



# Welcome Home

I HAD TRULY BELIEVED that I would be six feet under before something like this took place. But I had lived long enough to see it, and to be part of it. My alma mater was welcoming me back. It was embracing me as one of its own, as a part of its history and of its legacy and of its contribution to American society. And it was going to immortalize me with a statue right on the campus grounds I once walked.

Thirty-five years earlier, I had thought I would never see the city of San Jose, the campus of San Jose State College, my home on the west edge of campus, or my wife and son ever again. On the night of October 16, 1968, I had stood on a platform on the infield of the Olympic Stadium in Mexico City, with a gold medal around my neck, black socks on my feet, and a glove on the right fist I had thrust in the air. My head was bowed, and inside that bowed head, I prayed—prayed that the next sound I would hear, in the middle of the Star-Spangled Banner, would not be a gunshot, and prayed that the next thing I felt would not be the darkness of sudden death. I knew there were people, a lot of people, who wanted to kill me for what I was doing. It would take only one of them to put a bullet through me, from somewhere in the crowd of some 100,000, to end my life because I had dared to make my presence—as a black man, as a representative of oppressed people all over America, as a spokesman for the ambitious goals of the Olympic Project for Human Rights—known to the world.

That was my victory stand. Not only because I had won the gold medal in the 200-meter final a half hour earlier, in world-record time. This was my platform, the one I had earned by years of training my body and my mind for the ultimate achievement. The athletic achievement paved a road toward my quest for a social victory, where

## 2 — SILENT GESTURE

everyone would be listening to and watching my statement about the conditions in which my people and I were living in the greatest country in the world. I never said a word as the national anthem was playing. My silent gesture was designed to speak volumes. As hard as I had worked to climb the victory stand, I had worked just as hard to earn the platform that the stand provided. For me, and for all of those who had participated in the struggle to bring me there and to put that platform to its best use, this victory stand represented more than just a place to accept a medal.

And because of what it meant to all those who opposed me, who hated me for what I had done before and was doing now, it very well might have been my last stand. Live another 35 years? I felt blessed that I lived another 35 seconds, after raising my fist, after descending the platform, after waving my fist again, after walking out of the stadium and into the uncertainty of the rest of my life—the uncertainty being how much longer I might even survive. But I lived on, and I lived long enough to step onto campus again, 35 years later to the day, and to see and hear San Jose State University honor what we had done—myself and John Carlos, who had stood with me with a fist raised on that stand, who had also attended San Jose State, who had felt the same weight of what we did and wondered how much longer he would live after it. The school was acknowledging our sacrifice, telling us that the act and the sacrifice had not been in vain.

I had received threats in my own little home that I shared with my first wife and my eldest child, then less than a year old. I had been forced to scrape by for a living to support my family, and eventually I lost that marriage from the strain. I had been denied an opportunity to take my track career to its fullest potential. I had been left no choice but to leave California, my home, to start over, and then to leave my adopted home of Ohio, where I had moved away from the mainstream, away from the turmoil brought on by my name—moved underground, I thought. Ultimately I had come back to my home state, restarted my career, and started a new family, but stayed at a distance from San Jose, teaching and coaching in southern California and coming to terms with the life path I had chosen. I saw that second marriage disintegrate but found a third, and fought both to educate my students and athletes and to have the opportunity to educate

them better. I also searched for a peaceful location in which to live, where for at least a little while the hate mail, condemnations, and death threats might not find me.

Maybe none of this would have happened had I done nothing on the victory stand. It doesn't matter, though. I have never regretted it and never will. If the city and school at which the first planks of my stand were built were content with leaving me on the outside, then I would have to live on the outside.

Yet now, 35 years later, they were again opening the door for me.

So, on the morning of October 16, 2003, I stood in the quad near the entrance to San Jose State, with the traffic on San Fernando Street rushing by, and looked around at the place where so much had begun, and where I had thought so much could have ended. I can't say I was filled with joy, or relief, or pride, or even redemption. I stood with my wife of the past three years, Delois, and one of the men responsible for that day's commemoration, Alfonso de Alba, executive director of the campus's Associated Students, the independent student body organization. Delois and Alfonso were full of happiness and anticipation. But my mind wandered to other anticipations, not that far removed from the one I felt on the victory stand in Mexico City. The sight of the city and the campus brought those feelings out.

