

SAN JOSE STATE COLLEGE

ROBERT D. CLARK, PRESIDENT

October 22, 1968

Dear

The volume of mail both critical and supportive regarding the suspension of Tommie Smith and John Carlos from the Olympic games and my statement of October 18 regarding the original incident has reached the point where, given my limited staff, it is impossible to respond individually to each letter received. I sincerely regret this. It is my wish to respond personally to every letter I receive as promptly as possible. In this case, however, I am unable to do so.

Columnists, reporters, analysts, and commentators have widely interpreted, examined, and expanded the event in all media. It has become a cause célèbre. The fact I wish to stress is that I was responding to the original statements of the American Olympic Committee, the International Olympic Committee and Mr. Avery Brundage--and not to reactions of American television or to the reasons for punishment that might have occurred to them or to the American public.

As I understand it, the American Olympic Committee, according to press reports, condemned Tommie Smith and John Carlos for "a willful disregard for Olympic principles" and for "discourtesy ... in departing from tradition during a victory ceremony ... for immature behavior." Mr. Brundage is reported to have said "One of the basic principles of the Olympic Games is that politics play no part whatsoever in them.... Yesterday, U.S. Athletes in a victory ceremony deliberately violated the universally accepted principles by using the occasion to advertise domestic political views."

Those apparently, were the only reasons assigned for suspension of the two athletes. If so, both committees acted with something less than candor. Several other athletes, including Ralph Boston, also used the victory stand to express "political opinions."

Why weren't they expelled on the same principle? Was it that the committees thought a little blood-letting would be enough to satisfy the passions of the people?

I think it appropriate for the American Olympic Committee to apologize to the International Committee and to the Mexican Government for actions interpreted as discourteous. In fact, it appears to have been the original intent of the American Committee to let the matter rest at that point. It should be noted that both Smith and Carlos apologized to the Mexican Government in what one sports writer described as a "magnanimous gesture."

The National Observer, published by Dow Jones and Company, editorialized as follows on October 21: "If there is a gold medal for stupidity and narrow-mindedness, then award it to the U.S. Olympic Committee. They have won it going away..." The Observer, to which I have subscribed for many years, is, I am told, hardly to be described as a radical rag. After summarizing the event, The Observer says, "Surely it is difficult to work up a genuine rage over this sort of thing..." I am enclosing a copy of the editorial.

The San Jose Mercury concluded its editorial of October 22 (full text enclosed) as follows: "Smith and Carlos may have exhibited poor judgment in staging their demonstration precisely when and how they did, but the IOC's error in judgment was considerably more gross since it is bound to generate bitterness that will go deeper and last longer than any that might have resulted from Smith and Carlos' actions."

San Jose Radio Station KLIV in an editorial aired on October 18 and 19 questioned whether Smith and Carlos' actions indeed violated specific rules "defining the behavior of athletes as they accept their medals..." The full text of the radio editorial is enclosed.

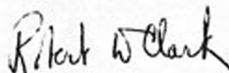
My reference to the failure to dip the American flag to the host country during the opening ceremonies was not a commentary on whether or not it is proper to dip the flag, but rather that it is a political act -- precisely the issue for which Smith and Carlos were taken to task. It is an inconsistency that is unjust. The complete text of my October 18 statement is enclosed for your reference.

The October 28 issue of NEWSWEEK magazine contains a comprehensive article on the Olympics with a section specifically describing the incident in question.

If you read the splendid five-part series in Sports Illustrated last summer you will perceive what a difficult problem the Negro faces in American collegiate and professional athletics. I believe that all Americans ought to be deeply concerned about the full and equal place of the Black in our society...that is, after all, what this entire incident is all about.

Both young men exercised their American right of stating their personal beliefs. One need not agree on how they state their beliefs, nor on the appropriateness of the platform they choose to use, but we must defend their right to express their views. This is a basic American tenet.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert D. Clark". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Robert D. Clark