸

Owens, who won four gold medals in Nazi Germany in 1936, said: "... we shattered this so-called Aryan supremacy then by our own supremacy and by standing and saluting the American flag. ... There is no politics or racism or prejudice in the Olympics. I believe you contribute more by entering than by

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷San Jose Mercury News, 3 April 1968, 93.

¹⁸San Jose Mercury News, 24 November 1967, 1.

staying out."¹⁹ He added, "I deplore the use of the Olympic Games by certain people for political aggrandizement. There is no place in the athletic world for politics."²⁰ Owens also stated that "it is my personal experience that the Olympic Games have been one of the greatest areas in which personal achievement is rewarded culturally, and, eventually, financially and economically,"²¹ which was rather strange for him to say considering not long after he won his four gold medals in Berlin he had been thrown out of amateur sports for life and was reduced to running against motorcycles and horses.

Boston, 1960 Olympic champion and world record holder in the long jump at twenty-seven feet, four and three-quarter inches, said he still planned to compete. "If I felt there was sufficient reason I would boycott, but I don't even know what the reason is. At least Negroes have this much: we can compete in amateur sports and we can represent ourselves and then the country."²² He said the proposed boycott didn't make any sense: "Until you qualify for the Olympics, you can't boycott them."²³

Novell Lee, who had won the gold medal for boxing in the 1952 Olympics, said, "The young athletes are ill advised. Athletics is the only field in which

¹⁹Life, 8 December 1967, 4.

²⁰San Jose Mercury News, 24 November 1967, 1; and Los Angeles Times, 25 November 1967, Part II, 3.

²¹Los Angeles Times, 25 November 1967, Part II, 3.

²²Johnathan Rodgers, "A Step To An Olympic Boycott," Sports Illustrated, 4 December 1967, 31.

²³San Jose Mercury News, 24 November 1967, 1.

the Negro has been treated well. The athletes, if they carry out the boycott, will be doing more to hurt themselves and their image than anything I can imagine."²⁴ John Thomas, two-time Olympic high jumper, said, "They (boycotters) talk about a man's dignity and racial pride. How much pride can you lose by emerging an Olympic champion? In the Olympics you're representing yourself. If you happen to be a Negro, you're also representing your race."²⁵

This was not the first time a boycott of the Olympics had been suggested. In 1960 Rafer Johnson, 1960 Olympic Decathlon champion, was approached about boycotting the Olympic Games to protest the treatment of black people by the police during the civil rights protests in the South, but he told them "I was not interested." Johnson added: "The Olympic Committee and Olympic organization always have been fair to the Negro," and said Olympic participation was one of individual against individual "not America against Russia or South Africa. I'm there representing me." In 1963 Dick Gregory, black human-rights activist, politician, and comedian, attempted to organize a boycott of the Russian-American Track and Field meet by black athletes, and in 1964 suggested a boycott of the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo.²⁶

Edwards thundered that "the United States hypocritically puts itself up as the leader of the free world while 22 million black people in this country

²⁴San Jose Mercury News, 24 November 1967, 1, 71.

²⁵Ebony, March 1968, 113.

²⁶Los Angeles Times, 25 November 1967, Part II, 3; and Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 40.

are catching more hell than in any Communist country ever dreamed of."²⁷ He declared: "... they can no longer count on the successors of Jesse Owens, Rafer Johnson and Bob Hayes to join in a fun-and-games fête propagandized as the epitome of equal rights so long as we are refused those rights in white society."²⁸

Kenny Moore of Sports Illustrated wrote that "Edwards's mention of Owens signaled a historic shift. The famed sprinter and jumper, whose four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin had made a mockery of Hitler's Aryan-supremacy theories, embodied the tradition in which a black athlete was understood to be a 'credit to his race.'" Owens never complained of having been reduced to racing horses after the Olympics or "of the hotels that turned him away, the restaurants that refused him service or the society that let this all happen."²⁹

In the six Olympics since World War II, black athletes had won 34 percent of the U.S. track and field gold medals and 18 percent of the nation's total gold medals for all sports. It was calculated that if the U.S. sent its best team, it would win thirty-three medals in track and field in 1968. Of that count, black athletes would account for eighteen medals, or 55 percent. Furthermore, it was calculated that the U.S. would lose a net of fifteen medals if blacks boycotted the Olympics because white athletes could make up only three of the

²⁷San Jose Mercury News, 24 November 1967, 71.

²⁸Harry Edwards, "Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey's Olympics," Saturday Evening Post, 9 March 1968, 6.

²⁹Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 68.

eighteen medals.³⁰ In the 1964 Tokyo Games, of the 126 medals won by the Americans, twenty-two were won by "Negroes."³¹

A Track and Field News survey of black contenders for the U.S. Olympic team showed that one third would consider a boycott, or nine out of twenty-seven.³² Another survey showed that black athletes overwhelmingly turned down the proposal to boycott the Olympics. The magazine Ebony polled a number of black athletes and only 1 percent of them agreed with the boycott proposal. Another 28 percent said they were undecided, but an amazing 71 percent rejected the idea completely. Some of the athletes expressed that they didn't like what they thought was an infringement of their right to individual rather than group thinking and others worried about their economic futures as career athletes.³³

Lew Alcindor said after the meeting in Los Angeles: "I haven't made up my mind. I'll just wait until the time comes."³⁴ "Everything was done anonymously," said Alcindor, who admitted: "Actually, there is no boycott as of now. There can be no boycott until it's time for anybody to boycott." Alcindor admitted he had not made up his mind, but said, "If you live in a racist society, you have to react—and this was my way of reacting. We don't catch hell because we're Christian. We catch hell because we're black."³⁵

³⁰Ebony, March 1968, 112.

³¹Los Angeles Times, 25 November 1967, Part II, 3.

³²Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 69.

³³Ebony, March 1968, 110.

³⁴Los Angeles Times, 25 November 1967, part 2, 1.

Charles Maher, a Los Angeles Times sportswriter, wrote that the boycott would bring more grief than good and suggested the athletes had been misled: "There determination to withdraw is a product of frustration. They have decided, or have been led to believe, that their people will never achieve social and economic equality in American society. ... The trouble is that no course of action could be more hopeless than the one these Negro athletes propose to follow." "What can it accomplish for the American Negro?" Maher asked. "Will the white majority in the United States then be disposed to treat the Negro more generously? ... the Negroes who voted Thursday to become athletic dropouts will bring their people less good than grief."³⁶

Maher even attacked Alcindor: "If Lew Alcindor would be serving the white establishment by playing basketball for the United States in the Olympics, is he not serving the same establishment by playing basketball for UCLA, a university operated by a white-dominated state?" Maher said Alcindor's position would be inconsistent until he announced that he would not only not play in the Olympics but also would not play again for UCLA or subsequently play in the "white-owned and operated National Basketball Association." He would be "inconsistent until he says he will stand by his convictions even if it costs him money to do so." "Is it the position of the militants that it is permissible to serve a white master if the pay is good and to refuse to do so if only Olympic gold medals are at stake?" asked Maher.³⁷

³⁵Ibid., 3.

³⁶Ibid., 1.

³⁷Ibid.

Maher failed to realize or comprehend that the athletes were protesting against the treatment and the condition of the black athlete in America and blacks in society, not the pay. A black athlete, amateur or professional, could gain prestige and make money, but he still would not be able to eat at a nice restaurant or move into a neighborhood of his choice, or find housing or join a fraternity. He could make money but still be treated as a second-class citizen, as a social unequal. "If you win a gold medal," declared Edwards, "you still can't move into any house you want and you still can't vote in Mississippi."³⁸

Edwards had his own critics and was publicly charged with manipulating the Negro athletes in the boycott plan. He denied any manipulation of Negro athletes, but said: "The manipulation charge is flattering but totally false."³⁹

Many people thought it was a Harry Edwards show and some people in the media even suggested Edwards was using the athletes. The fact was that Edwards had nothing to lose but everything to gain. Says Smith now: "Harry used that moment to use Tommie Smith, John Carlos, and Lee Evans to do his work. Harry is a sociologist. It was a perfect situation for him to audition for his degree and his position [at Berkeley]. Any smart person would do the same thing." He adds:

Yes, of course he manipulated the athletes. I would say he used the moment for his social platform. Everybody does it, but this was done to us. And the athletes received nothing. No money. ... Harry was the academia of [the] athletes. ... He used San Jose State. I believed Harry Edwards got the power there.⁴⁰

³⁸Newsweek, 4 December 1967, 59..

³⁹San Jose Mercury News, 26 November 1967, 10.

Jim Murray, also of the Los Angeles Times, went so far as to compare Edwards with Hitler and even promulgated that Edwards "has his own form of 'apartheid' going." He also called the proposed boycott the "most self-defeating form of social protest short of holding your breath."⁴¹ The day before Murray had written that Tommie Smith was either the beneficiary of some bad advice or he had an exaggerated idea of his own importance.⁴²

J. Benton White thought it was racist to say that the athletes were being used by Edwards. "I said that then and I'll say it now, because it says that they can't make their own decisions," says White, who adds, "'cause I sat in discussions with them and I watched them as they discussed with Harry about what they faced and the consequences, and Harry didn't, I don't think, ever tell anybody it was going to be easy." "He [Harry] gave them strength," adds White, " ... and they needed somebody to organize and guide them. But I think it's somewhat racist to say that these people were not capable of making those decisions and standing on their own feet."⁴³

San Jose State President Robert Clark felt there was no formal reason to object to Edwards's protest movement. "I had no proprietary interest," says Clark. "That is I did not feel there was any formal reason for my objecting to his wanting to boycott the Olympics because he was a professor at San Jose State. I thought he had the right to do what he wanted to do on the Olympics."

⁴⁰Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

⁴¹Los Angeles Times, 29 November 1967, part 3, 1; also San Jose Mercury News, 29 November 1967, 110.

⁴²San Jose Mercury News, 28 November 1967, 25.

⁴³J. Benton White, interview by author, Tape recording, San Jose, California, 5 December 1996.

"I did feel that it was a mistake," Clark adds. "I thought the boycott was a misguided effort, because I felt people like Tommie Smith and John Carlos and Lee Evans, Ronnie Ray Smith, they were at their prime, and they never would be again, and for them to be deprived of the opportunity to participate, I felt, was a serious mistake. And so I thought Harry Edwards was wrong."⁴⁴

To no one's surprise, Governor Reagan expressed disapproval of the intended boycott. "I disapprove greatly of what he (Edwards) is trying to accomplish," the state chief executive remonstrated. "Young athletes are going to be victimized."⁴⁵

On November 26 Edwards announced demands that must be met if blacks were to participate in the upcoming Olympics—the start of a threatened boycott. The athletes, led by Edwards, issued a list of five demands to the U.S. Olympic Committee: 1) The all-white teams from both Rhodesia and South Africa be barred from the Games in Mexico City; 2) A second black coach be added to the 1968 U.S. Olympic staff; 3) At least one Negro be placed on the U.S. Olympic Commission—the athletes indicated that Jesse Owens would not be acceptable; 4) The New York Athletic Club (NYAC) must immediately cease practicing segregation in the lodging of players and on the NYAC membership roles; and 5) That Muhammad Ali be reinstated as heavyweight boxing champion of the world.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Robert D. Clark, interview by author, tape recording, Eugene, Oregon, 11 January 1997.

⁴⁵Spartan Daily, 29 November 1967, 1.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

By far the most significant aspect of the demands was the barring of South Africa. "To me, South Africa was *the* biggest of the demands," says Smith. "We were talking about an entire nation, the separate but equal clause."⁴⁷ South Africa was actually suspended from the 1964 games because of its Apartheid policies. South Africans had participated in the earliest modern Olympiads; thus South African sports tradition antedated the policy of Apartheid (pronounced a-pahrt-hayt), which grew from National Party rule. In fact, during the 1930's there was much contact between athletes of different races, particularly in English-speaking areas. But in June 1956 a law was passed requiring an end to inter-racial sports. When the International Table Tennis Federation reacted by reiterating its ban on the all-white South African Table Tennis Union, Interior Minister Donges spelled out his government's policy:

- 1) White and non-white athletes must be separately organized.
- 2) No mixed sport is allowed in South Africa.
- 3) No mixed teams should be sent abroad.
- 4) No mixed teams should visit from abroad.
- 5) Non-whites from abroad can play South African non-whites.
- 6) Non-white South African sport organizations must seek recognition through white organizations (both internally and internationally).
- 7) The government can refuse travel visas to those who would leave the country and then campaign against the presence of South Africa in international sport.⁴⁸

This policy reversed the tradition of mixed sports but also concatenated South African sports to the social and racial policies of the regime.⁴⁹ In fact, measures to implement apartheid, the principle of racial segregation, had been

⁴⁷Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

⁴⁸David B. Kanin, A Political History of the Olympic Games (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 97.

⁴⁹Ibid., 98.

accelerated by Balthazer J. Vorster in his first year as prime minister.⁵⁰ South Africa also had a barring law—punishment without trial. The Suppression of Communism Law left people confined to their homes, without trial. From October 1962 to October 1967, Helen Joseph had to stay home every week day from 6:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. and spend all holidays alone. She had to sign in at a police station every week day. At no time could friends visit, or could she talk to the press, or attend any meetings, or take a weekend trip to the country. People were never tried by a judge or jury, and the South African government gave no reasons when it imposed such restrictions.⁵¹ In addition, all nonwhites were required to carry a book of passes on their person, including a pass to work in Johannesburg, a pass to travel back and forth, and a pass to be on the street. There was also a law that allowed any magistrate to sign a warrant for arrest and ninety-day detention without a trial of any kind. Incredibly, at the end of ninety days the prisoner could be released and rearrested for another ninety days, *ad infinitum*.⁵²

In the 1960s many governments which had been pressured to ensure the civil rights of their own racial minorities began to oppose South African participation in international sports events. In 1964 South Africa was ousted from the Olympic Games and from several sport federations as well, despite repeated efforts by International Olympic Committee President Avery Brundage to keep South African federations active within the Olympic

⁵⁰San Jose Mercury News, 13 September 1967, 13.

⁵¹San Jose Mercury News, 17 September 1967, 18.

