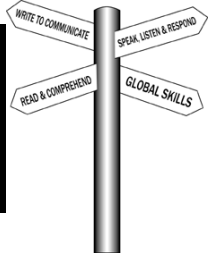


# African American protest at the 1968 Olympic Games



The 1968 Olympics held in Mexico City got off to a bad start even before the Games had begun. The decision to hold the Olympics in Mexico City was not a popular one. Mexican college students did not agree with spending money on the Olympic games, and instead believed that the money should be spent on community projects. Ten days before the Olympics started, 5,000 student protesters gathered in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City. The Mexican Army opened fire into the crowd of protestors and it is claimed 200 to 300 people were killed.

Despite this awful event the games began as planned. However, this was not the last of the protests. During the games two black American runners, John Carlos and Tommie Smith, protested against racism in the United States.

Team mates at San Jose University, Smith and Carlos were both competing in the 200-metre race. Smith was the winner in a time of 19.5 seconds and Carlos won the bronze.

At the medal ceremony, Smith and Carlos stood on the platform wearing black socks without shoes, they both wore an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge, and Smith wore a black scarf around his neck. As the American flag was raised and the National Anthem was played, Smith and Carlos bowed their heads and each raised a gloved fist in the black power salute.

Because of their actions, the Olympic Committee stopped them from competing in other events. Back in



the United States, instead of being praised for their successes, they received death threats and their actions were the subject of widespread debate. However, they did receive support from some civil rights leaders.

While at the time, Smith and Carlos' method of protest was not liked by many, years later they were honoured for their actions on a number of occasions.

Sources:

- Jessica McElrath <http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/athletes/a/1968olympics.htm>
  - [www.newsbbc.co.uk](http://www.newsbbc.co.uk) - On This Day website (2<sup>nd</sup> October 1968)
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## Activity

Using the information above imagine that it is October 1968 and you are a sports journalist at the Olympic Games. Write a short article for your newspaper telling people about what you have seen.

