

# Activism, Organizing, and the Symbolic Power of Sport

## Reassessing Harry Edwards' Contributions to the 1968 Olympic Protest Movement

**Abstract** This paper provides an overview and assessment of Harry Edwards' work with the 1968 Olympic protest movement. Based primarily upon evidence presented in *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete* (Chicago 2003), I posit that Edwards' contributions to the movement most famously associated with Tommie Smith and John Carlos' iconic victory stand demonstration come in the areas of education, organization and leadership, and media communications. I further argue that Edwards' work with the media was his most brilliant and original, revealing the symbolic power of sport in American culture and setting the stage for much of his subsequent career in the public eye. The implications of these contributions for sports scholarship and activism are highlighted throughout. The paper concludes by suggesting that one of the ironies of Edwards' prolific career is that he has never produced a capstone work that formally articulates the sophisticated understanding of the cultural power of sport embodied in his activism and public engagement.

In the fall of 1967, when world champion sprinter Tommie Smith first broached the possibility of an African American Olympic boycott of the 1968 Mexico City Games, Harry Edwards was a name very few Americans would have recognized. Only local sports enthusiasts would have known that the 24-year-old Edwards had been recruited from the ghettos of East St. Louis to play football and throw the discus at San Jose State earlier in the decade. And only a handful of this select group would have realized that Edwards, a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Cornell University, had recently returned to teach race relations at San Jose State. Yet he would not remain in obscurity for long. Over the course of the next few months, Edwards, in an (ultimately unsuccessful) quest to help organize an African American boycott of the 1968 American Olympic team, would appear with national Black leaders ranging from Martin Luther King, Jr. to H. Rap Brown, be questioned by Vice President Hubert Humphrey and called out by then-California Governor Ronald Reagan, and be profiled in national publications such as the *New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Newsweek*. And this was only the

beginning of a long and prolific public career. In a few short years, Harry Edwards would emerge as a national spokesperson on race and sport issues and write one of the first, best-selling sociology of sport texts. Indeed, in the ensuing quarter-century in the public eye, Edwards would, among other activities, fight and win a tenure battle at the University of California, Berkeley, serve as consultant to Bill Walsh during his legendary run as coach of the San Francisco 49ers, and hold the office of special consultant to Major League Baseball and Commissioner Peter Ueberroth on minority issues.

To comprehend how Harry Edwards was able to accomplish this as well as what it all reveals for our understandings of sport and race and society, it is useful to go back and review his role in the 1968 African American Olympic protest movement. Not only was this campaign what first brought Edwards to national attention, this movement itself was crucial to shaping the understandings of sport, race, and the relationships between them that would be foundational to so much of his work in the public eye. It is an argument and analysis that is based primarily upon the research presented in my book on the 1968 movement—*Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete* (2003), a work whose title is an homage to Edwards' own work on the subject even as much of the material in it highlights the broader social significance of the movement and the remarkable effort and understanding of the athletes who constituted the movement.

## Edwards and the Making of the Movement

Based upon my own research as well as my reading of the existing historiography (Bass, 2002; Harris, 1995; Moore, 1991a, 1991b; Spivey, 1984; Wiggins, 1989, 1984; Grundman, 1979; see also Edwards, 1969; and Matthews & Amdur, 1974), I believe Harry Edwards made at least three distinctive and indispensable contributions to the 1968 African American Olympic protest movement. (The original archival research is detailed in text and footnotes in Hartmann, 2003a.) These came in the following areas: education and consciousness raising; organizing and leadership; and media relations and mass communications.