⁵²Sports Illustrated, 3 June 1968, 71-72.

movement. Despite pressure from the increasing number of Third World states in the Olympic system, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) constantly tried to help South Africa—though the latter wrongly assumed that with IOC support, no concessions were necessary. In fact, the only reason that the IOC went along with South Africa's expulsion from Tokyo was that South Africa refused to permit non-white athletes to participate on South African teams.⁵³ "The struggle to isolate South Africa in international competition has been the single most extensive use of sport as an instrument of diplomatic and political sanction. It has also been a very effective form of attack against the white supremacist regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa," wrote David B. Kanin.⁵⁴

In 1963 the IOC meeting scheduled for Nairobi had to be moved to West Germany because the Kenyans would not allow South Africa or Portugal (which still possessed African colonies) to send all-white delegations. At the meeting the IOC issued a warning that not only attacked individual discrimination but political discrimination against states as well. It warned: "No discrimination is allowed against any country or person on grounds of race, religion, or political affiliation." South Africa was advised to reform, but was led to believe that no action would be taken against it if it did not.⁵⁵ South Africa could also claim that it was now being discriminated against on the grounds of its political policies, whereas before the Olympics had always claimed to be separate from politics. In June 1964, the South African government reiterated that it would not send any

⁵³Kanin, A Political History of the Olympic Games, 98-99.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 97.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 99.

mixed teams abroad nor would it allow any to visit. Amazingly, and to its surprise, South Africa was barred from the 1964 Olympics.

After Tokyo, South Africa was in a more difficult situation because now they were on the outside trying to get back in. South Africa saw that it would have to make at least some token changes in its sports policy if it was to be reinstated. With expulsion from several more federations serving as a prelude to Mexico City, Lord Killion, IOC Vice-President, announced in 1967 that South Africa promised to come up with a single racially mixed Olympic team that would travel together and be selected by a board consisting of members of different races.⁵⁶ The IOC would consider this gesture when reviewing the status of South Africa and their re-admittance to the Olympic Games.

The demands authored by Louis Lomax, lecturer, author, and radio and television commentator, and Edwards, who was the spokesman for the athletes, were sent in a telegram to Arthur Lentz, executive director of the U.S. Olympic Committee. Lentz explained that the USOC could not meet the demands because it had no connection with them. He also said Edwards was doing his homework and was beginning to see that the USOC could not meet the demands. He explained that the World Boxing Association, which took Ali's title, was not connected with USOC administration; that Brundage was elected to his post by more than 100 nations; and that USOC board members were elected by organizations such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, and the Amateur Athletic Union.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Ibid., 100.

⁵⁷Ebony, March 1968, 112.

Instead of ascertaining whether the demands had any validity, Avery Brundage simply brushed them off and said any pullout would be a mistake and observed that there were enough talented white athletes to grab gold medals for the U.S. anyway. "They'd only be depriving themselves of an opportunity that comes once in a lifetime," said the 80-year-old IOC President.⁵⁸

Lee Evans and Tommie Smith were among the first to publicly declare their intention to boycott the Olympics. Evans said he would probably run in the Olympics if only three of the original five demands were met, admitting that the latter two requests fell outside the jurisdiction of the Olympic Committee.⁵⁹ But Evans, holder of four world records and winner of the 400 meters in the 1967 Summer Pan American Games, stood 100 percent behind the decision and believed that the boycott was a weapon that must be used by the black athletes.⁶⁰ So did Smith, who said, "I am quite willing not only to give up participation in the Games but my life, if necessary, if it means that it will open a door or channel by which the oppression and injustice suffered by my people in America can be alleviated."⁶¹

The reasons to boycott also reflected the bitterness among black athletes about the way things were on many college campuses in America. Housing was promised for black athletes, the San Jose State athletes claimed, but they got no help from the Athletic Department when they encountered discrimination by

⁵⁸Newsweek, 4 December 1967, 59.

⁵⁹Spartan Daily, 16 January 1968, 1.

⁶⁰Spartan Daily, 29 November 1967, 1.

⁶¹Newsweek, 4 December 1967, 59.

local landlords; there were no blacks in any fraternities; coaches grouped blacks together on road trips and in locker rooms; counselors advised them to take "Mickey Mouse" courses like football appreciation so that easy grades would maintain their eligibility for sports. "... what does society gain by some Negro winning a medal while other Negroes back home are burning down the country?" asked Edwards.⁶² Edwards said that the white man must be forced to stop taking the black man's services for granted in a country where black people can't take simple things like expecting to be served food or being treated with humanity, for granted. He further declared that it was time for "the auction block to come down. Black masculinity is no longer for sale." He stated that most black men on scholarship at white colleges are athletes and the "badminton education" they receive leaves them at a serious disadvantage in the job market.⁶³

In a more subdued and reflective mood, Edwards also stated, "We don't want a full-scale revolution—not even for one day," adding, "it would be insane to pass up any means to avoid destruction and to gain human rights." "No one attempts to change anything he's not in love with, and the Negro loves his country, fights for it in war and runs for it," and, he added solemnly, "The tragedy here is that the country the Negro loves doesn't love him back."⁶⁴

On Wednesday, December 13, at a news conference at the Greater Los Angeles Press Club, Edwards expanded his goals to include a ban on all New York Athletic Club events and a demand to reinstate Muhammad Ali as heavyweight

⁶²San Jose Mercury News, 16 December 1967, 61.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

champion. Edwards also stated that the boycott campaign now included five steps: 1) A boycott by Negroes athletes of the Olympic Games; 2) A boycott of all New York Athletic Club events; 3) A demand that all-white teams from Southern Rhodesia and South Africa be banned from Olympic competition; 4) Reinstatement of Ali as heavyweight champion; and 5) Desegregation of the United States Olympic Games committee and assignment of more Negro coaches to the U.S. Olympic teams. The basis for the campaign, explained Edwards, was that blacks do not accrue prestige when they go to the Olympics "because when you come back you're still a nigger."⁶⁵

Edwards attacked the USOC and asked how could it excuse having a president of the International Olympic Committee who "owns an exclusive, lily-white club, ... where most of the Olympic Committee business takes place?" The club had no Negro members and only a few "token" Jews and he charged Avery Brundage with running a "segregated racist organization!"⁶⁶

At a conference in New York the next day, with Martin Luther King and Floyd McKissick by his side, Edwards demanded the dismissal of Olympic committee chairman Avery Brundage on the grounds of racist practices. Edwards stated that the ouster of Brundage had been added to the original five demands because thorough investigation had revealed the Olympic committee chairman to be a "devout anti-Semitic and anti-Negro personality."⁶⁷

Brundage had reportedly said that before he would let a Negro set foot on his country club he would break it up and sell it as separate lots. A

⁶⁵San Jose Mercury News, 14 December 1967, 63Z.

⁶⁶Ebony, March 1968, 112.

⁶⁷San Jose Mercury News, 15 December 1967, 73.

magazine reporter even quoted Brundage as saying he would sell his exclusive Montecito Country Club in Santa Barbara "before letting niggers and kikes" become members. Although Brundage denied that he used such words as "nigger" and "kikes," he never denied that his club discriminated. In an attempt to justify his club's policies, Brundage said that "it's a private social club run by committees. I only own the property and facilities. I belong, of course, but I don't serve on those committees." He added: "And if they choose to accept only red-haired barbers for members, I think it's their right."⁶⁸

Brundage said, rather defensively, that he could be quoted and declared: "I think there should be a qualified Negro on the USOC Board," and suggested that "Jesse Owens is a fine boy." Of course, the ex-Olympian was no boy but a 57-year-old man, who was a partner in a Chicago public relations firm at the time.⁶⁹ Brundage called the proposed boycott "a very stupid thing," stating "where else have Negroes had the opportunity to display their talent as in track and field and in the Olympics."⁷⁰ John Carlos says that Brundage "exemplified racism from day one from what he did to Jim Thorpe ... and carried on in his wicked ways until he became a senior citizen."⁷¹

On January 11 Edwards stepped down from his coordinator position for the United Black Students of Action (UBSA) and became off-campus

⁶⁸Ibid.; also Ebony, March 1968, 112.

⁶⁹Ebony, March 1968, 112.

⁷⁰San Jose Mercury News, 19 January 1968, 56.

⁷¹Carlos interview, 24 January 1967.

coordinator.⁷² Then on January 28 he announced he planned to leave San Jose State claiming that the political atmosphere at San Jose was not conducive to his receiving tenure.⁷³ But there were things that would occupy Edwards's time in the interim.

⁷²Spartan Daily, 12 January 1968, 1.

⁷³Spartan Daily, 29 January 1968, 1.

Chapter IV

"A life is not important, except in the impact it has on other lives."—Jackie Robinson

In February 1968 the all-white New York Athletic Club (NYAC) was celebrating the 100th anniversary of its annual indoor track meet at the new Madison Square Garden in Manhattan. Harry Edwards held a press conference in Harlem to announce a demonstration to boycott the annual AC Winged Foot games. The target of the protest was the private club's membership policy, which discriminated against Negroes and Jews. The NYAC had never had Negro or Jewish athletes on its teams and the boycott's primary objective was to force the 9,600-member club to open its membership to blacks and Jews. "We will try to have an orderly demonstration," said Edwards, but he added, "Any black athlete who tries to cross the picket line will be in trouble."¹

Edwards invited H. Rap Brown to his Harlem premeet press conference, and though Rap never did show up at the demonstration, he did suggest that

¹San Jose Mercury News, 16 February 1968, 53.

the Garden be blown up: "I think Madison Square Garden should either be burned down or blown up."²

"Racism must go—now!" was the cry, as some one hundred pickets, including Ken Noel, chanted and marched on the sidewalk in front of the entrance to the Garden, and ignored police orders to retreat behind a picket area. A group of Negro militants waved a black, green, and red banner and tried to invade the main entrance area, and in the process bowled over a policeman. When about a dozen athletes from Holycross and Providence stepped off a bus, they sprinted to the entrance with chanting demonstrators in hot pursuit. But the trackmen got an early start and sprinted into the Garden.³ According to Pete Axthelm of Sports Illustrated, Edwards injected the protest with an unnecessary atmosphere of violence when he openly threatened those who crossed the demonstration with retaliation by "people back in their home towns." Axthelm did state that violence was not in Edwards's plans and that whenever things seemed likely to get out of control, he steered the group in another direction.⁴ In an attempt to avoid mass arrests, city officials gave Edwards a police bullhorn to control the crowd.⁵

²Ibid. Later that month on February 23 Brown would be jailed for a bond violation, and he immediately issued a statement calling for a Negro revolution so "our race shall live," and added, "There must be 10 dead racist cops" for every Negro slain by a white policeman;" San Jose Mercury News, 24 February 1968, 10.

³San Jose Mercury News, 17 February 1968, 1-2.

⁴Pete Axthelm, "Boycott Now—Boycott Later?" Sports Illustrated, 26 February 1968, 26.

⁵San Jose Mercury News, 17 February 1968, 2.

Entire teams pulled out from the event, including Georgetown University and past meet regulars Villanova and Manhattan. The meet was boycotted by both black and white athletes because of the club's discriminatory practices. Paul Drayton, a two-time Olympic medalist and graduate of Villanova, was one of the first to pull out of the winter meet. "I don't want to join the NYAC," he stated. "I'm not telling them to change their policy. I just don't see why I should support it."⁶

The seven-man Russian team dropped out at the last minute, and West German star Bodo Tummler also didn't show up. The Russians gave an explanation for their withdrawal the day before the meet stating that the team was fearful of injury from demonstrators and wanted to remain in California to train for the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) meet.⁷ A Russian official was quoted as saying, "We are guests in your country and we don't want to get in trouble. We don't want to risk injury crossing a picket line."⁸

Edwards got more than one hundred black athletes to withdraw from the meet, but ten athletes,⁹ among them sprinter Jim Hines and six athletes from the University of Texas at El Paso, including Indoor World Record Long Jumper Bob Beamon, crossed the demonstration picket line in front of the Garden, performed in their events, then quickly went home.

⁶San Jose Mercury News, 16 February 1968, 53; and Newsweek, 19 February 1968, 85.

⁷San Jose Mercury News, 20 February 1968, 45.

⁸San Jose Mercury News, 16 February 1968, 53.

⁹Nine Negroes competed and one other was late for the 60-yard dash after being delayed by traffic and by the pickets, while more than 500 picketed; San Jose Mercury News, 20 February 1968, 45.

Beamon said that the trackmen had long meetings to discuss the situation and the reason given ostensibly by the UTEP athletes was that the NYAC was "prejudiced against a lot of different kinds of people, including Jews ... What happens if we boycott and they agree to admit Negroes but they still keep out Jews? What have we accomplished?" A more plausible reason why they voted to compete was that most of them were from the Northeast.¹⁰ Beamon admitted that "most of us hadn't been home for a long time, and we were miserable in El Paso, and here was a chance to visit our people with all expenses paid." There was another reason to attend, and it was a defiant one. "People like Harry Edwards were telling us we *couldn't* go to the NYAC meet," said Dave Morgan. "He was announcing that we would be a bunch of Uncle Toms and house niggers if we went, and something would happen to us." He added indignantly: "Who the hell is Harry Edwards to tell us where we can go and what we can want, what we can do, and what we can't? That teed us off, and if there was ever any chance that we would boycott, it was lost when Edwards started popping off."¹¹ But after the NYAC meet, Beamon and Morgan began engaging in long discussions with a few of the other black trackmen and would decide to plan a boycott of their own.

During the demonstration black militant groups chanted throughout the night "Muhammad Ali is our champ" and announced that they would picket the world heavyweight championship bout between Buster Mathis and Joe Frazier. Edwards would later organize a protest of the heavyweight title

¹⁰Jack Olsen, The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story (New York: Time-Life Books, 1968), 65.

¹¹Ibid., 65-66.

fight on March 4, 1968, and lead hundreds of demonstrators who waved picture placards of Ali and shouted that Ali was the real champion. Frazier won, but Edwards called the fight one staged by "white racists."¹²

There was a great outcry in California against Edwards in his effort to boycott the NYAC meet, and charges were made about his person. In defense of Edwards, San Jose State President Robert Clark cited a New York Times article that stated Edwards controlled the event and kept it from becoming violent by his strong leadership.¹³ Axthelm said that anonymous phone calls to athletes by militants not connected with Edwards added to the false impression that the NYAC was a victim of intimidation rather than its own practices.¹⁴ Dan Hruby of the San Jose Mercury said Edwards's group had a good case against the NYAC: "The athletic club has long supported amateur sports in the U.S., but it has consistently refused over the years to answer charges that it discriminates against Negroes. It won't even talk about membership practices."¹⁵

After the NYAC meet, Edwards declared he was going to "white-list" other athletic events and colleges.¹⁶ Time magazine categorized Edwards's campaign as a "Black Power and bitter protest" to "cajole or coerce Negro

¹²San Jose Mercury News, 5 March 1968, 57.