In the years since 1968, whenever I was invited to a function in San Jose, I was nervous. I always thought, "I don't want to end where I started." How many minds do you think are still out there saying, "Oh, that nigger Tommie Smith, I'm gonna take him down where he got started"? I've been around too many people who think like that, have heard too many things in San Jose—when I was going to school—to feel welcome there. It's because of thoughts like these that I have not gone back often. Oh, I was invited back a handful of times after Mexico City to be honored by the city or by the school. In 1994 the Bruce Jenner Classic, a prominent international track meet in San Jose, held a special ceremony in tribute to me, and I attended. That was the first time I had been back in the city in several years. In 1997 I was inducted into the San Jose Sports Hall of Fame. A year later, on the 30-year anniversary of the victory stand, San Jose State gave me its annual award as Outstanding African American Alumnus. At that point I had been an alumnus for nearly three decades, but then, as

#### 4 — SILENT GESTURE

now, I remembered to be gracious. I could have gone unrecognized forever, or at least while I was still on this earth.

It was not that I felt totally uncomfortable with, or even hostile to, San Jose State. I never could feel that way, really. My five years on the campus had shaped my life more than anything else. Those years pointed my life in the direction of social integrity. My first year in college, the 1963–64 academic year, was a shock in every way, athletically, academically, and socially. It took no time at all for me to realize how much I had not learned in my life before that—not as a little boy, one of 12 children, picking and chopping cotton in east Texas in the late 1940s, and not during my years in Lemoore, in central California farm country, going from the fields to the classroom to the practice field and back to the fields, through grammar school and high school. Until the day I got on a plane to San Jose in the summer of 1963, I had no knowledge of social integrity. I discovered it in abundance at San Jose State, for better and for worse.

Much of what I am today—and no doubt who I was on the victory stand—developed at this school. Part of me was formed here. Now the school was saying I was, and am, part of it.

More specifically, the students were saying I was part of it. This commemoration was their welcome back. The administration had signed off on it and was giving its blessing to it. That was as close as the faculty, officials, and administrators of San Jose State had ever come to expressing any sentiment more positive than indifference toward Tommie Smith or John Carlos. In some ways, they had not even waited until we returned from Mexico City to begin ostracizing us. Long before the Olympics, we had been made to feel like less than true members of the college. In the days following Mexico City, I would have welcomed mere benign acknowledgment in place of what we did get from the leaders of that branch of the state college system. Now, 35 years later, having them stand in support was appreciated, even if it was belated.

But this was not their show. The students had put this together, and it was they who opened the door and opened their arms. They were where I was four decades earlier, and they made me feel truly welcome. They were one-third of my age. They were doing something great, much as we had tried to do when we were there—not

exactly the same, but they were doing something, and in doing it they were acknowledging what we had done.

The signs of their appreciation were all over campus this morning, and I mean that literally. Along the same pathways on which I used to draw stares—because I was a black man and an athlete in the 1960s with the nerve to show off an armload of books—banners snapped in the autumn breeze. On one side was the photo that's instantly recognizable the world over, of Carlos and me with gloved fists raised. On the other side of half of these banners was a reproduction of me in action that seemed damn near lifelike. The young man on those banners had no facial hair, a short Afro, unshaded eyes (which indicated how early in my college years this was, because the sunglasses I wore during my later races became a trademark), and the letters "SJS" running diagonally across his chest. That man was the athlete at his peak, not yet the activist depicted on the other side.

He did have beautiful form, though. That kid on the banner was going through the turn—I didn't know if the photo of me was from the 200 meters, 220 yards, 400 meters, or 440 yards—but I was coming around the curve. Over the years, my technique, for the turn and every other segment of a race, was honed to perfection, with every movement in place for maximum effectiveness. My expression on the banner . . . well, I had none. I didn't look tired; I didn't even look like I was exerting myself. Every description of my running style referred to how easy I made it look, how smooth, how fluid, how effortless. But it wasn't ever easy or natural to run as fast as I did. The results were worth every extra ounce of effort I put into the science and physiology of running fast, as taught me by the greatest coach who has ever lived, Lloyd C. "Bud" Winter.

