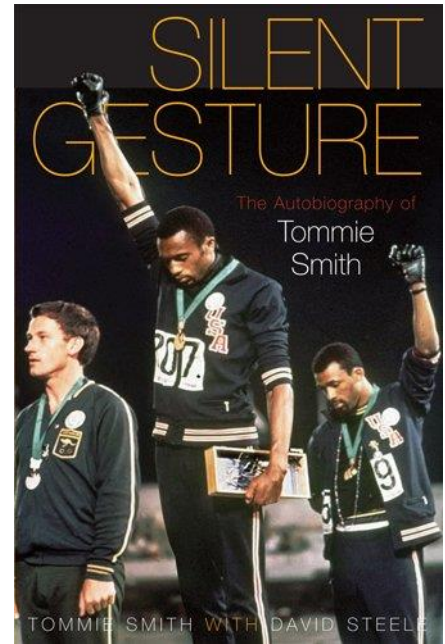


From Champion to Spokesperson – A Silent Gesture

1. **Observe** the photo and **compare** it with Tommie Smith's book cover.



2. **Read the text** and say what you have understood about the narrator and his state of mind.

3. **Read again, then discuss :**

-Tommie Smith's double motivation for winning the gold medal in 1968.
(tip : find two main semantic fields linked with his motives)

-What he expected to happen.

-The actual consequences over the years (what Tommie thought would happen and what really happened).

4. **Comment on :**

-line 22 « My silent gesture was designed to speak volumes ».

-line 32 « we had done what these students ought to be doing today ».

« I HAD TRULY BELIEVED that I would be six feet under before something like this took place. But I had lived long enough to see it, and to be part of it. My **alma mater**¹ was welcoming me back. It was embracing me as one of its own, as a part of its history and of its legacy and of its contribution to American society. And it was going to immortalize me with a statue right on the campus grounds I
5 once walked.

Thirty-five years earlier, I had thought I would never see the city of San Jose, the campus of San Jose State College, my home on the west edge of campus, or my wife and son ever again. On the night of October 16, 1968, I had stood on a platform on the **infield**² of the Olympic Stadium in Mexico City, with a gold medal around my neck, black socks on my feet, and a glove on the right fist I had **thrust**³ in the
10 air. My head was bowed, and inside that bowed head, I prayed — prayed that the next sound I would hear, in the middle of the **Star-Spangled Banner**⁴, would not be a gunshot, and prayed that the next thing I felt would not be the darkness of sudden death. I knew there were people, a lot of people, who wanted to kill me for what I was doing. It would take only one of them to put a bullet through me, from somewhere in the crowd of some 100,000, to end my life because I had dared to make my presence—as
15 a black man, as a representative of oppressed people all over America, as a spokesman for the ambitious goals of the Olympic Project for Human Rights— known to the world.

That was my victory stand. Not only because I had won the gold medal in the 200-meter final a half hour earlier, in world-record time. This was my platform, the one I had earned by years of training my body and my mind for the ultimate achievement. The athletic achievement paved a road toward my
20 quest for a social victory, where everyone would be listening to and watching my **statement**⁵ about the conditions in which my people and I were living in the greatest country in the world. I never said a word as the national anthem was playing. My silent gesture was designed to speak volumes. As hard as I had worked to climb the victory stand, I had worked just as hard to earn the platform that the stand provided. For me, and for all of those who had participated in the struggle to bring me there and to put that
25 platform to its best use, this victory stand represented more than just a place to accept a medal. [...] and I lived long enough to step onto campus again, 35 years later to the day, and to see and hear San Jose State University honor what we had done [...] Now the school was saying I was, and am, part of it. More specifically, the students were saying I was part of it. [...]

I realized that today's students and I probably had similar thoughts—about society and change
30 and what America really represents and what it ought to represent—but these students likely were thinking of these things because of Carlos and me, because this day was dedicated to us, because we had done what these students ought to be doing today, nearly four decades after we opened the door for them and showed them the way.

1 : university which one has attended or graduated from.

2 : area enclosed by a racetrack or running track.

3 : pushed upward.

4 : national anthem of the USA.

5 : opinion, comment, or message conveyed indirectly usually by nonverbal means.

Tommie Smith with David Steele

Silent Gesture (2007)

Additional document :

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/2019/9/25/20883712/tommie-smith-john-carlos-olmpic-hall-of-fame>