Olympic Protest

In 1968 - a year of riots and protest marches, of Vietnam war escalation and assassinations, a photograph from Mexico City Olympics captured the mood of the times. It showed two black sprinters, Carlos and Smith, standing on the victory platform, heads bowed, feet bared, a pair of black-gloved fists thrust skyward in the black-power salute, as 'the Star-Spangled Banner' played in honor of their medal-winning performances in the 200 meters.

The two athletes shocked their countrymen, sparking a controversy that still lingers.

'It will always be with me', says John Carlos, looking not so different from the man in the photo. 'I'll always be John Carlos, the protester, the radical. They said I was a Black Panther, a terrorist, a this or a that,' Carlos says. 'I was nothing but a young American who believes in the ideals of America, freedom and justice for all, the land of the free. I don't regret what we did. Not in the least. It was an important statement, but it's too bad I'm still stuck with that label.'

For Carlos, life after the protest has not been easy. He had trouble finding a job when he got back. He ran track for a while, played pro football for Montreal of the Canadian Football League for a while, worked as a security guard, bummed around. He ran up a lot of debts, some that he has yet to pay off.

'I realized the protest would have impact,' Carlos says, 'but I didn't know it would affect my whole life.'

It brought him grief, it brought him tragedy. His first wife committed suicide, and Carlos remains certain the aftermath of Mexico was the principal cause.

'I couldn't find a job', he says. 'I had a wife and two kids and I had to put some food on the table. I would go to college campuses and give speeches. While I was away, someone would send letters - I don't know who, the government or somebody - saying 'You're home and Carlos is gone on the campus. He's a lady's man and he's got women.' Eventually, she killed herself.

Smith and Carlos, teammates at San José State, were two of the top sprinters in the world. As members of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, a group of athletes protesting the treatment of Blacks in America, they wanted to make a statement with their running. There was much talk of an Olympic boycott that year by the Blacks on the US Olympic team. Instead of a boycott, Carlos and Smith settled for their dramatic protest.

Their salute was seen around the world. Carlos told reporters afterward: 'White America will only give us credit for an Olympic victory. They'll say I'm an American, but if I did something bad, they'd say I was a Negro.'

The reaction in white America, and in some parts of black America, was predictable. The US Olympic Committee suspended the protesters and kicked them out of the Olympic Village. They were allowed to keep their medal, but that was about all.

'We made the protest as non-violent as we could,' Carlos says. 'But I got more criticism than someone who might take a pistol and shoot someone or take a hand grenade and throw it in a group of innocent people. I don't think murderers have had to endure what John Carlos has had to endure.'

International Herald Tribune.
Olympic Protest comprehension

Group 1: Words (Line 1 to 19)
Find the equivalents of the following words in the text:
émeutes: ............................................................ manifestations: ............................................................ humeur: ............................................................ poing:
............................................................ tendus: ............................................................ déclencher: ............................................................ persister:
............................................................ déclaration: ............................................................ collé: ............................................................ étiquette:

Group 2: Words (Line 20 to the end).
Find the equivalents of the following words in the text:
rouler sa bosse: ............................................................ contracter des dettes: ............................................................ rembourser:
............................................................ chagrin / douleur: ............................................................ conséquence: ............................................................ un coureur de jupons: ............................................................ être reconnaissant: ............................................................ exclure:

Group 1 + 2:
what did they do? ............................................................ Why? ............................................................
On what occasion? ............................................................

Group 1: the answers are to be found in the whole text.
(l.1 - 2) “riots”, “protest marches”, “assassinations” What do these words refer to in the history of the USA?

Riots / protest marches: ............................................................
Mention the name of two important men killed in the USA during the 60s: ............................................................

concentrate on the four consequences of the protest for John Carlos in chronological order:
............................................................ ............................................................ ............................................................ ............................................................
Pick out the expression showing that he couldn’t keep a job after the events: ............................................................
Pick out the five words and expressions showing that John Carlos is still bitter (amer):
............................................................ ............................................................ ............................................................ ............................................................ ............................................................

Group 2: Concentrate on the reaction of white America. The answers are to be found in the whole text.
Pick out the five elements showing that Americans strongly disapproved of Carlos and Smith’s statement.
............................................................ ............................................................ ............................................................ ............................................................ ............................................................

Right or wrong? Justify by quoting from the text. Note down the number of the line(s)
☐ R ☐ W John Carlos looks much older now than in 1968. ............................................................
☐ R ☐ W After the protest, John Carlos didn’t take part in competitions anymore. ............................................................
☐ R ☐ W Carlos and Smith were members of the Black Panthers. ............................................................
☐ R ☐ W Many of the black athletes favored another kind of action. ............................................................
☐ R ☐ W Retrospectively, he thinks he should have opted for a violent action. ............................................................
Olympic Protest comprehension

Group 1: Words

Find the equivalents of the following words in the text:
émeutes: riots (1) manifestations: Protest marches (1) humeur: mood (3) poing: fists (5) tendus: thrust (5)
déclencher: spark. (9) persister: linger (10) déclaration: statement (16) collé: stuck (17) étiquette: label. (17)

Group 2: Words

Find the equivalents of the following words in the text:
rouler sa bosse: to bum around (20) contracter des dettes: to run up debts (20) rembourser: to pay off (20)
chagrin / douleur: grief (22) conséquence: aftermath (23) un coureur de jupons: a lady’s man (26) être
reconnaissant: to give credit for (32-33) exclure: to kick sb out (35)

Group 1 + 2:

what occasion? Their performance in the 200 meters in the 1968 OG in Mexico. (2 + 8-9)

Group 1:

(l.1 – 2) “riots”, “protest marches”, “assassinations” What do these words refer to?

Riots / protest marches: against the Vietnam war

Mention two important men killed in the USA during the 60s: 1963 JFK Dallas / 1968 MLK Atlanta.

concentrate on the consequences of the protest for John Carlos in chronological order:
(35) – (18) – (19-20) – (?) (22)

Pick out the expression showing that he couldn’t keep a job after the events: ‘for a while’ ((18-19)

Pick out the five words and expressions showing that John Carlos is still bitter (amer):
(11) – (17) – (21) – (32-33) – (37-38)

Group 2: Concentrate on the reaction of white America.

Pick out the five elements showing that Americans strongly disapproved of Carlos and Smith’s statement.

(9) – (12-14) – (25) – (32-33) – (36-38)

Right or wrong? Justify by quoting from the text. Note down the number of the line(s)

☐ W John Carlos looks much older now than in 1968. (11-12)
☐ W After the protest, John Carlos didn’t take part in competitions anymore. (18-19)
☐ W Carlos and Smith were members of the Black Panthers. (28-29)
☐ R Many of the black athletes favored another kind of action. (30)
☐ W Retrospectively, he thinks he should have opted for a violent action. (37 - 39)