Coach Winter had built the San Jose State track program into the unit known worldwide as Speed City. Four of us, as well as Coach Winter, made it to Mexico City. All of us won medals. Two of us went a step further, using what made us well known to make our message heard. Coach Winter has been gone a long time now, since 1985. The track program he built has been gone almost as long, brutally chopped away in 1988 for lack of money, our once state-of-the-art track surface now used as a parking lot for football games.

## 6 — SILENT GESTURE

Across the pathway from my banners flapped the banners for John Carlos, his image frozen in full, explosive, scowling charge. The differences between us were obvious from the way we ran. Of course, when we opened our mouths later in the day, we reminded everyone and each other of those differences.

Together on this morning, the two of us loomed over campus—in my mind, for the first time since our return from Mexico City. It would have taken a mighty effort for a student to ignore us, to turn away this time, as so many had 35 years earlier. This morning few of them did. The point of the entire day was to not ignore or turn away.

As nervous as I was being there, I was not nearly as nervous as I had been in the days leading up to this event. On the previous Saturday I had attended the annual health walk sponsored by the 100 Black Men at Lake Merritt in Oakland, another of my old stomping grounds, up the highway from San Jose. I knew my day at San Jose was drawing near, and I knew the attention it had attracted would only grow. All I could think of was that I had never believed I'd see it happen.

But here we were, and I felt overwhelmed. A lot would happen that day, and keeping up with it mentally as well as physically would be a challenge. So before the official events began I decided to focus on the students themselves, the ones who were walking the paths I had walked. I cleared my mind, providing space to store information from what I was observing. How much had the campus changed, and how much had the students changed?

A lot of them looked at us that day and figured we were just a couple of old black folks, no one special, could be anybody—and only later matched the aging faces with the fresh young ones on the banners, posters, T-shirts, programs, and fliers all over campus. And even then they might not have understood why these men, whose action was captured for the ages in that photo, did what they did—or even understood what they did besides raise their fists on the victory stand.

I thought back to what I must have been thinking when I walked these same grounds in 1968. I realized that today's students and I probably had similar thoughts—about society and change and what America really represents and what it ought to represent—but these students likely were thinking of these things because of Carlos and

me, because this day was dedicated to us, because we had done what these students ought to be doing today, nearly four decades after we opened the door for them and showed them the way. On any other day, they might not have been having these thoughts.

The students responsible for this event surely were thinking something close to what we once had thought. My mind turned to Erik Grotz, the young white Associated Students board member who had taken the first steps toward this event the previous spring. That a 23-year-old white male was the originator and the catalyst for this event might have been the most interesting thing to me. It all started with his curiosity about us. Then in December he introduced a resolution in an Associated Students board of directors meeting to honor us with this entire project—campus visit, ceremonies, salutes, banquets, and the statue. He pushed for us to receive the school's annual Unsung Heroes award in recognition of our special place in the history of the college. Much of the ceremony surrounding the first football game of the season in August, against Grambling, centered on Carlos and me. We participated in panel discussions, were praised in speeches by the likes of Cornel West, and were introduced at the game to the first sellout crowd at Spartan Stadium in more than a decade.

Erik Grotz had set in motion everything that was to happen on this day, getting people to support him in something that not long before he had little knowledge and less understanding of. By pursuing this, he grew to recognize the Mexico City victory stand for what it truly was: not an athletic thing, even though it was done at an athletic event, but a socially generated act that happened to culminate on the world's biggest athletic stage. One of the people he enlisted for his cause was walking with my wife and me: Alfonso de Alba, who himself had grown up in southern California, as a Mexican-born immigrant, understanding the global impact of what Carlos and I had done.

In fact, it was his destiny to take the baton on this project: Alfonso de Alba was born in Mexico City on October 16, 1968. That fact gets a laugh from many, including me, but that element of fate is hard to ignore, and Alfonso decided not to. Once he learned of his prophetic entry into the world, he realized he could not honor it any better than to clear a path of his own toward social justice, on the very campus

**8 — SILENT GESTURE**

where I had, and to lift this project as much as he could. He found his platform as a student leader at San Jose State.