As a sociology instructor for Smith and Lee Evans and a number of their teammates and classmates at San Jose State (SJS)—the fabled “speed city,” home to almost a dozen of the best sprinters in the world at the time—Edwards' role as an educator was first and most basic among this list of contributions. Edwards was, by all accounts, a powerful and charismatic presence in the classroom (his race relations course reportedly grew from sixty to six hundred students over the course of the 1967–68 school year), and had an excellent contact and rapport with student athletes. Indeed, in an interview Tommie Smith gave explaining his willingness to consider an African

American boycott of the Games, the sprinter said that his interest in the possibility of an Olympic protest started the previous semester at SJS when he took a class in Black leadership that had introduced him to the whole problem of "racial ostracism" in the United States. Clearly, Edwards was the unnamed influence that was driving the decision and commentary. Many years later, Smith recalled: "Harry challenged you. He used whatever he could to stop you in your tracks and get you to listen—Black jargon, profanity, jokes, threats, or a Ph.D. soliloquy on history" (Moore, 1991a, p. 66).

Edwards was a race scholar when he began teaching at SJS, not a sport specialist. Nevertheless, in teaching Smith and his teammates about the realities of prejudice and discrimination in the U.S. Edwards raised the questions of racial equality, human rights, and social justice that would be the rallying cries and moral foundations of athletic activism. More than this, Edwards offered student-athletes a sophisticated, sociological understanding of the challenges of the struggle for African American justice and equality in the late, post-Civil Rights phase as well as actively encouraged them to think seriously about the idea of using sport to contribute to the ongoing struggle. Indeed, when Smith and his teammate and close friend 400m champion Lee Evans, were asked what led them to consider an Olympic boycott in the first place they gave identical one-word answers: "thinking" (Hartmann, 2003a, p. 47). So committed was Edwards to education, intellectual mentorship, and the academic life that his second major scholarly work was *Black Students* (Edwards, 1970).

And in working with students and young people, Edwards was far more than a classroom instigator or armchair sociologist. He actually played a leading role in conceiving, organizing, and guiding the race-based activities, initiatives and protests in and around American athletics that constituted the '68 protest movement at a national level. This was Edwards' second main contribution to the movement.

Edwards' work as an organizer was multifaceted. He was one of (if not the) campus leader of the United Black Students Association protests at SJS that informed and emboldened athletic activists in California. Not only did Edwards put his pedagogical skills to full use in raising the general political consciousness of student athletes on campus in and through the UBSA, this group conceived and carried out a major protest that involved a threatened boycott of a football game against the University of Texas–El Paso. Along with Kenneth Noel, Edwards subsequently convened the Olympic Committee for Human Rights (OCHR), the formal organizational group that provided leadership and direction for the Olympic boycott movement and its associated protest activities. To clarify the distinction between Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) and the Olympic Committee for Human Rights (OCHR), as I understand and use the label, refers to the actual organizational activities and events associated with Edwards, Noel, Smith, and their orga-

nizing group at SJS. The OPHR, in contrast, refers to the broader movement—the set of interests, social networks, protest activities, and events that constitute the movement and that, for better and for worse, were beyond the immediate control of Edwards and his organizational efforts. The first meeting was held in his house in October. Edwards subsequently served as lead organizer, moderator, and public spokesperson of the Thanksgiving Day gathering in Los Angeles that produced a formal boycott resolution. Working with Louis Lomax, Edwards developed the six “demands” that became the focal point of movement activism and then organized the December 14 press conference in which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. offered his public declaration of support for the fledgling boycott proposal. (Their demands included reinstating Muhammad Ali to his heavyweight world championship and the removal of the American, Avery Brundage, from his post as president of the International Olympic Committee.) Edwards, too, was the recognized leader of a boycott of the famed New York Athletic Club indoor track meet in early February of 1968, clearly one of the high points of the entire protest movement. Almost single-handedly Edwards also kept the possibility (or threat) of an Olympic boycott alive in the spring and summer of the year, even as it was becoming clear that there wasn’t sufficient support among athletes for such an action. These were all significant activities and accomplishments.