¹³Robert D. Clark interview, 11 January 1997; and Brett H. Melendy, "An Oral History," Robert D. Clark, President, 1964-69, San Jose State College. June 1983, 32.

¹⁴Axthelm, "Boycott Now—Boycott Later?" Sports Illustrated, 26 February 1968, 25.

¹⁵San Jose Mercury News, 23 February 1968, 49.

¹⁶San Jose Mercury News, 16 February 1968, 53.

athletes into boycotting what he considers 'white-dominated' sporting events."¹⁷

Then came a startling announcement. On the very day of the NYAC track meet, in the headlines above the story of Edwards's boycott, was the announcement that South Africa would be allowed to compete in the Olympics.

On Thursday night, February 15, South Africa was re-admitted into the Summer Olympics in Mexico City. The decision to restore South Africa was made at the Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France, in a vote taken by mail. By the narrowest of margins, thirty-six out of seventy-one voted to reinstate South Africa to the Olympic Games. Banned in 1963 because of its Apartheid policies, South Africa promised to field a fully integrated team. Although South Africa promised to field an integrated team, its members would still be picked from segregated trials.

IOC President Avery Brundage announced that the IOC had agreed that the South African Olympic Committee was meeting the standards demanded by the Olympic rules and would be permitted to send a team to Mexico City. Apparently as long as the South African team was integrated, the IOC could overlook the fact that it would be selected in segregated trials based on a national law that forbade meets involving both blacks and whites.

The Olympic code bars such discrimination as practiced by South Africa. The second paragraph of Article I of its fundamental principles in the eligibility code specifically states that "no discrimination is allowed against any country or person on the grounds of race, religion, or political

¹⁷Time, 23 February 1968, 61.

affiliation."¹⁸ South Africa would have to change its method of team selection before the Olympics changed, and according to a majority of the seventy-two-man voting committee on the IOC, South Africa had changed. Not socially, economically, or politically, just with respect to its Olympic team. South Africa agreed to allow non-whites to compete for places on the team and guaranteed that they could live without discrimination or segregation with the team at the Olympics. It guaranteed that the team selection committee would be representative of all the races.¹⁹

Satisfied with its compliance, Brundage and the IOC reinstated South Africa to the Olympic Games, which triggered a new fusillade of boycott threats. Ethiopia immediately announced its withdrawal from the Mexico City Games that Thursday night. Algeria followed Ethiopia's lead the next day, about the same time Brundage said he hoped no nation would pull out of the Mexico City Games because of South Africa's re-admission.²⁰

A number of other countries followed suit. On February 19 Syria joined ten African countries in a decision to boycott the Games. At the same time, the Iraq Olympic Committee met in "extraordinary session" to consider joining Syria and the other African nations to protest the re-admission of South Africa. The African nations that had joined the boycott up to this time included Algeria, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and the United Arab Republic, with many more African nations, including Nigeria, Kenya and Malaysia, considering such action.

¹⁸Sports Illustrated, 11 March 1968, 19.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰San Jose Mercury News, 17 February, 61.

Upon hearing that South Africa would be reinstated, the Supreme Council for Sports in Africa (SCSA), a body of thirty-two independent nations, announced that its members would boycott the Mexico City Olympics. Even though a number of African nations had already announced their intentions to boycott the Olympics, the SCSA met in Brazzaville and decided that the thirty-two affiliated countries should take such an action as a body.²¹ They were joined by seven other nations—Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, and Somalia. Moreover, India and the Soviet Union were both threatening to pull out.²²

Although South Africa had promised to field its first integrated team, the SCSA noted that the nation would continue to ban athletic competition between the races. The SCSA also considered the IOC to be predominantly white, over-aged, and European. At the time, there was only one black African on the seventy-one-member committee.

The IOC is not a representative body. It is a body of officials elected by other officials. Less than half of the seventy-two participating nations at the time were represented. The U.S. had three votes and Africa as a whole had only four, with only one black African on the body.

The IOC made a decision that clearly violated the first principle of its own constitution.²³ The first clause of the IOC constitution specifically prohibited any discrimination against any country or individual on the

²¹San Jose Mercury News, 27 February 1968, 17.

²²Time, 8 March 1968, 68.

²³Ian Robertson and Phillip Whitten, "The Olympics: Keep South Africa Out!" New Republic, 13 April 1968, 14.

ground of race or of political conviction. In fact, the IOC had no difficulty applying this clause in 1962 when Indonesia was suspended from the Olympics for refusing to allow athletes from Israel or Taiwan to compete in Jakarta. According to the IOC constitution, clause 25, national committees must be free of all political pressures from governments, which omitted South Africa. All sports in South Africa were segregated, and so were the spectators. Apartheid prescribed that each race may only watch events of its own race.²⁴

But John Westerhoff, secretary of the IOC, said that the South African government had made three concessions that allowed them back into the Olympics: 1) In past Olympic Games, South African participants were on the basis of non-whites representing non-whites and whites representing whites, South Africa promised that the Games in Mexico would have a white and non-white representing the whole of South Africa; 2) Previously, white and non-white participants traveled separately to the Olympic Games, they would now travel together; and 3) The whites and non-whites of past South African teams had to be dressed differently, accommodated separately and could not march under the same flag in the opening ceremony, now will wear the same uniform, room together and march as an integrated team under the South African flag.²⁵

The South Africans assured the IOC that their team would be multi-racial, chosen by a multi-racial committee, would travel and live together and march under the same flag in ceremonies before and after the Games. But segregated trials would be held for the Olympics, with nonwhite athletes

²⁴Ibid., 13.

²⁵San Jose Mercury News, 16 February 1968, 51.

running against the clock instead of competition, with the different races performing before the selectors at different altitudes, under different climatic conditions. There would be no integrated trials within South Africa, since integrated sports were forbidden, but it would be possible to have such trials outside of South Africa. "What happens after the Games?" asked an Ethiopian official. "Each athlete will return to South Africa to join his segregated club. What has the IOC achieved if the status quo is maintained ...?"²⁶

The boycotting nations were screaming hypocrisy—integration abroad, apartheid at home. "What South Africa does in sports outside her borders is not as important as what she does inside her borders, which is a violation of the Olympic code," said Abraham Ordio, secretary of the Nigerian Olympic Games Committee.²⁷

The Soviets knew this as well. The Soviet bloc, backed by Poland, delivered a verbal vitriol to the IOC at the decision to let South Africa bring a team ostensibly integrated.²⁸ A Soviet statement read: "The decision is flagrant violation of the charter of the IOC that forbids discrimination of athletes for political, racial, or religious reasons." After five more African countries pulled out, the Soviet Union, which had been contesting with China for power and influence in Africa, indicated that it might support the African countries in the boycott.²⁹ Soviet sports officials at the Winter Games had

²⁶San Jose Mercury News, 17 February 1968, 61.

²⁷San Jose Mercury News, 18 February 1968, 74.

²⁸San Jose Mercury News, 20 February 1968, 47.

²⁹San Jose Mercury News, 18 February 1968, 74.

already indicated that if South Africa competed in the Summer Games, the Soviet Union would not.³⁰ The Soviet threat of withdrawal was still uncertain, but a Soviet spokesman said, "We consider that the question of discrimination is not solved by including some colored sportsmen on the team."³¹

The African nations, backed by the moral support of the Soviet Union and therefore by the Eastern European countries as well, threatened to withdraw in protest unless the IOC reversed its decision to admit South Africa. If Russia pulled out, Dan Hruby of the Mercury News noted, the Olympics would "boil down to nothing more than a glorified Pan American Games."³²

Dennis Brutus, president of the South African nonracial Olympic Committee, also condemned the decision by the IOC. "By this act," stated Brutus, "the IOC is itself threatening the continued existence of the Olympic movement with all its high ideals."³³

The withdrawals of African and Asian states were viewed with some satisfaction by a few people in South Africa. Frank Braun, president of the South African Olympic Association, even contemplated the possibility of the absent states holding "their own Afro-Asian Olympics" and observed that their boycott "would restore the old prestige of the Games."³⁴

³⁰San Jose Mercury News, 16 February 1968, 51.

³¹San Jose Mercury News, 27 February 1968, 17.

³²San Jose Mercury News, 23 February 1968, 49.

³³San Jose Mercury News, 18 February 1968, 74.

³⁴San Jose Mercury News, 8 March 1968, 58.

The re-admission of South Africa gave the sputtering protest movement greater impetus. When Edwards first proposed an Olympic boycott in November, the chance of it actually happening was slim at best. But that chance was dramatically increased when the IOC re-admitted South Africa. Said Edwards: "The committee has shown the black man just what it thinks of him. I think things will really begin to heat up."³⁵ The NYAC success, combined with the uproar over South Africa's re-admission to the Olympics, spurred Edwards's movement, which had been sputtering. Arthur Daley wrote: "The temporary return of South Africa also lit a fire under the virtually dead and barely smoldering movement by Harry Edwards ... They had been shooting at the wrong target because the Olympics has always been devoid of racism. But South Africa's re-admission made too many blacks hesitate and wonder."³⁶

This new movement was more complex and fractionalized than the 1964 campaign because it also involved Rhodesia and American blacks. Black African boycott leaders were torn between the desire to showcase their athletes on an international level while dealing with the necessity to oppose Apartheid.³⁷ The United States was trying to balance opposition to Apartheid, support for the separation of sport and politics, and the threatened black American boycott. In fact, United States Senator Edward Brooke (R-Mass)

³⁵Axthelm, "Boycott Now—Boycott Later?" Sports Illustrated, 26 February 1968, 25.

³⁶San Jose Mercury News, 23 April 1968, 41.

³⁷Kanin, A Political History of the Olympic Games, 100.

called for a total economic boycott of South Africa if it did not change its policies toward Negroes.³⁸

Edwards was outraged by the decision of the IOC. "The U.S. Olympic Committee, which in line with its racist demeanor does not seat any black people, was a prime force in the political lobbying which enabled the white racist country of South Africa to be reinstated into the international Olympic movement under the sham integration that they concocted," reproached Edwards. He then proposed a second set of Games to be held in an Africa nation during the late summer: "These Games [*sic*] will be financed by a coordinated effort around the world in order that 1968 will in fact be a year of athletic competition in the true Olympic spirit. We shall initiate a fund raising drive here in the United States to support all athletes who qualify to participate in these African games [*sic*]." ³⁹

Edwards even wrote an article for the Saturday Evening Post explaining "Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey's Olympics." "American Negroes have contributed greatly to U.S. victories," explained Edwards. "And while they were winning medals, they were also being hailed before the world as symbols of American equality—an equality that has never existed." Edwards stated that any Negro athlete who didn't join the boycott was "a cop-out and a traitor to his race." He also posed the question: "If the weapons now at our command aren't used in behalf of those left behind, how can we go on living with ourselves?" ⁴⁰ Edwards's contention was that in many ways the condition of

³⁸San Jose Mercury News, 30 April 1968, 6.

³⁹San Jose Mercury News, 3 March 1968, 39.

the black athlete in 1968 was just as bad as it was before Jackie Robinson integrated baseball in 1947. "Black athletes are beginning to realize that breaking records doesn't alter their own status as second-rate citizens outside the sports arena," exclaimed Edwards.⁴¹

On Tuesday, February 27, the NCAA basketball committee announced that Lew Alcindor, Lucius Allen and Mike Warren, stars on UCLA's defending NCAA champion basketball team, rejected invitations to compete in the Olympic Trials, citing the interruption of their academic studies.⁴² In fact, twenty of the nation's finest collegiate basketball players, whites as well as blacks, passed up the tryouts. Seven of the best black basketball players in the country, four of whom would be inducted into the NBA Hall of Fame, made it known they were not interested in competing in Mexico City. Joining Alcindor, Allen and Warren of UCLA, were Wes Unseld of Louisville, Elvin Hayes of Houston, Bill Hewitt of USC, and Bob Lanier of St. Bonaventure University.

With all the nations and top U.S. black athletes boycotting, Mexico, which had the biggest financial stake in the Olympics and had agreed to put \$84 million into the 1968 Olympics, was feeling the pressure. If all of the protesting nations decided to stay home, Mexico would be left with a massive bill and nothing to show for it. So Mexican officials started a campaign to frighten South Africa into withdrawing by saying that it would be the most integrated Olympics ever. It didn't work. South Africa said it would never

⁴⁰Harry Edwards, "Why Negroes Should Boycott Whitey's Olympics," Saturday Evening Post, 9 March 1968, 6.

⁴¹Ibid., 7.

⁴²San Jose Mercury News, 28 February 1968, 67.

withdraw after having been admitted. Despite pressure to withdraw, South Africa insisted there was no chance it would withdraw voluntarily to save the Games. "There is not a ghost of a chance of us withdrawing," said Frank Braun, president of the South African Olympic Association.⁴³ One Olympic official compared Mexico's plight to that of a host who spreads a fine table of food and wines only to have a stranger invite the guests.⁴⁴ Desperate, Mexico City dispatched a three-man delegation to Chicago to ask Brundage for a reconsideration of the committee's decision.⁴⁵

Three Olympic officials from Mexico City met with Brundage in Chicago on February 28 behind closed doors to discuss the boycott threat—Ramirez Vazquez, President of the Mexican Olympic Organizing Committee and two delegates to the IOC, both of whom had voted against the re-admittance of South Africa. After the meeting, Brundage reluctantly agreed to convene a special meeting of the IOC nine-member executive board within thirty to sixty days.⁴⁶

Back in 1935 Brundage faced a similar situation as president of the American Olympic Committee (AOC)—U.S. participation in the Olympic Games, which were held in Berlin and Nazi Germany. The struggle within the committee to send the athletes was acrimonious to say the least, but Brundage

⁴³San Jose Mercury News, 19 February 1968, 49.

⁴⁴Ibid., 50.

