

As Mark Zandi, chief economist at *Moody's Economy.com*, argues, "A-Rod could be worth trillions if you get enough eyeballs in China to start watching him."

The point here is that I think another book waits to be written about another set of games, in this case the Olympic Games from the perspective of an industry reshaped by technology and globalization. It is within this frame of reference that we need to seek a broader understanding of the value of the Beijing and subsequent Olympiad Games.

References

Saskia Sassen, "Economic Globalization and World Migration as Factors in the Mapping of Today's Advanced Urban Economy" (paper commissioned for the Globalization Research Network, 2003); <http://www.global.grn.org>.



Silent Gesture: The Autobiography of Tommie Smith by Tommie Smith, with David Steele (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 267 pp. Reviewed by Robert K. Barney, The University of Western Ontario, London, Canada.

Arguably the most famous and enduring picture in the photographic record of the now more than 100 years of Olympic history is that storied 16 October 1968 shot of Tommie Smith, Peter Norman, and John Carlos arranged in the gold, silver, and bronze medal positions, respectively, on the 200 meters victory podium at the Mexico City Olympic Games. The photograph, reflecting Norman standing at attention, and Smith and Carlos with heads bowed and black glove-clad fists (Smith's right, and Carlos's left) thrust aloft in the night sky, constantly appears and reappears, year after year, decade after decade, whenever the subjects of race, politics, crises, and climactic events of Olympic history are discussed. Indeed, as one might imagine, the graphic moment is captured on the front of *Silent Gesture's* dust-cover. Today, just short of 40 years later, silver medalist Peter Norman is deceased (both Smith and Carlos travelled to Australia to serve as pall-bearers); John Carlos still lives, teaching and coaching at a private school in Southern California; and Tommie Smith seeks final peace by biding his time in retirement in Los Angeles and Georgia, the locale of his wife's family.

Physical monuments as testimonies to people and events can be looked upon as punctuation marks to history. On 16 October 2003, thirty-five years to the day after his Mexico City 200 meter sprint triumph and subsequent controversial victory podium "gesture," the graphic moment was reborn by the commemoration of a statue on the campus of Smith's and Carlos's alma mater, San Jose State University. The statue, conceived and sculpted by artist Rigo 23, depicts a replication of the Mexico City stadium podium scene, except that the

image of Peter Norman is missing. His silver medal victory podium station was purposely left vacant, offering an interaction quality to the dedication scene as honored guests and student onlookers mounted the platform to be “part” of history. Actually, Peter Norman attended the celebratory events of the statue’s inauguration, at one point having his picture taken standing in the place he had rightfully won in Mexico City thirty-five years previous. The countenances of Smith and Carlos tower behind him. The idea for such a statue came from San Jose State student leader Erik Grotz. Together with the actual commemoration ritual, the celebratory day’s other events – barbecue, interviews, panel discussion, speeches, and culminating banquet – provided further punctuation marks to one of the most storied moments in Olympic history.

Censured by IOC and American Olympic officials at the time, sent home in disgrace, Tommie Smith faced a future of chastisement by most whites and a fair number of blacks, ominous death threats, and countless “we’ll call you” responses to his pursuit of economic livelihood. But, from it all, there emerged a quiet but resolute quest to write this book. After years of simmering “starts and stops” on the literary tale of his historic Olympic ordeal, Tommie Smith has at last reached a measure of peace and satisfaction with “his world” as it exists today. In fact, the tempered but nevertheless rancor and bitterness that pervades the early part of the book is softened near the end, a testimony to the mellowing process by which most folks look backward with reflection and tolerance for and of the people and events that had such a profound impact on their lives.

But, now to *Silent Gesture* itself. The book opens with two graphic chapters in the life of Tommie Smith, “Welcome Home” and “October 16, 1968,” each of which describe and analyze the events of 16 October 2003 on the campus of San Jose State, and 16 October 1968 at Mexico City. The remaining chapters of the book follow the standard autobiographical pathway. First, Smith paints a portrait of his early years, an absorbing tale in itself. The seventh of the twelve children born to Dora and James Smith, poor sharecroppers in the equally poor hamlet of Ackworth in northeast Texas, Tommie Smith’s life was dominated by picking cotton and rural boyhood activities in wide open spaces where “there wasn’t a building close enough to throw a stone at.” Religion and church were always present in the Smith family. Like many other poor Americans seeking a better life, the Smiths moved to California in 1950 when Tommie was six years old. They settled near Fresno, residents of a “labor camp,” joining both citizen and illegal alien pickers. Somehow, between “picking” and “surviving,” school and athletics entered Smith’s life. Never a brilliant student, he was nevertheless a dedicated one. In athletics he was outstandingly gifted, and a hard worker to boot. He excelled in football, basketball, and track and field, registering the fastest time (47.7) in the nation in the 440 in his junior year of high school. College scholarship offers arrived in sequence with his growing athletic status. In the end, he matriculated at San Jose State University.