Similarly, Erik Grotz's platform is not athletics. He used his platform as a recognized student leader to perpetuate the legacy of Tommie Smith and John Carlos. He used it to send the true message of this day and of this project: this is what educated and aware young people can do, and must do. "See these men?" he was saying. "They are your proof."

I can only hope the students today get his point better than so many people in the world got ours. Our point is missed even now: it wasn't a black athlete on the victory stand giving accolades to his triumph in athletics, but to his triumph socially. If there ever was a time to understand that point, it's today, with so many of the same problems back with us again. The present government is at war for an unclear reason, taking and losing lives to force its version of democracy on other people. It is undermining the Constitution here and abroad and denying the rights guaranteed in the Constitution to its own citizens in the same way as in the '60s. The groundswell of activism will grow from the students, as it must.

But it's going to have to happen in a different way, and the students will have to awaken themselves to do it. The mindset has changed. The students, and society as a whole, have allowed their concerns to shift from society to technology, which has its place and its positives, but which shrinks human interaction, thought, feeling, and concern. When someone is satisfied with pushing a button to accomplish something, or with communicating through computers rather than in person, the prospects for awareness and change through political and social means are diminished.

As I prepared for the ceremony, I realized that this event would be a test of how much today's students are willing, prepared, and able to think. And in my mind, I tested them. I kept an open mind, but I watched and listened and looked into their faces for signs of recognition and understanding. I am an educator, and have been for years, and wanted to be one for many years before that. If the students of San Jose State were not more educated by the end of this day, the day would be a disappointment.

There were plenty of opportunities for them, and for me, to learn—almost too many. I decided to deal with each as it came along and



leave it up to the organizers and to my wife Delois to steer me to the right place for the moment. The day began in the student union at about 10 in the morning, with John and me participating in a panel discussion on activism, in our day and today, along with three San Jose State students, campus communications professor Dr. Marquita Byrd, and the moderator, campus sociology professor Scott Myers-Lipton. An hour later, the discussion moved into the atrium of the student union, with John and me talking informally to the students for another hour, answering all sorts of questions about ourselves, the Olympic protest, and the role of athletes as role models for the campus and greater society. That was a lot of talking with which to start the day.

A barbecue on the Seventh Street Plaza, pretty much directly in the middle of campus, lasted from about noon until our next speaking engagement. The barbecue included entertainment from a live band playing music from our day—they billed it as “the protest era.” Several student groups performed for us in their own cultural ways. A Mexican American dance troupe performed. A Vietnamese group did a stage show that alluded to our protest and tied it to the struggle of their people at the same period in history. A group of Pacific Islanders performed a dance in our honor.

The black fraternities and sororities did a step show that recognized our contributions. I enjoyed this immensely, partly because the members all came by afterward to pose for pictures with us, and partly because under other circumstances, I would have been a fraternity member back in the day. I had other priorities back then, mainly academics and athletics. They had their platform; I had mine. It was encouraging to see them using theirs in this way.

It was far more encouraging to see that it was not only the black students, or the students of color, gathered on the plaza under the sunny sky during that barbecue. The blend of colors among the students, from all nationalities, was breathtaking. They all lined up to pose with us, speak to us, shake our hands, and ask for autographs on posters, fliers, and shirts being sold to commemorate the day and to raise funds. Carlos and I signed and signed until we were dragged away from the table to speak before the crowd; then we went back and signed some more until we were dragged away again for our next appearance.

**10 — SILENT GESTURE**

When we did speak to the gathering at the barbecue, we each expressed our awe at being here. I said what I believed this day to be: a momentous time in history, the two of us together on stage on the campus we had walked decades ago. Carlos praised the former school president, Dr. Robert Clark, who had supported us by speaking out against the outpouring of condemnation. That tribute was fitting, too: one of the buildings bordering Seventh Street Plaza, visible from where we stood, was named for Dr. Clark.

