

# Tommie Smith

## Biography

Tommie Smith began life quietly, born to Richard and Dora Smith on June 6, 1944 in Clarksville, Texas, the seventh of 12 children. Tommie Smith survived a life-threatening bout of pneumonia as an infant which allowed him to carry out the work that God intended for him. Today, his historic achievements make him a nationally and internationally distinguished figure in African American history. He is the only man in the history of track and field to hold eleven world records simultaneously.

Tommie Smith received his Bachelor of Arts degree from San Jose State University in Social Science with double minors in Military Science and Physical Education. In 1974 he received his Master's Degree in Sociology from Goddard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts. As a college student, Tommie amazingly tied or broke a total of 13 world records in track. However, realizing the importance of education, Tommie went on to obtain a Master's Degree in Sociology. Tommie was awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree (LHD) from his alma mater, San Jose State University in May 2005.

During the historic 19th Olympiad in Mexico City in the summer of 1968, Tommie Smith broke the world and Olympic record with a time of 19.83 seconds and became the 200-meter Olympic champion. As the *Star Spangled Banner* played in the wind at the Mexico City Summer Olympic Games, Tommie Smith and John Carlos stood on the victory podium, draped with their Olympic medals, and each raised a clinched fist covered in a black leather glove in a historic stand for black power, liberation, and solidarity. This courageous, unexpected worldwide event propelled Tommie Smith into the spotlight as a human rights spokesman, activist, and symbol of African American pride at home and abroad. Cheered by some, jeered by others, and ignored by many more, Tommie Smith made a commitment to dedicate his life, even at great personal risk, to champion the cause of oppressed people. The story of the "silent gesture" was captured for all time in the 1999 HBO TV documentary "Fists of Freedom".

Tommie Smith's courageous leadership, talent, and activism have earned him well-deserved acclaim and awards. Some highlights are included here: He was featured in Sports Illustrated, Ebony, Time, and Newsweek; 1969-1971 Tommie played for the Cincinnati Bengals, 1978 member of the National Track & Field Hall of Fame; coaching staff of the 1995 World Indoor Championship team in Barcelona, Spain; 1996 inducted into the California Black Sports Hall of Fame; 1999 Sportsman of the Millennium Award; May 1999 inducted into the Bay Area Hall of Fame; November 1999 inducted into the San Jose State University Sports Hall of Fame; 2000-2001 the County of Los Angeles and the State of Texas presented Tommie Smith with Commendation, Recognition and Proclamation Awards; 2004 the French Government named a Gymnasium and a Youth Sports House in March 2007 in Paris in his honour. Since the games of the 19th Olympiad, Tommie has enjoyed a distinguished career as a coach, educator and activist. Tommie served as a faculty member at Santa Monica College, Santa Monica California for 27 years, teaching and coaching and serving on academic committees. Tommie has dedicated a total of 37 years to educating and teaching our children. In June 2005 he retired and move to Georgia, he continues to travel nationwide giving of himself to all.

The Tommie Smith Youth Track Athletics is in its 16th year in the Oakland California, The 9<sup>th</sup> year in Washington DC. Dr. Smith continues the struggle by helping bring awareness to our youth about Health and wellness. London and Paris has also joined the Tommie Smith Youth

Initiative. Dr. Smith completed his Autobiography titled “Silent Gesture” published by Temple University Press in January 2007, was nominated for an NAACP Image Award in the literary category Autobiography and Biography. The Peace Abby Courage of Conscience Award April 2008, and the ESPYS Arthur Ashe Courage Award July 2008. The Trumpet Awards in 2007. April 1, 2012 Tommie was inducted into the California Sports Hall Of Fame. Smithsonian African American Museum 2016. He received the International Peace Prize in Dresden Germany 2018.