A good deal of the success of the 1968 athletic protest movement, as I argued in detail in the book, can be attributed to structural forces and external conditions well beyond the control of Edwards and his associates: persistent racism and inequality in society and resurgent African American radicalism; repression and hostility (or at least lack of receptivity) from the leadership in the sports world; a generation of exceptionally smart, well-educated, and well-spoken world-class African American athletes. Yet social movements require not only favorable structural conditions but also human agents—leaders—to understand those opportunities and act to take advantage of them. And it was Edwards, more than any other individual at the time, who assumed this leadership role.

There were at least three keys to Edwards’ skills and accomplishments as an organizational leader. One was his basic recognition of the symbolic power of sport in contemporary American culture, and his unrelenting commitment to convincing African American athletes and others of the potential of sports-based protest. A second was his understanding of how to use small, symbolic projects to orient potential recruits to more radical criticisms and ambitious actions. The NYAC boycott in February was a great example: while a far cry from an Olympic boycott in terms of both logistics and ideology (the NYAC was a rather old-fashioned segregationist club that required no particularly sophisticated conception of post-Civil Rights racism or institutional discrimination), it gave the movement a legitimate target and an easy victory.

A third dimension of Edwards' organizing acumen had to do with his considerable persuasive skills—skills, I believe, he honed and perfected with his critical pedagogical approach in the classroom and as an intellectual mentor and advisor. I am thinking here of his ability to tap into the core sentiments, commitments and ideals of the athletes to whom he was trying to appeal as well as the way he challenged people to think through problems, grapple with harsh social realities, and live up to their ideals. Consider the following quotations from the organizing pamphlet Edwards and his colleagues circulated at the time and other interviews:

- “We must no longer allow this country to use black individuals of whatever level to rationalize its treatment of the black masses. We must no longer allow America to use a few ‘Negroes’ to point out to the world how much progress she has made in solving her racial problems when the oppression of Afro-Americans in this country is greater than it ever was” (Hartmann 2003a, p. 98).
- “We must reassert the basic masculinity of black people and force the white man to stop taking their services for granted in a country where we can’t take simple things like personal safety for granted, where we can’t drive across the country and expect to be served food or treated with humanity. I think the time is gone when the black man is going to run and jump when the white man says so” (Ibid, p. 125–6).
- “Who is to say that any arena is too sacred to be used as an avenue to relieve the suffering [of black Americans]? Black athletes . . . must brush aside the ‘holy’ cries that sports should be a sacred arena, ‘off limits’ to political issues. The life and death struggle [of black America] enables black athletes to recognize the simple truth that there are no sacred arenas” (Ibid, p. 92).
- “We’re not just talking about the 1968 Olympics, we’re talking about the survival of society. What value is it to a black man to win a medal if he return to be relegated to the hell of Harlem?” (Ibid, p. 93–94).

These exceptionally rich and revealing quotes capture the power of Edwards' own rhetoric and logic, a wonderful blend of analysis and prescription, of pressure and choice, opportunity and responsibility. They challenge African American activists to live up to their own ideals and take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Edwards's rhetorical brilliance—his way with words and ideas—was more than just a tool for mobilizing potential athletic supporters; it was also key to keeping the movement and its boycott proposal on the public agenda. This, in fact, brings us to his third primary contribution to the movement as a whole. In addition to nitty-gritty administration and organizational leadership, Edwards was a master media strategist, using public personae and

appearances to get the boycott idea into the public eye and keep the movement relevant even in the absence of extensive support from athletes themselves. Sometimes Edwards engaged the public in an attempt to win support for the movement or one of its various initiatives. Other times, it was simply to rile folks up and provoke a reaction. Sometimes it was both. And it wasn't always only with words. Indeed, over the course of the year leading up to the Games, Edwards transformed his personal style from a coat and tie and horned-rimmed glasses to dark sunglasses and African dashikis, playing the part of the Black power radical to a tee.