Dr. Clark deserved that honor for a number of accomplishments as president, including what he had done in our defense. When the pressure was on to officially denounce these two unpatriotic radical Communist race agitators who dared disrespect that flag, anthem, and country, he made his feelings clear about our reasons for doing what we did and our right to do it. Dr. Clark issued an official statement that concluded, "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." He immediately got a taste of what we had gotten in the months leading up to the Olympics and ever since the victory stand. You can go to the Martin Luther King Library on campus today and look at the inch-thick stack of hate mail he received.

I saw a lot of old friends at the barbecue that day. My old roommate was kicking off his final year as a campus administrator before retiring—St. Saffold, the football and basketball player from Stockton, not far from where I grew up in farm country, who later played pro football and then came back to San Jose State to mentor the next several generations of students of all colors. Old track teammates were there, such as Jerry Williams, who once managed to beat John and me in a race and never let me forget it, and who later sued to become one of the first black firefighters in the city of San Jose; and George Carty, who came to San Jose State after I had finished running and stayed in the area to become a track coach and high school teacher.

A few old heads from the struggle on campus made the trip unannounced, like Loye Cherry, who was a few years ahead of me and was one of the activists back when being an activist was even more new and dangerous. Loye came in from Oakland, where he is now the minister of a large Baptist congregation, and he caught me by surprise,

telling me he just wanted to take advantage of the day set aside to honor us.

Our wives were there, of course. Delois and John's wife, Charlene, and all of the old crowd sat together at the picnic table, ate ribs and chicken and baked beans and salad and rolls and hoo-rahed around like in the old days. Not me as much as the rest, although I enjoyed being with everyone, but John definitely raised a ruckus, as he can do. That's what I call all the noisemaking and attention-getting people can do, hoo-rahing, and John has a gold medal in hoo-rah. He showed off his skills when the local TV reporter, a man named Lloyd LaCuesta—who was one of the first journalists to speak to us when we returned to San Jose State, as he was a fellow student at the time—sat down to interview John and me together at the picnic, there in the plaza. 'Los was 'Los, in every way. For that time, while the spotlight was on the two of us, he pretty much took it for himself and shared it with people of his choosing, whether they wanted to or not. At that point, he wanted Erik Grotz, the young white cat who conceived the whole plan for honoring us, to join in. He got the young man in there, even though it was pretty clear that Erik wanted to be there a lot less than John wanted him there.

There was one absence from the day's events, someone both notable and noticeable by his absence. Everyone asked about him. Those of us who knew him, especially Carlos and me, were not surprised that we didn't see him there. I finally made a point to mention him late in the day at the final panel discussion. A very critical figure in this entire project is not here, I said—Dr. Harry Edwards. Harry Edwards was there at the beginning of the project and throughout the struggle, but not in Mexico City, where our lives were on the line. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised, then, that he would not be here, I added. It got a little chuckle. It was the truth, though. It was Harry Edwards himself who had said to both of us, we ought to be the captains of our own ships. Harry is his own captain. John is his own, and I am my own. Two of the ships were docked in San Jose that day, and in reality there wasn't much reason for that third ship to be there.

The rest of the day, we talked. Oh, did we talk, talked in the morning and talked in the afternoon until we were all talked out. The two

**12 — SILENT GESTURE**

morning discussions, before the barbecue, were pretty much a direct dialogue with the students, although the first panel session was moderated and included the two faculty members. It was the three students on the panel, though, that livened things up for me. I was glad to see the room so full, some 300 spectators, most of them current students, including a good segment of athletes. I knew nobody had ordered them to attend, just as I could tell no one had to twist the arms of the students on the panel with us. They were very engaged in what we had done and what needed to be done now.

One young man in particular—a Vietnamese American junior named Justin Nguyen—was so eloquent and dedicated that I had to acknowledge him during the discussion and speak to him afterward. All three students—the others were a young white woman, Mary Moran, and a young black woman, Ambra Kelly—spoke their pieces well, but Justin was very self-assured and seemed to have a real grasp of the connection between my time and his, as well as a view of the world similar to ours at the time. For one thing, he thanked Carlos and me for what we had done and compared us to, of all people, Galileo, who was excommunicated from the church for advancing a dangerous and unpopular idea: that the earth revolved around the sun rather than vice versa. Justin knew about Speed City, which is only a rumor to most people his age. He said he hoped his children would one day attend this school because he would be proud of the legacy we left.