⁴⁵Newsweek, 11 March 1968, 84. It was reported by French Olympic officials that they had heard the Mexican delegation had only one real message for Brundage: either call an IOC meeting on South Africa or we are going to cancel the summer Games now; Sports Illustrated, 11 March 1968, 20.

⁴⁶San Jose Mercury News, 1 March 1968, 52.

insisted that "non-participation would do more harm than good. Hitler would still go on. The Nazis would still go on."⁴⁷

In 1933 the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) passed a resolution calling upon the AOC to give notice that no American athlete would be certified for competition "unless in fact as well as in theory German Jews are both permitted and encouraged to train for the Olympic Games of 1936." A movement was started and a petition with more than half a million signatures called for U.S. withdrawal from the Games. On December 7, 1935, the NAACP declared itself against participation, on the ground that Germany had violated its pledges against racial discrimination.⁴⁸

But the AOC and Brundage thought differently. "Our athletes must not be denied the right to carry the Stars and Stripes to victory abroad just because of treason for political reasons in some quarters at home," said Brundage at the time. In response to pressure, Brundage and retired General Charles H. Sherill of the AOC went to Germany to investigate discrimination against Jews. When they arrived, they found that swimming pools, tracks, and even the town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, site of the 1936 Winter Olympics, were all closed to Jews. U.S. Ambassador to Germany William Edward Dodd reported that Jews were barred from open competition, denied use of sports fields and other athletic facilities, and that world-rank Jewish athletes were dismissed from clubs. Even a Nazi sports official made a statement conceding that no Jews would be participating. Yet Brundage and Sherill returned satisfied that the

⁴⁷Sports Illustrated, 11 March 1968, 21.

⁴⁸New Republic, 13 April 1968, 12.

U.S. should participate.⁴⁹ "Brundage was against a U.S. move to boycott the Berlin Olympics in 1936 even when it was obvious that Adolf Hitler intended to make Aryan hay out of the Games," wrote John Underwood of Sports Illustrated.⁵⁰ "In an imperfect world," said Brundage in 1968, "if participation in sports is to be stopped every time the laws of humanity are violated, there will never be any international contests."⁵¹ Maybe, but those countries that violate the laws of humanity should not be allowed to participate.

The Soviet Union officially threatened to boycott the Summer Olympic Games on March 7 unless the IOC withdrew South Africa's invitation to participate in the Games at Mexico City. The Soviet Olympic committee sternly called for an emergency meeting of the IOC to ban South Africa because of its racial policies, which left little doubt that the Soviets would not participate if South Africa was permitted to participate. "If the IOC refuses to convene an emergency session or leave its decision intact," the statement read, "the Soviet Olympic committee will be compelled to come back to the question on participation of Soviet athletes in the Summer Olympic Games." The Soviet committee added that the decision to admit South Africa was "an impermissible act which contradicts the basic principles of the Olympic statute." It seemed everyone knew this but the IOC. On the same day East Germany also indicated that it might consider a boycott.⁵²

⁴⁹Ibid., 13.

⁵⁰John Underwood, "Games In Trouble," Sports Illustrated, 30 September 1968, 47.

⁵¹Sports Illustrated, 11 March 1968, 21.

⁵²San Jose Mercury News, 8 March 1968, 58.

On March 28 a march led by Martin Luther King turned into a riot in Memphis, Tennessee, that left one dead and thirty-seven wounded. Nearly 6,000 people marched in an attempt to force the city of Memphis to come to terms with striking sanitation workers, and almost as soon as the march started, violence erupted as young Negro militants smashed store windows and began looting.⁵³

At the end of the month, on Sunday night, March 31, Lyndon Johnson announced he would not "seek" and would "not accept" the nomination for another term as president.⁵⁴

Then on April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered in Memphis. The violence that followed lasted a week. Riots erupted in 125 cities across the country. There was arson and looting in Baltimore, Chicago, Kansas City, and Washington, D.C. More than 75,000 federal troops and National Guardsmen patrolled America's streets. In the end, 46 people had died, all but five of them black. One hundred fifty thousand mourners marched through the streets of Atlanta with the mule drawn wagon containing the body of King singing the anthem of the civil rights movement "We Shall Overcome."

In a White House ceremony exactly one week after the assassination of King, President Johnson signed into law the civil rights and open housing bill, which made it a federal crime to interfere with anyone trying to exercise his civil rights, and also made it illegal to deny Negro families the right to buy and sell 80 percent of the nations' housing units.⁵⁵

⁵³San Jose Mercury News, 29 March 1968, 1.

⁵⁴San Jose Mercury News, 1 April 1968, 1.

⁵⁵San Jose Mercury News, 12 April 1968, 3.

In the aftermath of King's assassination, a crowd gathered April 10 at the San Jose Civic Auditorium to listen to civic and minority leaders speak, one of whom was Harry Edwards. "The question now is not whether you're going to get involved but whether you're going to survive," said Edwards effusively. "I won't harm a hair on the white man's head except in self-defense, but I'll burn down every damn thing he owns." He declared, "You honkies have buried your last Martin Luther King. There'll be no more like him."⁵⁶ On April 18 a rally was held at San Jose State designed to answer the question, "What Whitey Can Do" to abolish racism at the grass roots level. The purpose of the program was to aid minority students at SJS and help alleviate racism on campus.

On June 5, only two months after King's life was taken, Robert F. Kennedy, just hours after winning the California presidential primary, was shot in Los Angeles. The person seizing the assassin's pistol that night was Kennedy's aide Rafer Johnson, the 1960 Olympic decathlon champion.⁵⁷

And so the two leading peace symbols had been removed from society, and so had the best hope for blacks. After King's death, Georgia Congressman John Lewis observed, "people just dropped out. ... I think some people were afraid to hope again, to get involved."⁵⁸ Lance Morrow wrote that with Kennedy's death a large number of the youth in America felt that they had "become disenfranchised and were now orphaned from the nation's political system."⁵⁹

⁵⁶Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷Kenny Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 70.

⁵⁸Time, 11 January 1988, 24.

Back on April 12 the American Committee on Africa issued a statement signed by more than sixty athletes calling for a United States boycott of the 1968 Olympic Games unless South Africa was prevented from participating. Among the signers were Negro and white athletes, both amateurs and professionals, including San Jose State track stars Tommie Smith, John Carlos, and Lee Evans, and also Harry Edwards.⁶⁰

The American Committee on Africa contended, and rightly so, that the resolution to allow South African participation changed the Olympic code's "fundamental principal [*sic*] against discrimination" and therefore was subject to a two-thirds vote of the IOC present at a meeting, rather than by a simple majority, as was required in a vote taken by mail.⁶¹

The statement signed by the athletes listed three reasons for supporting the boycott: segregation and discrimination in South African sports; the IOC's acceptance of South Africa despite continued racism in sports which violated the Olympic charter against discrimination; and the nations boycotting the Games deserved "full support from all American athletes." "Therefore," the statement concluded, "an Olympic contest in which South Africa participates violates the integrity of the games and demands non-participation by all American athletes."⁶²

Meanwhile, the day before, seven Negro track and field athletes at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) said in a statement they would boycott

⁵⁹Ibid., 26.

⁶⁰San Jose Mercury News, 12 April 1968, 54.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

UTEP's track meet that Saturday against Brigham Young University due to what the athletes called a belief at BYU "that blacks are inferior and that we are disciples of the devil." BYU is owned and operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Mormons, and its Book of Mormon specified an inferior role for blacks. At the time, no black could hold the priesthood. King's death also had a part in it. The athletes said that track coach Wayne Vandenburg should "have been more sympathetic toward us, the black athletes, concerning our feelings toward the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King."⁶³ The day after King was assassinated, UTEP participated in the 41st annual Texas relays, and the trackmen felt they never had a chance to show how they felt about his death and believed the Texas meet should have been canceled out of respect. But their coach asked them to run, and run they did. "We still felt sad about that," said Dave Morgan. "And the meet at BYU was in Easter week, and it seemed to us that there was an obvious connection between the martyrdom of Jesus and the martyrdom of Dr. King." He added: "And on top of all of that, there was a general fact that the Negro is treated like something out of the jungle here and we wanted to express ourselves about that."⁶⁴

On the same day that UTEP athletes announced they would not participate at the BYU meet, Harry Edwards publicly called non-violence a "dead issue in the nation" and announced he was seeking membership in the Black Panther Party.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Jack Olsen, The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story, 68. The boycott announcement came the day after Edwards had visited the El Paso campus and a week after the Texas relays.

"In all good conscience," he stated, "black athletes can't participate for a government which is racist oriented and which denies the black man what the white man takes for granted." Speaking in San Francisco, Edwards also said, rather ironically, the committee had decided to designate the Olympic boycott "as a solemn memorial to Dr. King and his family in recognition of their sacrifices and in recognition of the significance of Dr. King's nonviolent struggle for black liberation in this country." As another memorial to King, Edwards said the committee would urge Negroes to patronize three major California track and field meets in May—the Los Angeles Coliseum Relays, West Coast Relays at Fresno, and California Relays in Modesto.⁶⁵

On April 17 Edwards appeared on the same program with Stanford University track coach Payton Jordan to discuss the role of black athletes as part of Afro-American Culture Week at Stanford. Edwards called Jordan a "white nationalist," and argued that "black athletes—just like black people—are not considered human beings." Edwards, who was "alternately cheered, jeered, and laughed" at by the nearly 600 persons in attendance, said, "We're not running, we're not fighting, we're not paying income tax until the white man recognizes that we're human beings." Edwards claimed that the Olympic Games executive committee had no minority group members and the Olympic coaching staff had only one Negro, whom Edwards called an "Uncle Tom." When asked during a question-answer period if he would be happy with any white coach, Edwards said, "It's possible to have a white coach who is a human being."⁶⁶

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶San Jose Mercury News, 18 April 1968, 36.

Then a startling reversal of events took place. On Sunday night, April 21, Avery Brundage, his eyes "shimmering with tears," announced the reversal to re-admit South Africa to the Olympic Games. At a two-day summit meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, the executive board of the IOC unanimously voted to withdraw South Africa's invitation to compete in the Mexico City Olympics.⁶⁷

Brundage, who had gone into the weekend meeting openly opposed to any change in the original vote to re-admit South Africa, reluctantly announced the reversal after more than forty nations had threatened to boycott the Olympics. Up until that time, the IOC had never reversed its executives.⁶⁸

The executive board's decision was framed in a telegram to all seventy-one IOC members "strongly" recommending that the invitation to South Africa be withdrawn and asking for an "immediate" mail vote confirming the board's stand. The telegram was less a recommendation than a command.⁶⁹ The cable that Brundage sent to all seventy-one members of the IOC said: "In view of all the information on the international climate received by the Executive Board at this meeting, it is unanimously of the opinion that it would be most unwise for a South African team to participate in the Games of the 19th Olympiad. Therefore, the Executive Board strongly recommends that you endorse this unanimous proposal to withdraw the invitation to these Games."⁷⁰

⁶⁷San Jose Mercury News, 22 April 1968, 1, 45.

⁶⁸*ibid.*

⁶⁹*ibid.*

South Africa had been re-admitted by a simple majority vote of the IOC taken in February during the Winter Games at Grenoble, but because the vote constituted a rules change, it required a two-thirds majority under IOC rules. According to Lord Killanin of Ireland, chairman of the IOC report that recommended South Africa's re-admission, the reasons given for the change were the boycott threat, plus the question of the Olympics' very future and the possibility of "incidents" against South African athletes if they showed up at Mexico City and half of the world's other Olympic teams stayed away.⁷¹ Underlying the vote was an obvious, deep-seated fear of demonstrations by Black Power advocates in the United States and elsewhere. "We did not want that chap from California coming down to Mexico City and setting off riots," one member said.⁷² The "chap" was none other than Harry Edwards.

The clincher came when the Soviet Union officially threatened to pull out of the Olympics, and a number of top U.S. Negro athletes threatened to boycott; plus the worldwide reaction to Martin Luther King's assassination, left the IOC with only one real course of action. The assassination of King was listed as having a profound effect on those attending the meeting. "We were all very much aware of the implications of his assassination and the climate the act had created in America," said another board member.⁷³

⁷⁰Tex Maule, "Switcheroo From Yes To Nyet," Sports Illustrated, 29 April 1968, 28.

⁷¹San Jose Mercury News, 22 April 1968, 47.

⁷²Maule, "Switcheroo From Yes To Nyet," Sports Illustrated, 29 April 1968, 28.

⁷³*Ibid.*

But there was little doubt that the IOC was greatly influenced by the boycotting nations, which could have ended the modern Olympics. At stake was not only the Mexico City Olympics but the Olympic movement itself. Louis Duino, Sports Editor for the Mercury News, said, "The Mexico City games would become a disaster without the nations who are backing the boycott. If this happens, no reasonable thinking country would take a gamble upon staging the games in the future."⁷⁴

The IOC had to sacrifice South Africa for "the sake of the future of international amateur sports."⁷⁵ Reginald Hlongwane, secretary of the South African Non-racial Open Committee for Olympic Sports agreed with the decision. "The South African Olympic trials will not be fair if the black and white men do not compete against one another. If you have two lightweight champions, one black and one white, do you sniff at them to decide who goes? If so, you know who will go."⁷⁶ Hlongwane later stated: "It is no better to put blacks on the team for show than it is to exclude them."⁷⁷

So less than two months after being re-admitted South Africa was once again expelled from the Olympics. And no one could have been happier to hear of South Africa's expulsion from the Games than Mexico. Mexican officials considered the Elective Board's recommendation a "victory" for all of Mexico. Col. Antonio Haro Oliva, President of the Mexican Sporting

⁷⁴San Jose Mercury News, 24 April 1968, 65.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Maule, "Switcheroo From Yes To Nyet," Sports Illustrated, 29 April 1968, 29.

⁷⁷Sports Illustrated, 3 June 1968, 73.

Confederation, stated: "Mexico was not fighting to condemn a political policy but rather to express the Olympic spirit and to draw together all men on earth."⁷⁸ It didn't hurt that Mexico wouldn't be eating the \$84 million they spent on the Olympics.