Edwards' media savvy was on display in the context of the December 1967 press conference, the one in which Martin Luther King, Jr. appeared in support of the boycott proposal and its six protest demands. I have already suggested that these "demands" were obviously part of a strategy designed to orient otherwise reluctant athletes toward more ambitious modes of protest. But what I want to highlight here is the broader public audience these demands were also intended to impact. There is no reason to believe that Edwards, Noel, and their advisors really expected these changes to happen. After all, no agency or authority in the country—not the NCAA nor the AAU nor the US Olympic Committee which was then only a small semblance of the institution it has become since the federal amateur athletic act of 1978—had the power or authority to implement these changes, and the threat of an Olympic boycott provided no leverage against targeted organizations such as the New York Athletic Club, the New York Boxing Commission or the International Olympic Committee. Rather, Edwards and his colleagues were acting to ensure that their boycott proposal stayed in the public eye, and perhaps even to find at least sympathy and support for the cause of using sport in service of racial protest.

As a media strategist and manipulator, Edwards was at his most brilliant in the summer of 1968, after it had become clear, at least to insiders, that the possibility of an all-out, rank-and-file Black Olympic boycott had evaporated. Edwards was able to keep this hidden from the public, instead telling reporters that "many brothers had been awakened" and that it was "unbelievable how much momentum they had picked up in [the past] few days." When questions mounted, Edwards announced a "shift in strategy," explaining that the OPHR would not announce its intentions until after the team reached Mexico City, hinting that protests instead of or in addition to boycott might be considered. As different accounts became to come out over the summer months of July and August (the Olympics that year were held in October)—accounts that appeared to contradict Edwards' own statements or minimize the possibility of a boycott—Edwards remained resolute about the boycott movement and smoothly explained that it was all part of a "a strategy of chaos." "There is only one thing more confusing than a rumor," he told reporters, "and that's a million rumors" (Hartmann, 2003a, p. 144).

These strategies proved surprisingly effective. It is not too much of a stretch to say that Edwards success as an organizer may have less to do with actually organizing a movement as in convincing the media and mainstream public that this is what he had done. In Edwards' hands, the idea of a Black Olympic boycott continued to captivate the American press and mainstream public. It generated a great deal of criticism and backlash to be sure. But it also kept the whole problem of race in the public eye. What we see here is a deep, intuitive understanding of the media and the symbolic-ideological rhetorical structure of American discourse as well as how sport fits in to all of this. Edwards, in other words, understood just how much Americans cared about Olympic sports and how big a threat the possibility of an African American boycott was to these hopes and dreams and could therefore be leveraged in service of movements for racial change.

## **Lessons and Implications**

---

In the lead-up to the 40th anniversary of the victory stand demonstration in the Olympic year of 2008, Tommie Smith and John Carlos received the lion's share of public attention, adulation, and credit for the 1968 movement. (For a treatment of media coverage and commentary, compiled for somewhat different purposes, see: Hartmann and Sullivan 2008.) This came primarily at the expense of their mentor and advisor Harry Edwards, the man who was once hailed as the "chief architect" of the entire protest movement. I don't know what Edwards thinks about this shift in historical representation and collective memory. I, myself, am of two minds on the matter.

On the one hand, I believe that any account that ignores or diminishes Edwards' role in the 1968 athletic protest movement is both flawed and incomplete. Edwards was not a perfect organizer. His confrontational style didn't sit well with everyone, even many of the competitors he was trying to organize. He almost completely dismissed female athletes who actually wanted to be part of the movement, and he never did succeed in connecting American activist efforts with larger international developments and movements, despite the obvious international nature of the Olympic games and his organization's own universalist "human rights" nomenclature. Nevertheless, I want to be clear: there would have been no movement without Harry Edwards. While some protests and demonstrations may have been inevitable, they would have never gotten off the ground much less garnered the attention that they received, had it not been for Edwards. The idea of a boycott would never have been taken seriously by athletes or public audiences. Edwards was highly effective in all of the ways that mattered, and one could argue that some of his weaknesses were actually strengths in many respects, especially in terms of getting attention and keeping the movement in

the public eye. Recall, also, that it was Edwards who literally wrote the book, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (1969), that was for many years the standard, almost sole, source of information on the 1968 Olympic activism.