Justin, Mary, and Ambra reflected the passion and commitment that John Carlos, our Speed City teammates, and I brought to the struggle 35 years earlier. They stood out that day, even as the crowds gravitated toward us throughout the afternoon. The other students were curious about us and the world in which we had lived, and about how similar it might be to their own today. The rap session in the student union atrium after the panel discussion was very informative to us as well as to them. The crowd—again well populated by athletes—threw question after question at us about our responsibilities, and theirs, in being role models and leaders on campus and in society. Many of them had no prior knowledge of our history on this campus. Some said that now that they knew, they would take a more active role in the issues that affected them as athletes and as members

of the community—even to lead. Some said they began to study up on us more when they heard about the commemoration, or promised themselves they would do so now that they had seen and heard us. And I hope they do.

The final panel discussion was coordinated by the campus Africana Center and the Black Student Union—the descendents of the Black Student Union in which we were involved, which was one of the first ever started on a college campus. This event was less of an interaction with the audience; the two of us were alone at the table answering questions from the audience read by the moderator. The venue was spectacular: the brand-new campus library, doubling as the main branch of the city library system, named for Dr. Martin Luther King. The atrium where we spoke was packed, and under other circumstances we could have spoken for hours. The students and everyone else who wanted a glimpse of us and an earful of our recollections about 1968 didn't mind standing behind the full seats, in the hallway, the doorway, and along the wall.

John and I answered the questions, even the difficult ones. The entire experience hit home the hardest when we were asked what we felt and thought as we stood on the victory stand with fists raised. I admitted, as I always do, that I was scared, that it was something I felt I had no choice in doing. And, I said, I had thought about death threats, and not just the ones that might be carried out in the stadium. I had been harassed at home, right there in San Jose. I'd gotten letters, of course, and phone calls, and people driving by the house and yelling, or throwing things, or just stopping and sitting and waiting for a reaction before pulling away. They would do this when I was home, and they'd do it when my wife and infant son were there by themselves—and when my wife went shopping to buy Similac for little Kevin, spending the precious few dollars I had to feed our child, money I barely scraped up because I had lost jobs because of my beliefs . . .

And I couldn't go on. I didn't want to go on. I normally am not a big talker anyway. This time, though, the memories of what my wife and son endured because I chose to take a stand overwhelmed me.

Thankfully, my partner had no reservations about talking. He never has. He didn't in 1968, after the victory stand, and he doesn't

**14 — SILENT GESTURE**

now. At every session, John Carlos talked himself almost completely out. He started the day worn out; he did not get to campus as early as I did because he had an attack of kidney stones the night before. But that didn't slow him down, or even slow the pace of his talking. At the first panel discussion, we both said we might occasionally need reminding of what the question was, in case we got off track on something else. John just went completely off track on every question.

He was asked, for example, how he and I spread the word of a possible protest for human rights at the Olympics, and by the time he finished answering, he had veered into making sure schoolchildren in San Jose had crossing guards, how he and others had helped get them to take the proper math courses, the reasons drugs and crime afflict the black neighborhoods, how steroids are ruining young athletes, and how the CIA had infiltrated the movement on campus. And on and on and on. All valid topics, of course, and all related to the issues at hand and, in fact, the question asked. But it takes a John Carlos to articulate it that way.

He approached the rap session in the atrium the same way, and he repeated the process at the dialogue in the library. In fact, the library session ended up being cut short after we had taken only three questions. In truth, we were both exhausted, and John was clearly fighting those kidney stones. But the reason we took so few questions was that John spent about 20 minutes answering one of them. He had the audience riveted the whole time. Don't ever think John Carlos doesn't know what to do when he has a stage.

