

**Volume 14**

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**1968: Mexico City Olympics - II**

**Introduction: *A Moment in Time, 1968:* A special series on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a year of upheaval, in a world seemingly out of control.**

**Content: The dreams and scheming of political and social activists world-wide calculated the rich opportunity of the Mexico City Summer Olympics in 1968. The Olympics had never been far from politics. Even the ancient games were, in fact, relatively peaceful competition in midst of a truce between rival and hostile Greek City-States. In 1936, the Nazis attempted to use the Berlin Games as a**

**propaganda outreach for their regime.**

**In 1968 the Olympic flame was lit by a torch wielded for the first time by a woman, and in the opening ceremony the team from Czechoslovakia got a standing ovation from the crowd, a direct rebuke to the Soviets who had just invaded and snuffed out Czech hopes embodied in the Prague Spring. That year American Black athlete activists led by sociologist Harry Edwards had considered a boycott of the Games, but when the team representing racist South Africa was banned, the boycott lost its punch and the blacks prepared to leave for Mexico.**

**The Games seemed to go smoothly until the Track and Field awards for the 200 meter race. American black runners, Tommie Smith and John Carlos won medals and arrived without shoes and wearing a single black glove. When the National Anthem was played they lifted their fists in the defiant “Black Power” salute. IOC officials hit the ceiling and expelled the two guilty athletes. Other events witnessed the same attitude by American Black winners who swept the awards, though only Smith and Carlos had lifted their fists during the Anthem. Carlos lost his contract with the Los Angeles Rams, but the pair came home to great acclaim in the radical Black community. Even the Olympics could**

**not escape the turmoil of 1968.**

**At the University of Richmond,  
this is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

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