What is at stake here is more than just giving credit where credit is due. What is also, and more importantly, at stake are the lessons and implications of this historical episode for contemporary activism and scholarly understanding. Here I want to suggest that the recent minimization of Edwards' contributions may be contributing to an impoverished and indeed utopian sense of athletic activism and movement making or protest organizing in general.

In recent years there has been a great deal of hand-wringing in both the mainstream media and the scholarly community about the relative absence of political activism among contemporary athletes, especially African American competitors. Much of this commentary begins from and depends upon the claim that athletes lack political consciousness and commitment, an understanding of the political situation and a willingness to take the risks associated with political activism. Perhaps this is partly true, though for my own part I have often been impressed by the self-consciousness and social awareness of athletes, especially as it contrasts with our prevailing stereotypes about dumb jocks and apolitical athletes. What is missing from the contemporary scene, however, is a climate and infrastructure conducive to activism for athletes—a cultural and organizational infrastructure and social network that would provide athletes an outlet for social concerns and commitments, avenues that would give their frustrations not only an outlet and avenue but a realistic opportunity for making some kind of meaningful contribution, having an impact. One of the points this review of Harry Edwards's contributions to the 1968 movement reminds me of the fact that movements require organization and organizers—people to do the nitty-gritty, dirty work of making phone calls, writing and distributing flyers (or emails), convincing and cajoling wavering participants, doing media leg work, planning public events and demonstrations. Without this behind-the-scenes work, a demonstration or two may erupt, but the ongoing, sustained activism that forces a generally disinterested public and even more reluctant institutions and leaders to really face up to the issues and grievances of protest and disaffection is unlikely to emerge. As Edwards himself said in a recent media interview: "athletes [are] not as militant [today] because in the sports world many of the conditions have changed and this is a much more conservative time" (*Redding Record Searchlight*, April 18, 2008).

Having insisted on Edwards' capital role in the making of the 1968 protest movement, however, I also want to suggest that the recent, re-oriented emphasis on the role of athletes in the making of the 1968 protests in recent years has also been good, right, and appropriate. This brings me to my "on the other hand" reaction to Edwards' relative disappearance from the mainstream media. It was, after all, athletes who ultimately carried the burden



and responsibility of the protest. It was Tommie Smith and John Carlos who won their race, envisioned and carried out the act that has made the movement memorable, and who suffered the bulk of the costs and consequences for the act over the period, particularly in the first ten to fifteen years in the immediate aftermath of the protest when they were treated as villains and pariahs in mainstream American culture. This holds especially for the victory stand gesture itself, the demonstration without which there would be no memory of "a movement." To this day, Smith and Carlos still disagree about which of them should receive credit for the victory stand demonstration itself. Because it was Smith who produced the gloves that he and Carlos wore in the demonstration; existing video footage makes it clear that Smith took the lead in stepping up to the podium and initiating the clenched-fist gesture; Smith offered the most concentrated and coherent explanation of the protest's symbolic meaning in the immediate aftermath of the ceremony, I tend to side with Smith (see Hartmann, 2003a, pp. 20–26)

"There is," as I wrote in *Race, Culture, and Revolt*, "no indication in the historical record the Edwards (or anyone else, for that matter) formulated any strategy resembling the one Smith and Carlos put into form on October 16, 1968" (2003a, p. 21). The protests suggested by Edwards and others in the days leading up to the Games (strategies such as wearing black armbands or socks) were "vague and half-hearted at best," and if it is true that, as Edwards later wrote, that they had agreed on using the victory stand as the focal point of the protest, it is also evident that his idea at the time was to boycott the ceremony entirely which would have robbed the movement of its most powerful platform for demonstration.

