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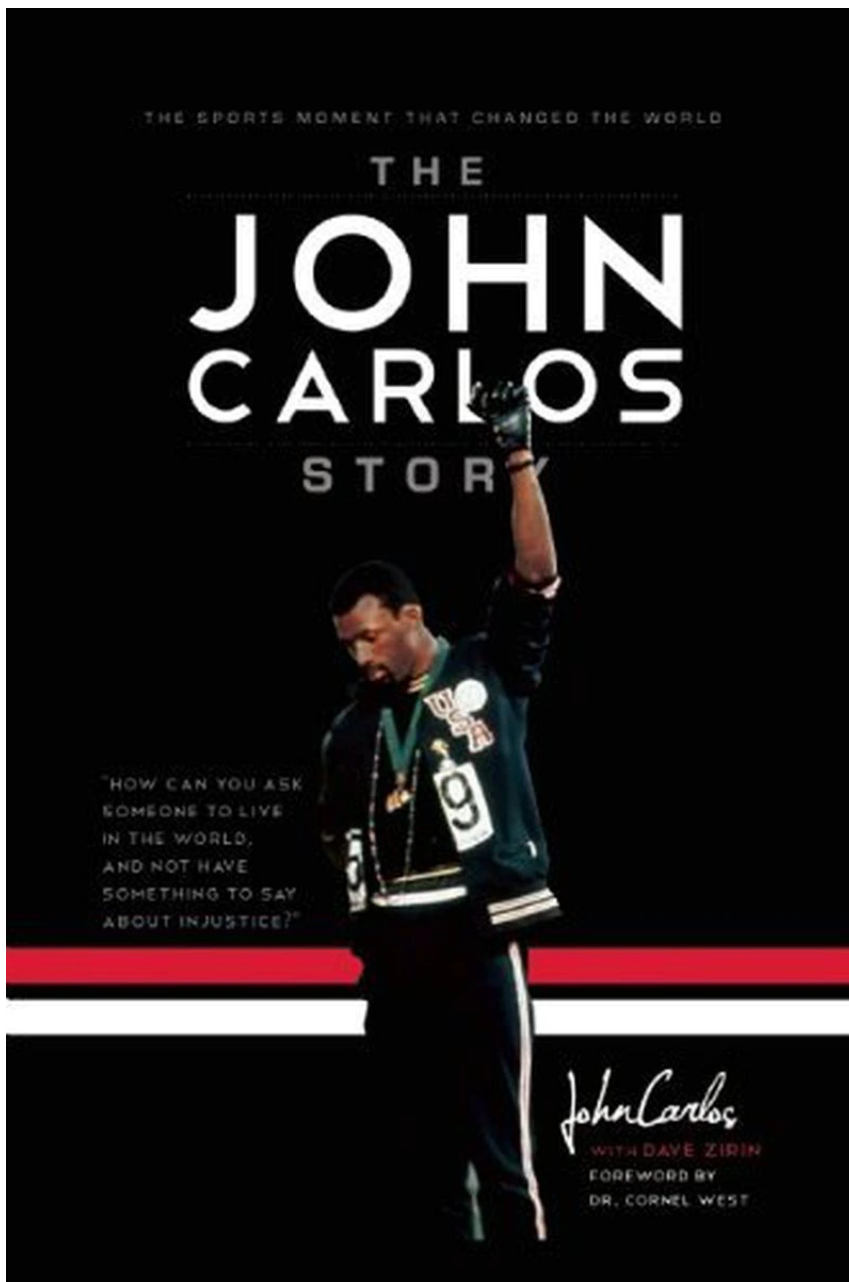
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BOOKS ENTERTAINMENT

'The John Carlos Story: The Sports Moment That Changed the World' by John Wesley Carlos and Dave Zirin

By **BY SHAMONTIEL L. VAUGHN**
TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS | SEP 30, 2011 AT 2:00 AM



Publisher: Haymarket Books

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Olympic runner John Carlos wants things done, and, as the people close to him came to understand, he demands that change within 48 hours. However, John Carlos had more than 48 hours to plan the bold statement he made after he won the bronze medal in the 200-meters dash during the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. And although what he and his friends Tommie Smith and Peter Norman did once the National Anthem started to play became a historical moment, their final decision was made spontaneously during the quarter-semi.