Some South African athletes were hurt by the IOC reversal and, understandably, bitterly disappointed. Sprinter Paul Nash, the "world's fastest white man," had tied the 100-meter world record four times in eight days the month before the IOC reversal and swimmer Karen Muir was ranked No. 1 in the world in the backstroke.⁷⁹ "I don't have to apologize for a 10.2," Nash said. When asked if he was disappointed at being barred from competing in the Olympics, he only replied, "No political questions." Brian Davis was philosophical about the IOC action. "I guess I really feel most sorry for the blacks. They were finally going to get their opportunity in sports, and it created an enormous interest among them ... participation doubled and tripled after the announcement at Grenoble that South Africa had been re-admitted. And the white athletes were happy for them. Sportsmen are not concerned with color."⁸⁰

Eddie Sono, vice-president of the nonwhite athletic organization and a former black sprint champion, said he didn't understand the actions of the other African nations. "South Africa did what they wanted them to do," he said. "They said in 1964 that they would not admit us because we, the nonwhites, were not on the team. Now we are on, and still we are not admitted."

⁷⁸San Jose Mercury News, 23 April 1968, 42.

⁷⁹Time, 3 May 1968, 67.

⁸⁰Sports Illustrated, 3 June 1968, 62.

We South African blacks are bitter toward the other African nations."⁸¹

For Humphrey Khosi, South Africa's best black track athlete, who had run an Olympic qualifying time of 1:47.9 for the 800 meters, at 29, this was his last chance of going to the Olympics. "They said they were fighting for us in international competition," Khosi said. "Now we have made this step forward, and, instead of supporting us and saying good, they boycott. They should say, 'This is progress. Now let us wait and see how it works out.' They have put us right back where we started. You cannot do all at once. You must take a step at a time, and they have not let us take the first step."⁸²

However, South Africa did not give any evidence it was taking steps to alleviate the atmosphere of escalating separation and the subjugation of blacks. During one week in the month of May in South Africa, when white athletes competed at Potchefstroom and a week later black athletes competed at the Libanon Gold Mine Stadium for the Olympics, a 24-year-old white railway clerk and a 25-year-old African were found guilty in Johannesburg's magistrate court of contravening the immorality act and both sentenced to six months' imprisonment;⁸³ the South African government moved to deny the colored population their minimal representation in the National Assembly, four seats for white men represented the colored; the government also began to implement a new policy of moving 4 million of the 6 million blacks in the major cities back to their homelands if they were not "economically active," in

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 64.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³The immorality act forbade any white from having a sexual relationship with any black.

effect, arbitrarily separating a Bantu man who was jobless from his wife if she had a job as domestic in Johannesburg; and the Minister of labor threatened to deregister the Trade Union Council of South Africa if it insisted on continuing its affiliation with a few black trade unions. Even three award-winning movies were banned during that week—Bonnie and Clyde, In the Heat of the Night, and Guess Who's Coming to Dinner.⁸⁴

In light of what transpired in one week in South Africa, multiracial committees, white and "nonwhites" traveling together, living together, and wearing the same uniform, gave the appearance of a whited sepulcher. The South African government must have thought it could go back to business as usual after it was re-admitted to the Olympics.

In May Edwards was interviewed for a lengthy article that ran in the N.Y. Times Magazine section of the newspaper. In the article Edwards was called a "colorful phrasemaker," and rightly so. He told the newspaper that when his contract at San Jose State expired in June, he would quit the campus, complete his doctorate, and never teach at a white school again because "Teaching crackers is like trying to kick your way through a steel door with boots of jello." Edwards sure had a way with words. "Crackers" was Edwards' opprobrium for white America. He even referred to President Lyndon B. Johnson as "Lynchin'" Baines Johnson.⁸⁵

Edwards was a professed black nationalist, but preferred the sobriquet "black rightist," a man who stands up for the rights of black people.⁸⁶ He

⁸⁴Sports Illustrated, 3 June 1968, 64, 66.

⁸⁵Arnold Hano, "The Black Rebel Who 'Whitelists' The Olympics," New York Times Magazine, 12 May 1968, 39.

⁸⁶Ibid., 32.

even claimed that blacks "cannot and must not" work with whites. Yet it was pointed out that his office was staffed by whites and blacks, working together to turn out Edwards's explosive paraphernalia and publications.⁸⁷

Edwards was described as moderate *and* militant, separatist *and* integrationist. It was said that Edwards's Olympic boycott represented not only the nation's racial struggle but Edwards's own view of the struggle by colored people all over the world against a white man's "lingering colonialism."⁸⁸

Edwards claimed that blacks were not Americans ("We are black people") and said he refused to register to vote because "It's like saying, 'Pick the devil of your choice.'"⁸⁹ "We must get the cracker off our backs, by Olympic boycott, by out-and-out revolution, by whatever means," proclaimed Edwards, although he "grudgingly" included integration as a possible means.⁹⁰ In the interview Edwards summed up the aim of the Olympic boycott. "It's simple," he said. "Black dignity."⁹¹

A San Jose State professor who knew Edwards says, "Harry was somewhere between King and the Black Panthers," and adds, "Harry used the media."⁹² Says Bert Burns: "Harry exaggerates and sometimes he would say he'd do things that you know, and I know, and Harry knew, he wouldn't do."

⁸⁷Ibid., 41.

⁸⁸Ibid., 41.

⁸⁹Ibid., 48.

⁹⁰Ibid., 41.

⁹¹Ibid., 46.

⁹²The professor was Robin Brooks; Robin Brooks, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 31 January 1997.

But Burns adds:

I liked Harry very much. I found him to be very trustworthy. I said what I believe then and believe today. Well, I believe today it was true then. That there are two Harry Edwards: there's the Harry Edwards in the dashiki and the shades and the language that just scared the living pants off you; and there's the Harry Edwards that's the careful scholar—well-educated, thoughtful. And for the most part, I was fortunate enough to be able to deal with both Harry Edwards. If I had only seen the dashiki and the shades I might have different opinions. But there is a real a scholar. Harry's a real scholar. [And I was pleased to help him get into the doctorate program at Cornell. That wasn't to get rid of him, that's what he had wanted to do. And I was pleased to help him get his job and later promotion at Berkeley. I don't know what role I played. I don't want to make this too much, but they asked me for letters of reference and I was pleased to provide them.]⁹³

The United States Olympic Committee conducted preliminary Olympic track and field trials in late June in Los Angeles because the athletes would need to get acclimated to Mexico City's 7,350-foot altitude. Earlier in the month, Tommie Smith led "Speed City" to a victory over USC's experienced and favored world-record 440-yard relay team and was named top athlete at the Coliseum-Compton Invitational Track Meet in Los Angeles. The USC 440-relay team had not lost in more than a year.⁹⁴ After the Olympic trials at Los Angeles June 29-30, the athletes were sent to South Lake Tahoe, California, for high altitude training on September 14 where the final trials would also be held later that month.⁹⁵

⁹³Hobert Burns, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 15 January 1997.

⁹⁴Mark Mulvoy, "The Boys From Speed City Burn Up The Town," Sports Illustrated, 17 June 1968, 62.

⁹⁵Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 70.

At the Los Angeles trials, talk of a boycott was still lingering on the minds of the athletes, but without any unanimity. Thirteen of the twenty-six black male athletes said they would boycott. But the top two 100-meter men, Jim Hines and Charlie Greene, said they would compete in Mexico City. "It comes down to whether you're an American or not," reiterated Greene. "I am American, and I'm going to run."

With the black athletes divided on the issue of a boycott, Edwards officially announced the protest movement's end during a meeting of the Black Power Conference in Philadelphia on August 31. Dan Hruby stated that one of the reasons why Edwards announced the movement's end was that blacks were split and mostly opposed to his plan.⁹⁶ In a written speech, Edwards told the Black Power Conference that "of the 26 athletes who had an excellent chance of making the team, 12 and maybe 13 were unwilling to boycott under some circumstances. The remaining 13 were not willing to boycott under any circumstances."⁹⁷ David B. Kanin wrote that "the boycott movement fizzled, due probably to Edwards' loss of rapport with some athletes and to the lure of international competition and Olympic prestige."⁹⁸ But Hruby said that those who "feel inclined to call the boycott move a complete failure are wrong." He posed the question: "Is San Jose State, the community, the country or the black race any better off because of Edwards' actions in the last 12 months?" and answered if Edwards desire was to "focus world attention

⁹⁶San Jose Mercury News, 12 September 1968, 41.

⁹⁷Ibid., 41-42.

⁹⁸Kanin, A Political History of the Olympic Games, 94.

on what he felt were racial injustices in the U.S., he was eminently successful."⁹⁹

Also in August came what was known as the "Prague Spring." The Soviet Union, which had earlier condemned South Africa for its racist policies and had favored a boycott of the Olympics, was now under the same scrutiny. In Czechoslovakia during the spring, the Communist Party, led by Alexander Dubcek, undertook efforts to humanize the socialist structure and encourage greater individual discretion, but Soviet armies put a stop to that. On August 20 Soviets tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia the day after the Soviets told the United States they were ready to talk over the Non-proliferation Agreement. Among the leaders of the reform movement was Emil Zatopek, who starred in the 1948 and 1952 Olympic Games. In 1956 Russian tanks had rolled into Hungary to put a red light to that country's try for independence, and the Russians competed in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics anyway. But after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Zatopek went on television urging that the Soviet Union and its fellow invaders be barred from Olympic competition. After the Soviet Union's armed invasion of Czechoslovakia, there were yet again threats from other nations to withdraw from the Olympics.

At the South Lake Tahoe Olympic final trials seven track and field athletes from San Jose State made the U.S. team, more than any other college in the country. San Jose State trackmen Tommie Smith, Ronnie Ray Smith, John Carlos, Lee Evans, Tom Dooley, Ed Burke, would compete for the U.S. Olympic team, while San Jose State pole vaulter Chris Papanicolaou would compete for Greece, his home country. Both Tommie Smith, who held seven world sprint

⁹⁹San Jose Mercury News, 12 September 1968, 41.

records, and John Carlos, who held the world record in the 200 meters, would run in the 200 meters, Lee Evans would run in the 400 meters and 1600-meter relay, and Ronnie Ray Smith would compete in the 400-meter relay.

A week before the Olympic team was to leave for Mexico City, it met in Denver as a final stop because of Denver's high altitude, and there was one last meeting about the Olympics. "It boiled down to a clash," said James, "between the *goal*—doing good for all mankind—and the *gold*: the individual's self-interest. There was, shall we say, counseling back and forth to sort out the two." Tommie Smith stood: "I hold no hate for people who can't make a gesture," he said, "whatever the reason. But I have to reserve the honor of Tommie Smith. I'm an American until I die, and to me that means I have to do something. I don't know what I'll do. But we have to make worthwhile this last year."¹⁰⁰

St. Saffold played for the Cincinnati Bengals of the National Football League for a full season in 1968 and had a game at Denver against the Broncos the same weekend that the Olympic team was housed in Denver. It just so happened that the Olympic athletes were going to leave the Sunday of the game and Saffold came in that Saturday, and it was further coincidence that the Bengals stayed at the same hotel. Saffold, roommate of Tommie Smith at San Jose State from 1963 to the summer of 1967, who said, "in so many ways we were like brothers," called Tommie Smith's room and got together with him. Smith described the finals of the trials for the 200 meters in Tahoe and said that as he kind of strided for a while, he came off the turn in last place, and going through his mind was, "Did I want to? Did I want to?" And at that point

¹⁰⁰Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 72.

he decided, "Yes, I will." He decided during the race that he would qualify and then decide what he was going to do in Mexico City, and Smith began to move on everyone. John Carlos was out in front and he caught everyone but him. "Even in the hotel that day Tommie was telling me, this was a week or so before the race, he said, 'St. I don't know what I'm gonna do, but I gotta do something.'"¹⁰¹

Saffold states that "after the assassination of King and Kennedy, the two leading peace symbols in America and two very important icons in the black community, going into the trials Tommie said that he had his own personal battles as to whether or not he wanted to represent a country that was so full of racism and evil where black folks were concerned; whether or not he wanted to represent such a country on an international platform."¹⁰²

John Carlos says the death of black leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King weighed heavily on his mind. "This was all on my mind," Carlos says now. "They were willing to put their life on the line. This was more important than winning a medal. You can take my life, but you won't take my precedent."¹⁰³ "You're talking about the two greatest black leaders who ever lived," adds Smith. "They were fighting for human rights, not kill the honkie."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹St. Saffold, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 5 December 1996.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³John Carlos, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 24 January 1997.

¹⁰⁴Tommie Smith, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 29 January 1997.

Even though the black athletes did not agree on a unified course of action for the Olympic Games, they did decide that each of them could plan and "do his own thing." To avoid disunity the boycott was abandoned, but it was decided that the athletes would take it upon themselves to choose what to do once they got to Mexico City and if an athlete's conscience demanded it, then he could make a gesture on the victory stand. Says Smith: "We decided by a meeting in Denver prior to leaving for Mexico if there is no boycott that each athlete would identify and verify issues important to them, doing what they thought was necessary to make aware the atrocities in this country."¹⁰⁵ Smith told Saffold that he was ready to die and said "as a black man what do I have to live for in a country like this." Saffold says he found it interesting that Smith never once mentioned Edwards in the conversation. The truth of the matter was that Edwards didn't have anything to do with the athletes' decision to do their own thing. The athletes decided on their own what they would do.

In a session with one of the U.S. Olympic track team members just before the Olympic games, John Carlos warned about a boycott: "... when it comes to showing how we feel about the deal we're getting in this country, the individual has spoken for himself and, when it comes time to make a move at the games, you can tell all the brothers and sisters back home that we ain't forgetting 'em."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Spartan Daily, 11 October 1968, 6.

