

Harry Edwards, America's Sport Establishment, and the Proposed Boycott of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City.

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The purpose of this study was to examine the proposed boycott of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City by American Black athletes. Led by Harry Edwards, instructor of sociology at San Jose State College, the proposed boycott was part of the larger black power movement, the crusade that emerged out of a conviction that civil rights legislation and poverty programs were failing to erase inequality and poverty because they were part of the white power structure. The boycott movement was significant in that it was part of the general awakening of Black America in 1968. Blacks in this country were in the midst of dealing with their problems by banding together and overcoming their psychological dependence on the majority culture. Hunger, poverty, inequities in housing, education, employment, and social relations were improved upon because blacks recognized the root of their problems and that these problems were common to them as a group rather than as individuals. While individual success was praiseworthy and much admired in the black community, Black Americans struggled to eliminate racial discrimination by becoming more race conscious and collective. This race pride was reflected in the widespread adoption of afro hair styles and dress, a renewed interest in the life and art of black culture, and increased willingness to use violence and other aggressive tactics in the fight against inequality.

This new sense of race pride permeated all segments of black society, including those black athletes involved in the boycott movement. While the boycott in Mexico City never materialized, the year-long revolt certainly helped raise the political consciousness of many black athletes who had spent the better part of their lives faithfully following the instructions of their coaches and directing all of their energies toward Olympic competition. They were suddenly numbered among those Black Americans who actively spoke out against the injustices in American society. A new day had dawned for black athletes, one that would kindle further black power demonstrations in various athletic departments on predominantly white college campuses across the country. The raised, clenched fists of Tommie Smith and John Carlos would give rise to racial protests among black athletes from larger universities in such metropolitan areas as Syracuse, New York, and Los Angeles, California to smaller institutions in more out of the way places like Corvallis, Oregon, and Laramie, Wyoming. These protests would in turn help stimulate additional protests among black athletes in professional sport. The dam had been broken. Black athletes were determined to wash away the racial inequities and discrimination existing in organized sport and the larger American society.