What is at stake in recognizing and reclaiming the role of athletes like Smith and Carlos is—again—about more than the mere giving of credit. In this case, credit has a great deal to do with the scholarly and theoretical lessons we can draw out of this entire episode. Following Edwards' own accounts (1969; see also 1979), most scholars have interpreted Smith and Carlos' demonstration and the entire constellation of sports-based protest activities of the late 1960s and early 1970s as dictated by and directed against racism in the world of sport. There is obviously a good deal of truth to this framing, but there are some fundamental historical inaccuracies and broader conceptual blind spots as well. On the accuracy front, for example, when Smith and his colleagues initially put forward the idea of a race-based Olympic protest, they were actually quite explicit and self-conscious about not criticizing sport on racial grounds. While this was at least in part a rhetorical tactic and they clearly used racism and discrimination in sport as a motivator for recruiting athletes into their activist orbit, their expressed desire was nothing less than to use sports to contribute to the broader movement for racial justice. The boycott proposal was not, in other words, about racism in sport, and the extent to which or ways in which it could be challenged.

In terms of broader conceptual implications, framing 1968 athletic activism as focused primarily against racism in sports fails to grasp the complicated ways in which sport is bound up with the constitution of racial formations in contemporary America (and elsewhere), the extent to which or ways in which these formations can be challenged or resisted through sports, and what these struggles reveal about the social and symbolic role and power of sport in contemporary societies. There is obviously far more to these claims than I can unpack in this space. However, several points are worth noting. One is that I have argued OPHR's racial ideologies and strategies were, despite their radical tenor and contemporaneous reception, firmly entrenched in the constellation of ideological structures which constituted sport's usual ideals about itself and understanding of its place in the social world. As such, this dramatic moment of seeming rebellion—not to mention the institutional response to it (see chapters 6–8 of *Race, Culture, and Revolt*)—helped re-affirm and rearticulate a new racial order in sport, one which shifted, but did not displace sport's role in the production of racial difference and racism itself in the post-Civil Rights era.

Extending from this, what a fuller understanding of the significance of the athletic activism of the 1960s—especially in the form embodied by Smith and Carlos on the victory stand—as well as counter-resistance against that activism and the institutional reforms that came out of it are the complex ways in which sport is bound up with deep, commonsense ideas and ideals of American culture about meritocracy and individualism, about competition and social harmony, and about the relationships among sports, politics, and the common good. The point here, without completely rehashing arguments and applications I have developed elsewhere (cf. 2007, 2006, 2003b), is the need to see sport not only as a reflection of existing social arrangements and dominant cultural ideologies but also as a “contested terrain” (2000, p. X) where the social tensions and dynamics of the sports world are dramatized and can refract, contest, and challenge existing social arrangements even as they tend to reproduce them.

## Rethinking Sport's Symbolic Significance

---

There is an irony here, or perhaps a missed opportunity, that I want to comment on by way of conclusion. It has to do with Edwards' own powerful public presence and expert manipulation of the media, both in 1968 and in all of his subsequent public activism, conversation, and engagement. Whether on ESPN or writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, no intellectual in the United States has been a more prominent, powerful voice on issues of race and sport in American culture over the last forty years. At the core of Edwards' brilliance as a public sociologist, to use Michael Buroway's (2004) provocative formulation, is, in

my view, a deep, intuitive understanding of the symbolic power and potential of sport as a social force and the ways in which the practices and ideologies of sport are so deeply implicated with those that dominate American culture and discourse. However, although Edwards embodies many of the insights about the complicated and multifaceted nature of the relationships between sport and race in contemporary culture that I have argued for, I do not believe that he has yet produced a scholarly work or theoretical statement that captures the full range of his practical understanding.

