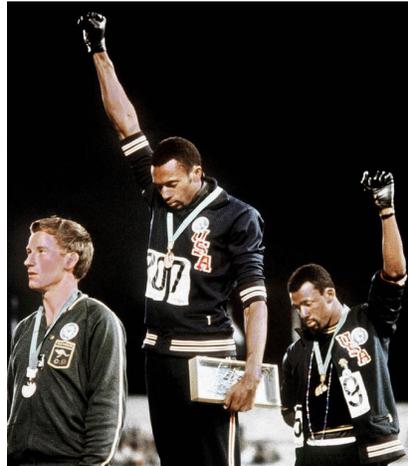


DEADLINE

John Legend & Jesse Williams To EP 1968 Olympics Protest Salute Documentary
Dominic Patten and Amanda N'Duka
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Deadline



With the recent furor over NFL players staying on the bench or taking a knee during the national anthem in protest, John Legend and Jesse Williams want to shine a contextual spotlight on one of the most famous examples of athletics and politics controversially coming together.

The Oscar winner, his Get Lifted Film Co partners Mike Jackson and Ty Stiklorius plus the Grey's Anatomy star will executive produce *With Drawn Arms*, a documentary about Olympic gold medalist and NFL wide receiver Tommie Smith, we've learned.

The winner of the 200-meters at the Games of the XIX Olympiad in Mexico City in 1968, Smith became renowned when he and Bronze medalist and fellow Olympic Project for Human Rights member John Carlos raised their black leather gloved fists on the podium in protests of racial injustice and for human rights during the playing of the Star-Spangled Banner.

"We are excited to collaborate with true artists in Glenn Kaino and Afshin Shahidi to bring this powerful story to the world in a fresh and compelling way," said Oscar and Grammy winner Legend today of the co-directed docu. "In this current climate we are once again being charged to stand up to bigotry, fear, and hate. We are inspired by this story and honored to be a creative partner on this film."

Prompted by Smith and protesting social injustice, the duo were suspended from the American team and had to leave the Games under threat for their gesture that was widely viewed as being a sign of Black Power. Following the Summer of Love, 1968 saw the rise of the Black Panther movement as well as riots in American cities over race and poverty as well as the assassinations of both Sen. Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

After his powerful symbolism at the '68 Olympics and with several track and field records under his belt, Smith went on to play for the Cincinnati Bengals for a couple of seasons. Never avoiding the topic of what he did in Mexico City and his beliefs, Smith's later career saw the Tennessee born Track and Field Hall of Famer teaching in Ohio and Santa Monica College.

Smith and Carlos' raised fists have been recreated by numerous athletes over the decades. While always harking back to the 1968 gesture, Williams feels Smith is more than just that moment.

“Tommie Smith is more than an iconic poster or risky act of defiance that inspires people the world over,” noted Williams, whose activism became known to a wider audience after his impassioned speech accepting the 2016 BET Humanitarian Award was seen by millions live. “He is a living man, whose incredible journey is worthy of examination,” the actor added. “I couldn’t be more excited to join forces with this team of filmmakers, to share his reality and challenge our notions of heroism in the process.”

Currently in production in L.A., *With Drawn Arms* is co-directed by conceptual artist Kaino, and former Prince creative collaborator Shahidi. The film is aiming to be released towards October 16 next year, the 50th anniversary of the raised salute by the now 73-year old Smith.

“I’ve been working with Tommie Smith for over five years on a range of projects that connect his story of sacrifice and courage 50 years ago to the fight for social justice today,” said Kaino. “Tommie’s story goes beyond his salute. The story of his character and commitment are key to understanding how a gesture like his salute can influence generations, evolve over time, and ultimately become a unifying symbol for all those who demand equality and will not rest until they find it.”

It is not known if NFL players will kneel, sit on the bench or link arms in unity before the national anthem at tonight’s Thursday Night Football match-up on CBS between the New England Patriots and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.