Interesting enough, had the audience taken a closer look they may have realized something was about to happen. John Carlos and Tommie Smith wore black gloves "to represent strength and unity," beads around their neck "to represent the history of lynching" and no shoes "to symbolize the poverty that still plagued so much of black America." The black socks were a well-known symbol in the community at the time to represent black America, too.

And even though Australian sprinter Peter Norman may not have had to use the same "colored" bathrooms that John Carlos did while attending East Texas State University and his children probably would never have racist epithets thrown at them, he wanted to participate. In fact, Norman, pictured towards the front of the notorious Olympics shot, was so amped to participate in their protest against racism that he almost took the beads off of Carlos' neck.

Originally, the Olympic Project for Human Rights was supposed to hold a large boycott, but after a massacre of students by the state military in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Square and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and former presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, people were too terrified to speak up. But judging from Carlos' entire childhood and teenage years, in which he never succumbed to racist attitudes or injustice, he didn't seem able to wait for things he wanted done pronto.

Carlos was a curious kid who loved to excel at sports, but when his 62-year-old veteran father explained to his 12-year-old son that he'd never be able to make it as an Olympic swimmer because of the color of his skin, Carlos set off on a mission to defy the odds. His father told him he didn't have a public pool to practice in and Carlos decided he'd go into the Golden Gloves. His mother refused to let her boy get bruised up so he stopped boxing and began looking for another way to make it to the Olympics.

The only thing was he had no idea how he'd make it. He knew he could run only because of the amount of people who admired how fast he could steal food from a train to pass out to poor people around Harlem. While he ran down 155th Street Bridge with two 25-pound boxes of food, folks from the neighborhood admired him outrunning watchmen, truant officers and the police. When giving away food was replaced with selling marijuana cigarettes, Carlos' father stepped in again to let him know no member of his family would be shamed by a drug-dealing son. Carlos stopped selling marijuana, but his curiosity increased about life in general. Carlos still had too much energy and too many questions.

Who did he reserve the questions for? Malcolm X.

When Malcolm X would speak in different communities in New York, Carlos would be running close behind shooting out questions when he could. Although he didn't realize he was actually getting early training for track and field in the oddest ways, his speed and pace was helping him along.

His contumacious attitude towards certain authority figures, including the principal who refused to stop distributing undercooked chicken (feathers still on it), and a boycott at school gave him the itch to protest. Blend Carlos' rebellion with his knack for running, throw in an incredibly confident attitude — he even admitted that his ego should've had

its own ZIP code — and you have a man on a mission.

This book is fascinating for more than just the sports history, as the text talks about Carlos' connection to Dr. King, basketball player Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Olympic runner Ralph Boston, baseball legend Jackie Robinson and boxer George Foreman. Carlos even comments on topics in today's news including First Lady Michelle Obama, the value of Twitter, the antics of athletes like Chad Ochocinco and Terrell Owens, and his views on an award he received at ESPN's 2008 ESPYs.

Readers may be curious about what happened to make Tommie Smith and Carlos stop speaking or why he did certain things to hurt his first marriage, but there's so much other information that one may quickly lose interest in those topics. Maybe.

"The John Carlos Story" included plenty of humor, historical anecdotes and sometimes depressing moments, all written in a conversational manner. For a book with this much history it can be easy to get preachy or sound like a textbook, but Carlos does neither. The personal aspects of the narrative intrigued me from beginning to end. For that reason, I'll more than likely re-read this book just to enjoy it all over again.

[The John Carlos Story](#)

By John Wesley Carlos and Dave Zirin

Haymarket Books, 210 pages, \$22.95 (paperback)

Topics: [Malcolm X](#)

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