Harry Edwards is known for two main scholarly works or bodies of work. One is his theoretical and scholarly contributions to the sociology of sport, as exemplified most obviously in his landmark *Sociology of Sport* (1973). The other is his writing and contributions to the public discussions and debates about the explanations for and meanings of the success of African American athletes in mainstream American sports (1984, 1973b, 1972, 1971). Both are essential. The former helped launch and legitimate the sociology of sport as an academic field, and was an indispensable guide for several generations of students and scholars. The latter body of work has played a major scholarly and public role in situating the success of African American athletes in the context of broader systems of racial segregation, disadvantage and injustice, and explaining how what appears to be an indication of progress actually often functions to reproduce racial difference and racism itself. But neither contribution displays a full understanding of the symbolic power of sport, and the possibilities and limitations of activism therein, either as it pertains to race or other social issues.

Obviously the text, a more formal academic work, comes closest. Intended to be a "comprehensive analytical profile of the institution of sport in the U.S." (1973a, p. vii), this work has a good deal to say about sport being intertwined with social and economic forces of society as a whole. As a teaching text, the theoretical notions underlying *Sociology of Sport* are not as systematically developed as they would be in a scholarly monograph or journal article format. But the real shortcoming, at least from my point of view, is that these formulations are fundamentally constrained by the structural-functionalist tradition Edwards was writing from at the time, where sport is seen as a microcosm and reflection of broader social forces and cultural values. If sport is granted any structural independence from the broader social status quo, in this view, it is only to the extent that the cultural visibility of sports in general and athletes in particular can be mobilized against the social status quo and its value system.

This theoretical orientation and its limitations are exemplified in Edwards' initial depiction of the UBSA protest where he and his OPHR collaborators ostensibly discovered the power of sport for race-based protest. In *Revolt*, Edwards wrote that when he returned to SJS in 1967 he was disappointed to discover that very little had changed with respect to racism and treatment

of white students while he was away. Rebuffed after his initial inquiries into the situation, Edwards, together with Kenneth Noel who was working on his master's degree in sociology at SJS (he, too, had been a scholarship athlete as an undergraduate), concocted a back-to-school protest. I have described it previously:

The kickoff event took place on the first Monday of the fall term. During a rally attended by hundreds of protestors and onlookers, the UBSA presented a list of grievances to San Jose State President Robert D. Clark. In order to allow students to 'register their complaints and to let other people respond if they wished to,' Clark called for hearings to begin on campus that afternoon. The chief administrator assigned two of his vice presidents to sit on a panel that included both UBSA representatives (Harry Edwards among them) and spokespersons from the groups under attack (2003a, pp. 48–49).

The developments came to national attention when the leaders announced that the first home football game of the year, scheduled to be played against the University of Texas El Paso, would be targeted for protest. Specifically, Edwards told the media that the UBSA would cover the football field with as many as one thousand demonstrators if their demands weren't met.

The protest was very successful, attracting national attention as well as leading to a number of concrete reforms on campus. It was also foundational for Smith, Evans, Edwards, and the whole idea of a boycott. Edwards depicted the football boycott as a "power lever" that was used to "force" the community, student body, and administration into "a pressure situation" where reform and change were required. Their success, according to Edwards, further taught them about "the power to be gained from exploiting the white man's economic and almost religious involvement with athletics" (Hartmann 2003a, p. 50). There is a good deal of truth to these ideas, and they obviously served athletic activists very well in the year leading up to 1968. But they don't capture the full structure and significance of sport's relationship to race and its role in activism and protest. In particular, the idea that sport was (merely) a lever to force social action fails to foresee the power of Smith and Carlos' victory stand demonstration—more specifically, that its impact was not material but ideological, and that its effects were achieved not by pitting sport against race (forcing folks to choose one or the other) but by putting sport and its rituals and ideologies up on a stage for all to see.

Can these different interpretations be tested or proven? Perhaps not. But consider this: if Harry Edwards had had his way, Smith and Carlos and other African American athletes would not have competed in Mexico City much less made their stand on the Olympic podium. Similarly, Edwards' own influence and success as an activist has come in and especially through the world of sport. Generating a theory that fully comprehends how this has happened

will not only be a real theoretical contribution to sport studies, it will help us appreciate even further the significance of what Harry Edwards has accomplished in his long and distinguished career.