That wasn't the first time one of our speaking engagements together had been cut short when John got hold of a microphone. Sometimes he doesn't even need the microphone, as long as he has an audience. That's the way the cat does it. That's the way he did it 35 years earlier. Think of the comment that has stayed in so many minds from those days surrounding the victory stand. It's when Carlos says to the reporters fighting to get to him that nobody had better come at him, because the next person that comes at him, he's going to kick his ass. That's what people remember, even though I spoke at length to Howard Cosell the day after the victory stand.

Lee Evans—who played a large role in the project even though he never had his opportunity to do what we did—has pointed out fre-

quently that somehow, after Lee and I and Harry Edwards laid the foundation for months before the Games, John became the spokesman when it was over. He was the spokesman in Mexico City, the spokesman at the airport when we left, and the spokesman when we arrived back in the United States. When we were invited to places on campus afterward, he did most of the talking.

News wants excitement, and he can excite you. But that's another difference between us: to me, being excited isn't all that's necessary to get a point across. If you have a listening audience, I'm good for that. If you have an audience that likes movement and likes to be aroused, then Carlos is your man.

Carlos did say something earlier in the day that illuminated our relationship perfectly: that he was more in the mindset of Malcolm X, while I was more aligned with the philosophy of Martin Luther King, but rather than letting this keep us apart, we brought our approaches together, and when they intersected, those who opposed us had to take notice, to the extreme. I had voiced that thought about Dr. King and Malcolm myself, but he was the one who put us in those roles. He was right on with that. Our differences are very distinct, and for that reason we conduct our own lives and are far from the permanently linked pair so many like to portray us as being. But we are not rivals, either. I'm my own man, and so is Carlos. Anyone who watched and listened to us that day understood our link and our separateness.

We surely were linked on that day, and more proof came in the final event of the day, a black-tie banquet in our honor at the Fairmont Hotel in downtown San Jose. The dinner, at up to \$150 a head, was also designed to kick off the fundraising for the statue. Again, so many of the people I grew to know and appreciate before, during, and after my time at San Jose State were there. St. Saffold and Jerry Williams were there. Dr. Robert Fuller, who as president of Oberlin College in Ohio hired me as a coach, administrator, and instructor in the 1970s, when no one else would give me a job. My fellow coach at Oberlin, one of the three black men hired there when hiring black coaches in college was unheard of: Cass Jackson, who coached football after being a player and assistant at San Jose State. Bob Poynter, who coached at San Jose City College and who has been a towering

**16 — SILENT GESTURE**

figure in track and field in the area for decades. Frank Slaton, who played football and sprinted at San Jose State when I was there, who took a stand of his own in the aftermath of Mexico City and who still coaches high school track in the area. A whole bunch of my old teammates and my rivals at other schools, whom I'd met at meets then and have seen at meets around the state at all levels since.

The students had planned this event as well. The model of the proposed statue was on display, and the artist whose design was chosen in the competition was there. We were saluted by a photo film essay, a jazz trumpet solo, and more live music from the band that had played earlier in the day. The keynote speech was given by Dr. David Horne, a black educator who at the time was an associate professor at California State University at Northridge and whose other positions included executive director of the California African American Political Institute in southern California. I can't lie, I had never heard of him before he stepped up to the podium. I can't say, however, that I'll forget his speech either: he talked about how as a teenager growing up in Florida, he was inspired by the sight of Carlos and me with fists thrust in the air before the world. It made him proud, he said, to be a black man at a time that it wasn't fashionable, or safe, to be a proud black man. Now, he said, the sight of us reminded him of all the beautiful things about the 1960s when he was growing up: the music, the spirit of revolution, the awakening of his soul and the souls of so many others. Apparently he came up with all this off the cuff—he had only a couple of notes with him at the podium, he said, because he didn't know what kind of a function it was going to be.

But his memory of the victory stand must have been very strong. Dr. Horne ended his speech by pumping his own fist in the air several times, saying it was a salute to all of us who sacrificed ourselves for our people's benefit. "Huhn! Huhn! Huhn!" he shouted. It came off like something the old Black Panthers would have done—which was funny to me, because, of all the misconceptions that have spread about the victory stand for the past 35 years, the one about us being Panthers and giving what they called a "Black Power" salute has gone the furthest. That is, if it's not the one about the Olympic officials taking John's and my medals away in Mexico City. John and I made it clear that day, once again, that our medals were safe and



sound at our respective homes. Anyway, at our table at the dinner that night, John was loving it; he was saluting and shouting back at Dr. Horne. When Dr. Horne came back to the table, both John and I gave him big hugs of appreciation.