Life at San Jose State was enveloped by his serious attempt at gaining a degree and running track under Coach Bud Winter, aside from his father, perhaps the biggest influence in his life. Knowing that the alternative was a return to “picking,” Smith was a highly motivated student, seldom missed classes, graduating with a degree in sociology with a slightly above average grade-point. Countless hours were spent under the watchful and expert supervision of Coach Winters, the custodian of what became known nationally and internationally as “Speed City.” During his undergraduate years Smith achieved a steady stream of sensational times in the 220 and 440 sprints, several NCAA titles, and world records (at one time he held eleven simultaneously), all leading, in time, to his selection to the 1968 American Olympic team. There was another dimension to college life for Tommie Smith. The product of a deeply religious and sincerely patriotic family, Smith at one time thought of a military career. He joined the ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps), compiling a solid record in the activities of the unit. As if pursuing a degree, running track at the world level, and active duty with the campus’s ROTC unit were not enough to test his mettle, Smith married a fellow San Jose State student (Denise Paschal), fathered a child, and descended into the world of political consciousness and protest.

By the latter years of Smith’s career at San Jose State, the Rosa Parks-inspired bus boycotts in Alabama had occurred. So, too, had the Martin Luther King-inspired march in the nation’s capital, the church bombing in racist Birmingham, the Freedom Rides, Malcolm X’s assassination, and the Civil Rights Bill prompted by Senator Lyndon Johnson. None of these escaped Smith’s awareness. “Black Empowerment” appealed to Smith. His debut into active protest was his participation in a protest march to San Francisco in support of beleaguered blacks in the American south. His social conscience grew. He met Harry Edwards. Edwards was a senior at San Jose State when Smith arrived as a freshman. Two years later Edwards was one of Smith’s professors, in fact, the first black professor he had ever had. Towering (6’8”), dynamic in speech and will, “the smartest athlete I ever met,” said Smith, Edwards had great impact on a young and impressionable Tommie Smith. When Edwards organized the now famous Olympic Project for Human Rights, Smith was an enthusiastic adherent. Edwards’ appeal for black athletes to boycott the 1968 Games eventually proved too much of a cross to bear for athletes who had poured heart and soul for years into their insurance policy for the future. The boycott fell flat; athletes were left to their own means to make a public statement of discontent. The reverberation caused by Tommie Smith’s and John Carlos’s “heads bowed and black gloved-clad fists thrust upward” gesture, echoed world-wide from its Olympic stage. The gesture itself may have been a silent act, but the effect was like the clap of thunder. And that thunder has scarcely abated since, at least in Olympic history. Smith discounts popularly-held beliefs surrounding the historic incident—for instance, he relates how his wife purchased the black gloves after arrival in Mex-

ico City; how John Carlos was counseled to “follow my lead” during the victory ceremony; how his fist uplifted was not an expression of black power at all, but rather one of triumph; how his head bowed was an expression of prayer, not one of suppression. So much for the mythology of those gestures that have grown over the decades.

After a turbulent young adult life, there were more tranquil and happier moments for Smith. He achieved a master’s degree in 1972 from Cambridge College. He served for six years in the 1970s on the faculty of Oberlin College in Ohio under the athletic directorship of the noted sports activist, Jack Scott. He had a lengthy and noteworthy career of twenty-five years at Santa Monica College as a teacher, coach and administrator. He has been inducted into numerous sports halls of fame. In 2005 a grateful alma mater, San Jose State University, conferred an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters on Smith for “courageous efforts on behalf of human dignity, equality, and civil rights.” In retirement Tommie Smith remains in demand as a public speaker and continues to be the recipient of national and international media interview attention for his insight and recollections.

What is the worth of this book? I believe it to be one that accurately portrays Tommie Smith’s life and Olympic ordeal. If one examines Smith’s life, independent from the tone of *Silent Gesture*, including those events surrounding the 1968 Mexico City event, one is struck by the fact that Smith has been many things: a dedicated student; an equally dedicated athlete of extraordinary skill; a persevering individual in the face of adversity; a person motivated by the “human cause,” especially with regard to the plight of less privileged blacks in American society; a responsible family man and citizen, all these dimensions consistently framed throughout his life by a quiet, reserved, contemplative, at most times modest demeanor, quite different from what one might expect resulting from a loud peer group and controversial issue atmosphere surrounding his life. For that, as Smith would be the first to admit, his upbringing in a small, poor, rural environment, in a close family presided over by religious, value-laden, and extraordinarily hard-working yet loving parents, were the critical elements that molded his life and character more than any other shaping forces. We have waited a long time for this book. The result is worth the delay. Though the startling 1968 Mexico City Olympic episode has been dissected “up, down, and all around” for decades by scores of journalists and academics, and John Carlos has even written his own flamboyant story on the matter, *Silent Gesture* provides, by far, the most powerful punctuation mark in explaining one of the most historic of all Olympic moments.