## Works Cited

- Bass, A. (2002). *Not the triumph but the struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the making of the black athlete*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Burawoy, M. (2004). Public sociologies: Contradictions, dilemmas, and possibilities. *Social Forces*, 82(4): 1603–1618.
- Edwards, H. (1984). The black 'Dumb Jock': An American sports tragedy. *The College Board Review*, 131, 8–13.
- Edwards, H. (1979). The Olympic project for human rights: An assessment ten years later." *The Black Scholar*, 10, 2–8.
- Edwards, H. (1973a). *Sociology of sport*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.
- Edwards, H. (1973b). 20th century gladiators for white America. *Psychology Today*, 7, 43–52.
- Edwards, H. (1972). The myth of the racially superior athlete. *Intellectual Digest*, 2, 58–60.
- Edwards, H. (1971). The sources of black athletic superiority. *The Black Scholar*, 3, 32–41.
- Edwards, H. (1970). *Black students*. New York: Free Press.
- Edwards, H. (1969). *The revolt of the black athlete*. New York: Free Press.
- Grundman, A. H. (1979). Image of collegiate protest and the civil rights movement: A historian's view. *Arena Review* (October), 17–24.
- Harris, O. (1995). Muhammad Ali and the revolt of the black athlete. In E. J. Gorn (Ed.), *Muhammad Ali: The people's champ* (pp. 54–69). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hartmann, D. (2007). Rush Limbaugh, Donovan McNabb, and 'A little social concern:' Reflections on the problems of whiteness in contemporary American sport. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 31, 45–60.
- Hartmann, D. (2006). Bound by blackness or above it? Michael Jordan and the paradoxes of post-civil rights American race relations. In D. K. Wiggins (Ed.), *Sport and the racial mountain: A biographical history of the African American athlete* (pp. 301–324). Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Hartmann, D. (2003a). *Race, culture, and the revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic protests and their aftermath*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hartmann, D. (2003b). What can we learn from sport if we take sport seriously as a racial force? lessons from C.L.R. James's *Beyond a Boundary*. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26(3), 451–483.

- Hartmann, D. (2000). Rethinking the relationships between sport and race in American culture: Golden ghettos and contested terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17(3), 229–253.
- Hartmann, D., & Sullivan, J. (2008). Remembering the 1968 African American Olympic protests in the context of the 2008 Beijing games. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- Majors, R. (1998). Cool pose: Black masculinity and sports. In G. Sailes (Ed.), *African Americans in Sport* (pp. 15–22). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Moore, K. (1991a, August 12). A courageous stand. *Sports Illustrated*, 60–73.
- Moore, K. (1991b, August 12). The eye of the storm. *Sports Illustrated*, 61–77.
- Matthews, V., & Admur, N. (1974). *My race be won*. New York: Charter House.
- Spivey, D. (1984). Black Consciousness and Olympic Protest Movement. In Spivey, D. (Ed.), *Sport in America: New historical perspectives* (pp. 239–262). Westpoint, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Wiggins, D. K. (1989). Great speed but little stamina: The historical debate over black athletic superiority. *Journal of Sport History*, 16(2), 158–185.
- Wiggins, D. K. (1984). The future of college athletics is at stake: Black athletes and racial turmoil on three predominantly white university campuses, 1968–1972. *Journal of Sport History*, 15(3), 304–333.

## About the Author

---

Douglas Hartmann is Professor and Associate Chair of Sociology at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), and co-editor of *Contexts*, the American Sociological Association publication that brings sociology to broader public influence and attention. Professor Hartmann received the Midwest Sociological Society's Early Career Scholarship Award in 2008. He is currently working on a manuscript that uses midnight basketball to explore the intersections of race, sport, and intervention in the United States.