Chapter V

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."—Viktor Frankl

When the athletes arrived in Mexico City, they discovered that student unrest was not restricted to North America. On October 2, while preparing to host the Olympics, a student demonstration was protesting the government and social policies of Mexico President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz. Rioting had occurred in Mexico City since mid-July when students demanded the elimination of the riot police corps, firing of top police officials, changes in the antiriot law and a guarantee of university autonomy. The Ordaz government hastily ordered an army takeover of the University of Mexico in September.¹

Mexican soldiers and riot police fired upon the demonstrators killing forty-nine and wounding several hundred, though one never knows the exact number of these things since governments are in charge of releasing the

¹San Jose Mercury News, 4 October 1968, 1.

information. The press secretary for Ordaz originally reported twenty people dead, seventy-five injured or wounded, and four hundred arrested.²

Students battled troops and police in the bloodiest outbreak in nine weeks of struggle against the government of President Ordaz, and this marked the third time authorities and students had clashed in a bloody encounter. Some 10,000 people had gathered at Tlatelolco Square for an anti-government rally, whereupon hundreds of soldiers hidden in the Aztec ruins opened fire and secret police agents in the crowds drew pistols moving in on the crowd from all sides.³ The students had gathered in the square to demand government reforms and then planned to march on the troop-occupied Polytechnic Institute. But troops cordoned off the Tlatelolco housing project, 15 miles from where Olympic athletes were to be housed in Olympic Village, and suddenly "opened fire when a helicopter dropped a signal flare."⁴

The presidential palace issued a statement that said the students had opened fire first. The army claimed that snipers had opened fire on soldiers and police, forcing the troops to respond with fire of their own, despite the fact that there were women and children among those attending the rally in the plaza, which lay in the Tlatelolco district near the heart of Mexico City, where some 450 years earlier Hernando Cortés and his Spanish troops crushed the last army of the Aztec Empire.⁵ The day after troops hunted room by room for snipers and tanks patrolled downtown streets.

²Los Angeles Times, 4 October 1968, 1.

³San Jose Mercury News, 4 October 1968, 2.

⁴San Jose Mercury News, 3 October 1968, 1-2.

⁵Los Angeles Times, 4 October 1968, 1.

Ironically, at the beginning of the year, Mexico, in its excitement over the Olympic year, proudly proclaimed that 1968 would be the "Olympic Year of Peace."⁶ "Mexico," stated the conservative leading daily Excelsior, "which in the past used guns as its arbiter for equality and progress, today champions an unwaveringly different approach toward the same ends." Another Mexican daily declared: "This peace year ... is an extension of Mexico's policies."⁷ Apparently those policies included gunning down innocent men, women and children.

Despite the massacre, Avery Brundage announced that the games would go on as scheduled after the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) met in an emergency session to discuss the status of the Mexico Games after the rioting.⁸

John Carlos made headlines when he announced on Sunday October 6, six days before the Olympics, that black athletes would "hold some sort of demonstration during the games."⁹ "We have no intention of disrupting the games," Carlos said. "But that does not mean we will not do something to accentuate the injustices that have been done the black man in America." "If I win a gold medal, I will be up there to get it," Carlos stated, but added, "I may throw it away afterwards."¹⁰ "The black boycott issue is dead," claimed Stan

⁶San Jose Mercury News, 7 January 1968, 14.

⁷Ibid.

⁸San Jose Mercury News, 4 October 1968, 1.

⁹San Jose Mercury News, 8 October 1968, 47.

¹⁰Los Angeles Times, 7 October 1968, part 3, 4.

Wright, black U.S. Olympic track assistant coach. "I have been very close to the black athletes. You can bet there will be no demonstrations."¹¹ Many people could get rich off that bet. U.S. Olympic track coach Payton Jordan (the same Payton Jordan from Stanford that Harry Edwards earlier in the year had labeled a "white nationalist") believed Carlos was speaking only for himself when he made his demonstration announcement. "Personally, I don't believe there will be any sort of demonstration," Jordan stated. "I'm convinced John was speaking from his heart—but also only for himself."¹² Jordan was wrong.

Two days before the opening ceremonies of the Olympics in Mexico City, the 81-one-year-old Brundage, who had served as IOC president since 1952, was reelected as president to another four-year term.¹³

On October 12, ten days after the massacre at Tlatelolco Square, the Olympic flame was lighted, and white doves were released into the Mexican sky high above Aztec Stadium. The 1968 Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City began in what was the first Olympics ever staged by a Latin American country. There were 7,886 athletes from 119 countries in the largest Olympics yet.

Immediately there was controversy surrounding the Games, and black athletes from the United States were right in the middle of it. On the second day of the Games, the first protest occurred. The first Olympic sprint final was the 100 meters and Jim Hines won in a world-record 9.95, becoming the first man to break the sub-ten-second barrier in the 100. After the 100-meter final,

¹¹Ibid.

¹²San Jose Mercury News, 8 October 1968, 47.

¹³San Jose Mercury News, 11 October 1968, 72; also Los Angeles Times, 11 October 1968, part 3, 8.

the three black medalists, Hines and Charlie Greene of the U.S., and Lennox Miller of Jamaica, let it be known they would refuse to have their medals presented by Avery Brundage.¹⁴ When Hines and Greene mounted the podium to receive their medals for a one-three finish in the 100 meters, the presentations were made by Lord David Burghley of England, not Brundage, who was originally scheduled to make the presentations, but was conveniently away in Acapulco where the Olympic sailing races were in progress.¹⁵

On Tuesday, October 15, the same day that Tommie Smith and Carlos qualified for the 200 meters, several black athletes issued a message that they did not want the IOC president to present them with any medals.¹⁶

The anti-Brundage feeling among black trackmen was contagious. Even Ralph Boston, who had declared himself against a Negro boycott of the Games when it was first proposed, said, "I don't want Brundage giving me a medal either if I win one." Brundage, who customarily made the medal presentations, had yet to make any involving the "known militants" on the U.S. team.¹⁷

The next day, Tommie Smith asked his wife, Denise, to buy a pair of black gloves. She and Lee Evan's wife went shopping and both bought black gloves that their husbands could slip on if they were forced to shake hands with Brundage on the victory stand.¹⁸ Smith knew what he would do, but did not

¹⁴"Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists," Life, 1 November 1968, 64C.

¹⁵San Jose Mercury News, 16 October 1968, 91.

¹⁶*ibid.*

¹⁷San Jose Mercury News, 17 October 1968, 75; also Los Angeles Times, 17 October 1968, part 3, 4.

yet tell Carlos. "I didn't know what I would say, but I knew I wanted to do something," says Smith now.¹⁹

Both Smith and Carlos of San Jose State, along with Stanford's Larry Questad, qualified for the 200-meter semi-finals, with Smith winning in an Olympic record 20.2 seconds.²⁰ But it was questionable whether Smith would run in the 200-meter finals. After the semifinals of the 200 meters, Carlos won the first semi in 20.11, and Smith won the second semi in 20.13, but as he slowed, he felt a jab high in his left thigh. Smith had pulled up lame in the semi-final heat, which he won with ease. A few strides past the finish of the semi-finals, Smith felt a pain in his leg. It was diagnosed as a slight groin muscle pull. His San Jose State track coach, Bud Winter, came over to him, got him up and packed his groin in ice and wrapped it. Smith would run in the 200 final.²¹

On October 16 the 200-meter finals began. Known for his slow starts, Smith ran lightly but felt no pain in his leg. During the race, coming out of the turn with a one and a half meter lead, Carlos said something to Smith and "pulled back the reins." "I turned my head and said, 'If you want this medal stop bullshitting!'" Smith didn't hear him. "I went by him too fast." Smith ran

¹⁸"Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists," Life, 1 November 1968, 64C.

¹⁹Tommie Smith, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 29 January 1997.

²⁰San Jose Mercury News, 16 October 1968, 91.

²¹Kenny Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 75; also Tommie Smith, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 29 January 1997.

past Carlos, and so did Australian sprinter Peter Norman, who came in second behind Smith. "I was so concerned with Tommie I forgot about Peter Norman," Carlos says now, as if he found it unbelievable. Carlos took third as Norman squeezed past him at the tape to take second.²²

According to Carlos, he had decided Smith would get "a gift." "When Tommie told me he was going to do something after the race that solidified what I'd do," says Carlos now. "Medals never meant anything to me. When I went to the Olympic Games I didn't go to prove who I was in track and field. That was done already. ... I didn't feel I should take that from a guy that it was more important to."²³ Smith says, not without some indignation, "When was the last time you heard someone say they went to the Olympic Games and let someone win? ... To not do your best ... it's an insult to one's integrity." "What can I say about my buddy?" Smith says laughing, "Damn fool. You don't do that."²⁴

Both Carlos and Norman had crossed the line at the same time and were both given the time of 20 seconds flat, which bettered the old Olympic record. So all top three finishers broke the old Olympic record in the 200 meters. Whether Carlos slowed or not (it is clear for everyone to see that he turned his head), he says, "I told them if I was awarded the silver I wouldn't take it. I felt that Peter Norman had beaten me."²⁵

²²John Carlos, telephone interview by author, San Jose, California, 24 January 1997; and Tommie Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

²³Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

²⁴Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

²⁵Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

Smith set a world record of 19.83 seconds in the 200 meters, which would not be broken until 1979. Before he hit the tape, he threw both arms into the air and crossed the finish line, and later said by raising his arms he had lost a little momentum in his legs and might have gotten a better time.²⁶

After becoming the first San Jose State athlete to be crowned an Olympic Games champion, Smith said flatly, "I don't want Brundage presenting me any medals."²⁷ After the race, guided through tunnels under the stadium to a room, Smith informed Carlos he had some gloves with him and told him he planned to wear them. Carlos replied he was with him. Smith told Carlos he would wear the right and Carlos could wear the left. Smith then borrowed a black scarf to wear around his neck, and Carlos borrowed a black shirt and African beads, for symbols of protest. Norman, who is white, had overheard the preparations of Carlos and Smith, and Carlos asked him if he would participate in the protest. Norman agreed, and Carlos gave him a large Olympic Project for Human Rights button that Norman pinned to his Australian sweatsuit. Smith and Carlos pulled up their sweatpants and took off their shoes to show their black knee socks, then walked to the medal stand in front of 80,000 people.²⁸

On the medal stand, IOC vice-president Lord Killanin of Ireland, who would succeed Brundage four years later as president, hung the medals around

²⁶San Jose Mercury News, 17 October 1968, 74.

²⁷San Jose Mercury News, 16 October 1968, 91.

²⁸Peter Norman would be severely reprimanded by Australian sports authorities for his actions; Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 5 August 1991, 77.

Smith, Carlos, and Norman.²⁹ The two men stood in stocking feet, and as the U.S. flag was being raised and the band struck up the Star Spangled Banner, Smith and Carlos, both San Jose State students, bowed their heads and thrust their clenched black-gloved fists, the right for Smith, the left for Carlos, into the Mexican sky. Smith remembers when he shot his fist into the air hearing Lee Evans say very clearly, "Oh, shit."³⁰

The Los Angeles Times reported that they "thrust their fists toward the sky in a Nazi-like salute" and said that "both glued their eyes on the ground and refused to look at the American flag as it was being hosted." The same article stated that "the stadium rocked with boos and cat-calls and some of the spectators made thumbs-down gestures as they would a Mexican matador preparing for the kill."³¹ As the two athletes left the field, Mexicans in the stands whistled to show their disapproval and the 20,000 United States citizens present in the stands also booed and turned thumbs down.³²

Another newspaper wrote that "while the second-place medalist, Peter Norman of Australia, stood in respectful attention at the playing of the Star Spangled Banner, both Smith and Carlos raised a black-gloved hand in closed-fist gesture." "Smith and Carlos, both known as Negro militants," it was written, "advised the U.S. track coaches before the ceremony that they would

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

³¹Los Angeles Times, 18 October 1968, part 3, 2.

³²San Jose Mercury News, 18 October 1968, 58.

appear with black scarfs as a protest gesture," and Head coach Payton Jordan and track assistant Sam White had made no objection.³³

It was called "A Gesture Of Protest." The gesture represented black unity in defiance of black poverty and discrimination in a country which saw itself, and still sees itself, as the standard-bearer of liberty and equality. In a post-race press conference, Smith and Carlos explained that the black stockings represented poverty; the black fists meant black power and black unity. In a television interview, Smith explained the glove on his right hand symbolized "power within black America," while the glove on Carlos's left hand signified "black unity."³⁴

In a statement to WABC-TV's Howard Cosell after the demonstration, Smith explained: "My raised right hand stood for the power in black America. Carlos's raised left hand stood for the unity of black America. Together they formed an arch of unity and power. The black scarf around my neck stood for black pride. The black sock with no shoes stood for black poverty in racist America. The totality of our effort was the regaining of black dignity."³⁵ Said Smith at the time: "We are black and proud to be black. White America will say 'an American won,' not 'a black American won.' If it had been something bad, they would have said 'a Negro.'"³⁶ Smith also said he objected to references to

³³San Jose Mercury News, 17 October 1968, 73.

³⁴San Jose Mercury News, 19 October 1968, 2.

³⁵Harry Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 104.

³⁶Time, 25 October 1968, 62.

Negro athletes and said, "I prefer to be called black. If I do something bad, they won't say American, they say Negro."³⁷

Smith was almost right. The newspapers and the press were calling him and Carlos "Negro militants." When asked if he thought of himself as a militant, Carlos says now, "I consider myself a black man. I was tagged with a lot of names. ... I was just a young black man, period. I was John Carlos."³⁸ Says Smith: "I'm no more militant than I am now. Militant is a congratulatory liaison. When one fights for a cause he is considered militant." He adds: "I don't know what militant means. If it's standing up for Constitutional rights, then I'm the biggest militant there ever was."³⁹

There was mixed reaction to the gesture back in San Jose. Many people felt angry and insulted and that Smith and Carlos were working outside the system.⁴⁰ But at San Jose State, professors who witnessed the gesture on television viewed it differently. Billie Jensen remembers feeling extremely proud of Smith and Carlos when she watched them on television. "It was wonderful," she says. "To make a statement to the entire world. It was a more powerful statement than not being there. I mean if you're not there you're not news anymore."⁴¹ When Peter Buzanski saw it on television, he thought

³⁷San Jose Mercury News, 17 October 1968, 75; also Los Angeles Times, 17 October 1968, part 3, 4.

³⁸Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

³⁹Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

⁴⁰I interviewed several people who witnessed the gesture on television and got their reaction to it, and many people back in San Jose felt angry and insulted and, having the opportunity to represent their country, felt Smith and Carlos were working outside the system.