Even that, however, was not what stood out most to me about the evening. Throughout the banquet there was a steady stream of proclamations and salutations and commendations from the administration of San Jose State University, the city of San Jose, and the county of Santa Clara, California. The first commendation we received, in fact, came from the newly appointed president of the university, Dr. Joseph Crowley. He brought us onto the stage at the front of the ballroom. He read the proclamations on the awards plaque to us, commemorating this as Tommie Smith and John Carlos Day. And when Dr. Crowley finished reading the plaques, he told us, "Welcome home," shook our hands, and then embraced us.

Yes. The president of San Jose State University hugged Tommie Smith and John Carlos. No, I would never have imagined living long enough to experience that. Nor could I have imagined hearing those words from anyone within the San Jose city limits or the borders of this campus: welcome home.

Now, it was not as if no one with a title or prefix on his name at San Jose State stood with us in 1968. Dr. Clark, for one, spoke up for us after Mexico City at great cost to his standing on campus and with his peers in other parts of the country. Also, at least two professors at San Jose State will always stand out in my mind as men who helped shape me when I needed shaping most: Dr. Bruce Oglivie and Dr. Thomas Tutko. Their names ought to be recognizable as, respectively, the foremost sports psychologist and sociologist of all time, men who pioneered in their fields. When either of them spoke in the years after I graduated, I made a point to go see them if I could, no matter how long the drive was. Dr. Oglivie in particular was special. I took his class as a junior, and in that class and in personal conversations with me, he truly made me understand that I was not dumb. At that time, convincing me of this took some doing, because of my own background and the campus culture. He was amazing.

But besides those exceptions, I cannot honestly tell anyone that the administration has ever made me feel welcome—back, home, or

**18 — SILENT GESTURE**

any other way. Not until right around the time the movement to commemorate us began, with the students. And realistically, it's still the students. The administration hasn't done anything more than what it did that night. What has it done? It has given a couple of kudos to us to keep itself alive in this awareness project. For 35 years it was up to the faculty and administration to make us a part of this campus's history, to impart our impact to generations of students, and to create an awareness of us among them. The awareness project in motion now is all coming from the students. How, then, can I feel welcome from anyone but the students? Besides the select handful I mentioned, I didn't feel anything from the faculty and administration when I was a student, I didn't feel anything after I graduated, and I didn't feel anything that night or since then.

For the official segments of the campus, city, and county, the time to acknowledge and embrace and recognize us was that third week of October 1968, when we were sent home from Mexico City. What were we sent home to? When we got onto the campus, it was just the status quo. Nothing. No celebration. At best, we were considered outside the mainstream, even more than we had been during our college years, and that period was no time for those outside the mainstream to wait for recognition. At worst, we were simply infamous. Those who didn't believe what we did was necessary, who thought there was no reason for it, or who knew the reason but didn't want us getting any accolades for it—they were not going to give us any notice for being back. Not even to congratulate us for winning a gold and a bronze medal for the country they believed we disgraced. We received positive reactions from some, but the negative far outweighed the positive, and many made it clear how negative they planned to be.

*I'm gonna take him down where he got started.* If I had found a reason not to feel dread on a day like this, I would have embraced it like no one had ever embraced anyone or anything before. But after all I have seen, known, and heard, how could I just dismiss that kind of threat? Again, grateful for it all, but wary. And observant, with eyes and ears wide open.

Those eyes and ears saw and heard, at the end of the night, waves of people, family, friends, admirers, students, and officials eagerly waving me over to a little table off to the right of the stage in the ball-

**Welcome Home — 19**

room. On it stood a model of the statue that would, God willing, be erected in honor of John and me. There I stood looking at myself in miniature, on a victory stand, head lowered and fist thrust high. What do you think? I was asked, over and over again.

What did I think? What could I think?