"really that that was sort of out of place; that it was probably going to hurt them more than it would help them. I think I was proven wrong in the fact by history. ... Time makes a difference and it's all a question of how things are perceived and how the perceptions are reported."⁴² Chester Winton believed the gesture by Smith and Carlos was "a necessary means to accomplish their ends." He adds: "And it was probably whites who were most embarrassed by that. ... The way they were judging white American society and letting the world know."⁴³

When President Clark witnessed the gesture, he was angry with Howard Cosell for the manner in which he reported the event. "He was very strongly critical of these men [Smith and Carlos] and over-judged what was happening as terribly unpatriotic. ... My opinion, immediately, was the next day as I thought about it, they would be very rudely treated, by the press and the public in this country. I felt that these men ought to be recognized for their achievement and not simply criticized for that expression, and that the expression needed to be explained."⁴⁴ At the time, Clark publicly stated that Smith gave an explanation on television of the symbolism of the gestures that "was calm and rational, his sincerity unquestioned." He added: "The message he conveyed should be of real concern to all Americans."⁴⁵

⁴¹Dr. Billie Jensen, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 24 October 1996.

⁴²Dr. Peter Buzanski, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 13 November 1996.

⁴³Dr. Chester Winton, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 20 November 1996.

⁴⁴Robert D. Clark, interview by author, tape recording, Eugene, Oregon, 11 January 1997.

Clark says when the gesture happened, he had turned to his wife and said, "That will give us trouble. It will give the blacks trouble all over the country." In fact, Clark got calls at two and three o'clock in the morning from "people protesting that protest." "My reaction was it was unfortunate. But that they were doing that as a modest gesture that they could make instead of boycotting the Olympics. And Harry [Edwards] had wanted them to boycott the Olympics—they didn't want to." Clark adds: "But they also wanted to give some expression to the views that Harry had expressed. And this gave them the opportunity to make a little demonstration, and so they did it."⁴⁶

The "little demonstration" caused a tumult in the press and the media. John Hall of the Los Angeles Times was brutally critical in his appraisal of Smith and Carlos. "Well, it takes all kinds," he started in his commentary. "But I've got to tell you this morning I'm sick of Tommie Smith and John Carlos. I'm sick of their whining, mealy-mouth, shallow view of the world. I'm sick of the apologizing and saying they are trying to improve things and that they have a right to take their best shot," stated Hall, who added, "Their best shot is a blank." Hall became even more vitriolic: "... I thought of what a thrilling, proud and remarkable moment it must be for any man to walk up to the steps to the top of the victory stand, receive an Olympic Games gold medal and all the cheers for an innocent, harmless little thing like running 200 meters in 19.8 while the world stands at attention and pays its respects as the band plays the Star-Spangled Banner," he went on to say after the sentence that could have

⁴⁵San Jose Mercury News, 19 October 1968, 2.

⁴⁶Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

used a comma or two: "Tommie Smith and John Carlos do a disservice to their race—the human race."⁴⁷

Most people condemned the act as disgraceful, insulting, and embarrassing. Even Mexico City's English-language newspaper, The News, was critical of the protest gesture. "They [the athletes] made one hell of a mistake," the paper said in an editorial.⁴⁸ The Mexican newspaper said the American blacks had a cause but that the Olympic Games was not the time, nor the place, to pursue it, and felt "that it was a disgraceful act and an insult to their government."⁴⁹

A black legislator in Los Angeles even claimed that the ouster of Smith and Carlos for making a black power salute after accepting their medals would jeopardize Los Angeles' bid to stage the 1976 Olympic Games.⁵⁰

Louis Duino, Sports Editor for the San Jose Mercury News, said: "We don't know who is guiding the two San Jose athletes, ... The way they are carrying on is in poor taste and does not show good organization." He further stated that Smith had a chance to be a "hero" and say something nice about San Jose State track coach Bud Winter when he was asked who gave him the best training and preparation for his running career, and Smith smiled and replied, "I would have to think about that question for an hour before I could answer." Duino criticized Smith and said he could have given Bud Winter "a kind word"

⁴⁷Los Angeles Times, 18 October 1968, part 3, 3.

⁴⁸San Jose Mercury News, 20 October 1968, 1.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁰San Jose Mercury News, 19 October 1968, 73. Los Angeles would not receive the bid to host the 1976 Olympics. Montreal, instead, hosted the 1976 Games.

and added that he "could have used some instruction in human relations."⁵¹

"Whoever wrote that misunderstood," says Smith now. "He [Winter] was in Mexico City training us. He never brought our political beliefs up at San Jose State. He said, 'If you need me you can come see me.' He was there when we needed him. We had God-given talent, but we needed someone to hone that talent. He was a coach, simple and clear." Adds Smith: "Bud Winter was one of the nicest men, one of the nicest human beings, one could ever meet."⁵²

The same newspaper also wrote that "the protest of American Negro athletes flared from the winner's stand ... with medal-winning sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos flaunting symbols of black power."⁵³

"I don't call it a 'Black Power' sign. ...," says Smith now. "There were the Black Panthers, but you didn't see any fists [being raised]. It was only after Tommie Smith and John Carlos did you see black fists being raised."⁵⁴ "It just happened to be a 'black power' gesture because I'm a black guy," adds Carlos. "If I was Puerto Rican, it would be called a Puerto Rican gesture. It was just two black guys raising their fists, saying that all people of color need to come together."⁵⁵

After St. Saffold witnessed the gesture, his first impression was, "Ah, this is what Tommie decided to do."

⁵¹San Jose Mercury News, 18 October 1968, 58.

⁵²Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

⁵³San Jose Mercury News, 17 October 1968, 73.

⁵⁴Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

⁵⁵Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

And I looked at it and a part of that initial response to it was reading into, knowing him as I [had] felt that I had known him, reading into the message that he was trying to send. And to me, I knew right off that the black glove was to symbolize black folks and the need for black power and in terms of self destiny, and also looking at it I read immediately that there was a sadness—the sadness for the condition that black folks found ourselves in in this country; the fact that we've been lynched and killed. And yet the one thing that we had done [was] the institution that had remained intrinsically the strongest throughout those years, and through the centuries, was the church, and that's been something that we've been able to hold on to and build on as a way of coping. ... and Tommie, you have to know him, he and I, and that's where we got a lot of our similarities from, were raised in deeply religious families. When he shot his fist up, his head was bowed; there was a double message there—not a one of rage and black pride—but at the same time one of a prayer and praise kind of position. And people tend to neglect the piece of his head being bowed in silence, and the meaning behind that.⁵⁶

Smith agrees with Saffold that "it was also a religious statement. While the National Anthem was playing, I was thanking God for his goodness. It wasn't demeaning the flag. I accentuated the flag being raised."⁵⁷

But it was written that Smith and Carlos bowed their heads to avoid looking at the American flag.⁵⁸ Arthur Daley of the New York Times wrote that Smith and Carlos "stood on the podium with heads bowed in defiant refusal to look at the American flag while it was being raised."⁵⁹

Avery Brundage had earlier said that any Negro athlete would be sent home if he wore black armbands or other symbols of protest in conflict with the U.S. Olympic uniform. The next day October 17 Douglas F. Roby, president

⁵⁶St. Saffold, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 5 December 1996.

⁵⁷Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

⁵⁸US News and World Report, 28 October 1968, 10.

⁵⁹San Jose Mercury News, 20 October 1968, 79.

of the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC), was called before the IOC and was accused of "not having control" of the Olympic teams. The IOC, led by Brundage, threatened to expel the entire U.S. team if Smith and Carlos weren't severely punished for what they considered to be abuse of the rule against political activity which could 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."⁶⁰

The U.S. Olympic Committee met for four hours early Thursday morning, then issued a strong reprimand to Smith and Carlos and a formal apology to the IOC, the Mexican Organizing Committee and the people of Mexico for their athletes' "discourtesy," "untypical exhibitionism," and "immature behavior," and warned it would not stand for a "repetition" of any display.⁶¹

The United States Olympic Committee expresses its profound regrets to the International Olympic Committee, to the Mexican Organizing Committee and to the people of Mexico for the discourtesy displayed by two members of its team in the parting from tradition during the victory ceremony. The untypical exhibitionism of these athletes also violates the basic standards of sportsmanship and good manners which are highly regarded in the United States, and therefore the two men involved are suspended forthwith from the team and ordered to remove themselves from the Olympic Village. A repetition of such incidents by other members of the USA team can only be considered a willful disregard of Olympic principles that would warrant the imposition of the severest penalties at the disposal of the U.S. Olympic Committee.⁶²

The IOC also said Smith and Carlos deliberately violated a universally accepted Olympic principle "by using the occasion to advertise domestic

⁶⁰Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 12 August 1991, 63.

⁶¹San Jose Mercury News, 20 October 1968, 79.

⁶²Los Angeles Times, 19 October 1968, part 2, 1.

political views."⁶³ "When there is racism," declares Carlos, "any time is the right time."⁶⁴

Even Jim Murray, who was critical of the proposed boycott, wrote that "the American Olympic Committee leaned heavily on the theory that the incident was an insult and 'discourtesy' to the 'people of Mexico.' This will come as a distinct surprise to those of us who could have sworn that was the U.S. flag they were clenching their fists at."⁶⁵

The USOC at first wanted to keep the sentence light and was reluctant to do any more, but the IOC demanded more. If the USOC did not punish Smith and Carlos, the IOC threatened to expel the whole U.S. team from the Olympics. And so, reluctantly, the USOC suspended Smith and Carlos from the team and ordered them to leave Olympic Village, but first sent Jesse Owens to speak to the Olympic athletes at an open forum.⁶⁶

That night in the Americans' dormitory, Owens, in behalf of the USOC, informed a group of about twenty-five track men, mostly black, including Lee Evans from San Jose State, that Brundage and the IOC accused Smith and Carlos not only of violating Olympic principles, but also of taking political action against the United States. He explained that the IOC was pressuring the USOC to send Smith and Carlos home or risk expulsion of the entire American athletic

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

⁶⁵Los Angeles Times, 20 October 1968, section D, 10.

⁶⁶"Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists," Life, 1 November 1968, 64C.

delegation. Owens proposed that hereafter the black athletes agree on some clear form of "humanitarian" protest.⁶⁷

Not all of the athletes agreed with Smith's and Carlos's gesture. Willie Davenport said the next day after winning the 110-meter high hurdles: "I came here to win a gold medal—not to talk about black power [sic]."⁶⁸ Although some of the black athletes objected to the style of Smith and Carlos, everyone backed them in principle, and contended that the protest was pro-black but not anti-American.

At one point in the meeting Owens asked the group, "What about the bowed heads? They didn't look up at the flag!" To this outburst, one of the white athletes, 1956 gold medal hammerthrower Hal Connolly, asked Owens: "Why isn't the Mexican government insulted by the fact that the U.S. team never dips the flag in respect when it passes the host country in the opening-day ceremony? We're the only nation in the Games that doesn't." In every Olympics all countries dip their flag when passing in review, but it is against government regulations to dip the American flag under any circumstances. Connolly added that when asked to carry the flag on opening day, he had refused because the USOC would not let him politely dip it. Outraged, Owens said to Connolly: "As far as I'm concerned, you don't even need to be here. I'm talking to my black brothers." "Vince Matthews and I jumped up," explained Evans. "I said, 'Jessie, you don't even understand what he means. He's sayin' both things are political,

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Time, 25 October 1968, 63.

so why does the Olympic Committee just come down on the Bloods?'" He added:

"And look, we invited Hal in here."⁶⁹

Carlos says Owens asked him why he "had to wear a false prop." "I told him I wanted everyone to know what color people I was representing," explained Carlos, who adds, "It was color T.V." "Then I asked him 'Where have you been from 1936-1968. They stripped you of everything you had.' ... I admired the man," Carlos says of Owens, but adds, "Jessie was being used."⁷⁰

On the morning of October 18 Smith and Carlos were suspended from the U.S. Olympic track team for making the "black power" gesture and were given forty-eight hours to leave Mexico. When they were expelled from the team, their visitors' permits were taken. Says Carlos now: "They kicked us out of the Olympics, but they didn't disown the medals that we won. They didn't take it away from the medal count." He explains: "At that time any medal I win is the U.S. tally. I still can't eat in a nice restaurant, you understand? I won't be served. There's no preference they're gonna give me because I won an Olympic gold medal or was a world record holder."⁷¹

Had it not been pressured by the IOC to do something, the USOC might not have suspended Smith and Carlos, and lost two alternates in the men's 400-meter relay. Roby revealed that the IOC called the U.S. Olympic Committee into a meeting and threatened to suspend the entire U.S. team unless it got the situation under control.⁷²

⁶⁹"Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists," Life, 1 November 1968, 64C.

⁷⁰Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

Back at San Jose State Bert Burns says, "I was so pleased that they had won their races, pleased for them, and pleased for San Jose State, pleased for the United States, and as soon as they did it, because of our history, I knew immediately what they were doing. ... The announcers didn't know what the hell they were doing. I mean they described it, but they didn't understand the motivation or the meanings behind it. And I thought they've made a terrible mistake, that they're going to send them home tomorrow, and I think they did. So I had mixed reactions to it."⁷³

Yet Burns suggested to President Clark that the university should publicly support Tommie Smith and John Carlos and say something about it.

we had to support our students. [That] they had their rights to do what they wanted to do. And while I was stunned when they did it, I understood why they did it. ... and I'm not going to criticize them for it. I didn't agree with the action, I agreed with what they wanted the action to stand for. And I think the university should, and it did, I believe, support them.⁷⁴

Burns told President Clark he believed that the college needed to make an official statement and, given all the criticism that was directed at Clark, volunteered to make the statement himself. But Clark felt "it ought to come from the president of the college."⁷⁵

On the same day they were suspended, President Clark issued a statement of praise for Smith and Carlos and criticized their treatment at Mexico City. "I hope their gesture will be interpreted properly," Clark said in a prepared

⁷²San Jose Mercury News, 20 October 1968, 76.

⁷³Hobert Burns, interview by author, tape recording, San Jose State University, San Jose, California, 15 January 1997.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

statement. "They do not return home in disgrace, but as the honorable young men they are, dedicated to the cause of justice for the black people in our society." In the same statement Clark also criticized the "ambiguous moralistic posture of the American Olympic Committee when they condemn our athletes" and specifically mentioned criticism of the U.S. team for refusing "to dip the American flag during the opening Games ceremonies when all other nations do so in respect to the host nation." He concluded, "We at San Jose State College are proud of the achievements of Smith and Carlos in the Olympics. ... All Americans should be proud of their achievements."⁷⁶

"Dr. Clark was the ultimate support," says Carlos now. "If Tommie Smith and John Carlos had done this somewhere else we would have been ridiculed by the university and university president ... but he [Clark] supported us, based on our character. He based it on the character of Tommie Smith and John Carlos and not on what he had heard or read. I will always have admiration and respect for Dr. Clark for as long as I live." He adds: "It took a lot of courage for Dr. Clark to do what he did."⁷⁷ Smith says of Clark: "He was on the side of right. He could have done a lot of damage to Tommie Smith and John Carlos as college president. Instead of doing that he showed that he could be more of a human than a college president."⁷⁸

After their suspension Jim Murray returned to his old ways and sneered that the "Olympics' boycotted" Smith and Carlos, and stated the American

⁷⁶San Jose Mercury News, 19 October 1968, 1-2.

⁷⁷Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

⁷⁸Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

blacks "have mistaken the International Olympic movement for the hierarchy of the state of Mississippi."⁷⁹ Says Smith: "Jim Murray is a step above Avery Brundage, and Avery Brundage was about the lowest person I knew."⁸⁰

Lee Evans, who was scheduled to run in the 400-meter finals that afternoon, was in a rage over the suspension.⁸¹ Smith and Carlos went to a local hotel after their suspension, but returned to Olympic Village, at the request of San Jose State track coach Bud Winter, to see Evans, who had decided not to run in the 400-meter final. "How could I?" Evans would later say. "I was their friend. We went to the same college. Everyone would think I was a traitor to the black community."⁸² Winter gave Evans no advice, but got him to sleep, and when he awoke, Smith and Carlos were there to greet him, summoned by Winter. They told Evans he had to run. Says Carlos now: "I told him, 'This is your country, but you do it for Lee Evans.' Then, if he felt he needed to do something he should. By not running when he got to the games was futile."⁸³ "I wasn't going to run until John Carlos told me I had to," said Evans.⁸⁴ "I wasn't gonna run unless I heard it from these guys' mouths. After that I was never more determined to win a race."⁸⁵

⁷⁹Los Angeles Times, 20 October 1968, section D, 1.

⁸⁰Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

⁸¹"Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists," Life, 1 November 1968, 64C.

⁸²Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 12 August 1991, 63.

⁸³Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

⁸⁴Time, 25 October 1968, 63.

⁸⁵"Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists," Life, 1 November 1968, 64C.

On the same day Smith and Carlos were suspended and President Clark issued his statement, Evans ran the fastest 400-meter time in history to pace an American sweep in the 400. Evans set a world record with a time of 43.86 seconds, winning by less than a stride and just barely beating Larry James, who ran 43.97. Ron Freeman completed the U.S. sweep with a time of 44.41. It was the first sweep at the Mexico Games by the U.S. and the first sweep in the 400 since the 1904 games at St. Louis. All three runners broke the existing world record of 44.5 held by Tommie Smith, and it would be twenty years until someone would crack the 44 second barrier again.

All three athletes were wearing black berets when they appeared for the victory ceremony, and upon mounting the stand, waved to the cheering crowd and gave clenched-fist salutes. However, when the Star Spangled Banner was played, the three athletes stood at attention, took off their berets and held their hands at their sides and faced the American flag.⁸⁶ On the victory stand, Evans accepted his honors with "grace" along with his teammates Larry James and Ron Freeman.⁸⁷ "We had to be careful," said Evans. "If we were thrown out, there'd be no U.S. 1,600-meter relay team."⁸⁸

The 1,600-meter relay was still two days away, but as it turned out those three, along with Vince Matthews, won in a world-record time of 2:56.16, smiled and waved their black berets during the victory lap, but made no gesture on the medal stand. The world-record-breaking 1,600-meter relay

⁸⁶San Jose Mercury News, 19 October 1968, 2; also Los Angeles Times, 19 October 1968, part 2, 3.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁸Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 12 August 1991, 64.

team led by Evans wore their black berets once again on the victory stand and Evans refused to shake hands with Douglas Roby.⁸⁹

Sounding like a tit-for-tat sibling comparison, the San Jose Mercury reported that when Willie Davenport turned in an Olympic record performance in the 110-meter high hurdles in 13.4 seconds and Ervin Hall finished second, "while the National Anthem was being played, they stood at rigid attention and made none of the 'black power' gestures Tommie Smith and John Carlos did ... while receiving their medals in the 200-meter dash."⁹⁰ The newspaper also said that Evans, as opposed to Tommie Smith, was "most gracious in giving credit where credit is due when he was asked how his race was planned," and replied, "My coach at San Jose State, Bud Winter, ... planned the race for me."⁹¹ When asked about the 400-meter race, Evans said, "I won it for all the black people in America."⁹² When asked if he didn't win it for a few white people also, Evans smiled and said he had a lot of white friends, too. "I have a lot of white friends at San Jose State and a lot all over the world," Evans said, then added, "This was for them too."⁹³

At the same time Evans was setting a world record in the 400 meters, Bob Beamon was setting one of his own. Ten minutes before the 400-meter final, Beamon jumped an unheard-of 29' 2 1/2", shredding the world mark in the

⁸⁹"Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists," Life, 1 November 1968, 64D.

⁹⁰San Jose Mercury News, 18 October 1968, 57.

⁹¹San Jose Mercury News, 19 October 1968, 65.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³*Ibid.*, 67.

long jump by almost two feet. Beamon's world record came on his very first jump and completely destroyed the old mark of 27' 4 3/4" held jointly by Ralph Boston and Igor Ter-Ovanesian of Russia.

Although Smith and Carlos were the only athletes who made any formal protest, Beamon, who had originally opposed any kind of demonstration, was indignant over Smith's and Carlos's suspensions, and rolled up his sweat suit to display black socks during the ceremony. Boston, who finished third with a jump of 26' 9 1/4", stood barefoot on the stand during the victory ceremony as a "protest against the way Smith and Carlos got sent home."⁹⁴ "My feet were bare because I am in protest against the way they [Smith and Carlos] got sent home," said Boston, who added, "They are going to have to send me home too."⁹⁵

In a show of solidarity, in full sympathy with Smith and Carlos, five other American athletes, all of whom had finished their competition, were also suspended from the team for "joining the black power movement." Among the athletes were Beamon, Boston, and former San Jose State athlete Ed Burke. The athletes claimed it was the only way to leave the country before the closing ceremonies on October 27.⁹⁶

It was an incredible Olympiad and a special U.S. track and field team, not only for the "gesture" of Smith and Carlos, but also because it was considered one of the best track and field teams in Olympic history. The U.S. had swept the 100 meter dash and the 400-meter dash. U.S. track and field athletes won fifteen gold medals, all of them Olympic records, and posted ten of the fourteen

⁹⁴San Jose Mercury News, 20 October 1968, 1.

⁹⁵San Jose Mercury News, 19 October 1968, 67.

⁹⁶San Jose Mercury News, 20 October 1968, 79.

world records erased in eight days, with one tie. The male black athletes at the Olympics ended up winning seven of the twelve U.S. men's track and field gold medals in Mexico City and set five world records and tied another.

Even more remarkable was the longevity of the world records broken. Smith's record for the 200 lasted eleven years; Jim Hines's 9.95 in the 100 lasted fifteen years; Evans's mark for the 400 wasn't broken until 1988; and Beamon's incredible feat wasn't broken until Mike Powell smashed the twenty-three-year-old long jump record by two inches jumping an amazing 29' 4 1/2", at the World Championships in Tokyo in September 1991.

Black U.S. women won three gold medals and set two world records of their own. And Wyomia Tyus became the first woman to win the 100 meters twice in an Olympics when she defended her 1964 gold medal and led a one-two American finish in the 100-meter dash and broke the world record in a time of 11 seconds flat.

San Jose State track athletes especially excelled at the Olympics. San Jose State won more gold in track and field (for one school) in one Olympics than any college in the history of the Olympics. Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Lee Evans, and Ronnie Ray Smith, all of whom attended San Jose State, together won four gold medals and one bronze, and set or helped set four world records. Tommie Smith won the 200 meters in a world record 19.83, Evans won the 400 meters in a world record 43.86 and was part of the U.S. 1,600-meter relay team that took three and a half seconds off the world record, and Ronnie Ray Smith was part of the world record 400-meter relay team that won in a time of 38.2 seconds. "No college or university has ever approached it," says Clark, who calls it the "finest achievement that any American college or university had

ever had at the Olympics." "And I said they ought to be given some public recognition."⁹⁷

Smith and Carlos arrived at San Jose Municipal Airport on Monday October 21 to two dozen eager and persistent reporters. Hounded, then surrounded, by the reporters, Smith was finally asked if he found his stay in Mexico exciting. "It was too exciting," he replied. Smith was also asked if he was aware of the statement given by President Clark praising him and Carlos as "honorable young men." "Yes I saw it," Smith said stolidly. "It came in a telegram. I have no great reaction, except that I know President Clark is behind us. He supports us."⁹⁸

President Clark had tried to organize some people in the community to support a recognition banquet for Smith and Carlos, but got cold responses because of the protest gesture. He did not think it satisfactory for the college alone to give the banquet so the NAACP stepped in and gave a banquet of recognition. Clark and his wife, Opal, were one of only two white couples that attended. "It was really disappointing, the community's reaction. Just disappointing," says Clark now.⁹⁹ "The banquet shows[ed] a lot of character from Dr. Clark," says Carlos, who adds, "He had to weather a lot of storms."¹⁰⁰ Smith was more bitter than Carlos about the "recognition banquet." "I don't remember any recognition banquet. The banquet was for Julian Bond," he says, and adds, "That's an insult to me to believe the NAACP helped me. If that's

⁹⁷Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

⁹⁸San Jose Mercury, 22 October 1968, 2.

⁹⁹Clark interview, 11 January 1997.

¹⁰⁰Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

a recognition banquet, I'm kind of embarrassed for the NAACP to recognize people. ... Tommie Smith and John Carlos were hungry, their wives were hungry, they were behind in rent. Did the NAACP help us out of our financial misery?—No."¹⁰¹

President Clark at the time said that the black athletes should have been able to make their views heard in America rather than in an international setting. "I regret that our treatment of our black athletes has been such as to prompt them to feel they must use the Olympic Games to communicate their real concern for the conditions of blacks in America."¹⁰²

Communicate the conditions they did. Smith and Carlos made a statement on a platform where only they could stand, and no one could look away. David B. Kanin wrote that "Smith and Carlos' [*sic*] protest in a way made up for some of the embarrassment caused by the world reaction to the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the call by Emil Zatopek for the expulsion of the Soviets from the '68 games." He added: "The protest by Smith and Carlos provided evidence to the rest of the world that life in the West was not all it was advertised to be."¹⁰³

It was a gesture of frustration, calling attention to the problems and the contradictions of a country that was supposed to be based on equality. Smith said that he loved his country, but that he wanted it to be better. "It was not a gesture of hate. It was a gesture of frustration."¹⁰⁴ Carlos also considered

¹⁰¹Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

¹⁰²San Jose Mercury News, 19 October 1968, 2.

¹⁰³David B. Kanin, A Political History of the Olympic Games (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 67.

America his country and was not anti-American. "I considered it my country," says Carlos now. "If it wasn't my country, then there'd be no need to protest. I just wanted things to change. That was the essence of the demonstration." Have things changed? "The money is there now, the economics," says Carlos. "In terms of whether you get the respect, the verdict is still out on that."¹⁰⁵ Adds Smith: "There's no purity in dignity. There's *being* but no *believing* in," and adds plaintively, "It's the money [case] now."¹⁰⁶

Kanin further wrote that "Smith and Carlos used the Games to advocate political change in the same fashion as the rest of the Olympic athletes use them to celebrate the political status quo."¹⁰⁷ "I think Tommie Smith and John Carlos were the individuals that broke that mold," says Carlos, who adds, "The old way isn't going to work anymore." Would they do it again? "I'd do it tonight. Most definitely," says Carlos.¹⁰⁸ Adds Smith: "There is no greater stand than what happened at Mexico City. All the gorilla dunks, all the multi-millionaires, won't be remembered. ... We put San Jose State on the map."¹⁰⁹

J. Benton White says of Smith and Carlos: "They had a great deal of integrity, and they understood that they would face consequences ... and the issue was too important to them not to do it." White states he has always felt

¹⁰⁴Moore, "A Courageous Stand," Sports Illustrated, 12 August 1991, 62.

¹⁰⁵Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

¹⁰⁶Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

¹⁰⁷Kanin, A Political History of the Olympic Games, 94.

¹⁰⁸Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

¹⁰⁹Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

that the school never did enough for them when they came back from Mexico City: "I don't think anybody in San Jose has ever done enough for them."¹¹⁰

The racial unrest had all started the previous September at San Jose State College. Initially endemic in its scope, Harry Edwards broadened the protest movement nationally, and then made it an international issue. Edwards and the Olympic Project for Human Rights was credited with helping keep South Africa out of the Olympic Games and humbling the New York Athletic Club by "publicizing its discriminatory membership policies and persuading" top athletes to "bypass the club's famed annual meet."¹¹¹ South Africa would eventually be banned from the Olympics for more than three decades because of its apartheid policies that prevented blacks from competing on the national team. In the 1996 Atlanta Games, after being banned for more than three decades, Hezekiel Sepeng became the first black athlete from South Africa to win an Olympic medal by taking the silver in the men's 800 meters.

The boycott movement was also credited with igniting "a lasting racial consciousness among the previously uncommitted black American college athletes."¹¹² "The boycott did everything it set out to do," says Smith now. "It was black athletes who took a heritage and made people listen, made a truth, and nobody liked it."¹¹³ If Smith and Carlos had not done what they did, the impact of the boycott movement would not have been as great. Carlos adds: "I

¹¹⁰J. Benton White, interview by author, Tape recording, San Jose, California, 5 December 1996.

¹¹¹"Amid Gold Medals, Raised Black Fists," Life, 1 November 1968, 64C.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³Smith interview, 29 January 1997.

think it succeeded in large part because of Tommie Smith and John Carlos. ... Tommie Smith and John Carlos convinced the other athletes there are things more valuable than winning a gold medal."¹¹⁴

And so what started as a protest against racial discrimination on the campus of San Jose State College became an international and world incident when two young men shot their black-gloved fists into the Mexican sky on October 16, 1968.

¹¹⁴Carlos interview, 24 January 1997.

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