



PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: AVAM Marketing Office | marketing@avam.org

AVAM 2025 Gala to Honor Olympian and Humanitarian Dr. John Carlos with Lifetime Grand Visionary Award

***AVAM's Play(ful) Ball Gala Evening will Celebrate the Intersection of Sports, Art, and Activism
on Saturday, June 28.***

(Baltimore, MD) - The **American Visionary Art Museum**—Baltimore's Congressionally-designated national museum and education center dedicated to showcasing intuitive, self-taught artistry and thought—will honor 1968 Mexico City Olympic Bronze Medalist and civil rights activist **Dr. John Carlos** with its **Lifetime Grand Visionary Award** during their festive "**Play(ful) Ball**" Gala evening on **Saturday, June 28, 2025 from 5:30 p.m.–12:00 a.m.**

"With admiration and gratitude for all that Dr. John Carlos has achieved in the field of human dignity and betterment, the Board of Directors of the American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) has designated him the 2025 recipient and honored celebrant of our Lifetime Grand Visionary Award," said Christopher Goelet, Chair of the AVAM Board. "Few sports figures have demonstrated the courage and determination to stand for something larger than themselves, transcendent of their innate talent and competitor skills. A true Olympian, Dr. Carlos' heroic 1968 protest spoke volumes in a powerful plea for our nation to better honor its founding ideals of equality for all. Through his silent eloquence and subsequent actions, Dr. Carlos continues to practice the high art of social justice and compassion in action. In recognizing Dr. John Carlos with AVAM's highest award, we hope new generations of Americans will be inspired to model his courage, caring, commitment, and vision."

AVAM's Board of Directors and Gala Committee selected Dr. John Carlos as the recipient of the **Lifetime Grand Visionary Award** for his lifelong commitment to sports activism and courageous protest against social injustice, immortalized when he joined Gold Medalist Tommie Smith and Silver Medalist, Australian Peter Norman, on the podium at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. During the medal ceremony, Carlos and Smith raised their gloved fists as the U.S. National Anthem played. This moment remains one of the most iconic political statements in sports history.

The **Varsity VIP Experience** kicks off at 5:30 p.m. in the AVAM Café and includes an intimate gathering with Dr. Carlos and a guided tour of the "Good Sports: The Wisdom & Fun of Fair Play" MEGA-Exhibition, led by curator Gage Branda. At 6:30 p.m., guests will enjoy a **Pre-Game Cocktail Hour**, followed by the **Playful**

Plates Dinner & Program at 7:45 p.m. on the 3rd floor of the Jim Rouse Visionary Center (JRVC). As guests enjoy a meal provided by Rouge Catering, they will hear from featured speakers including Honoree Dr. John Carlos. The evening concludes with the **Extra Innings After Party** at 9:30 p.m. in AVAM's Tall Sculpture Barn, where attendees can dance the rest of the night away to the music of Baltimore's **DJ Uncle Quincy**.

John Wesley Carlos was born in The Bronx in June 1945, and was raised in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. He received a full track and field scholarship to East Texas State University (ETSU), where he led the school to its first Lone State Conference Championship. Transferring to San Jose State University after one year at ETSU, he led that team to its first NCAA Championship, tying the 100-yard dash record with a time of 9.1 seconds. At the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, Carlos earned bronze in the 200-meter race. During the award ceremony he courageously stood up for worldwide human rights, removing his shoes and raising his black-gloved fist raised in the air, alongside teammate Tommie Smith. This act established a legacy of championing for equal rights that continues to inspire activists to this day.

After his track career, Dr. Carlos enjoyed brief stints in the National Football League and Canadian Football League, but retired due to injury. He became involved with the United States Olympic Committee and helped to organize the 1984 Summer Olympics.

Dr. Carlos was elected into the National Track & Field Hall of Fame in 2003 for his leadership. In 2008, at ESPN's ESPY Awards, he accepted the Arthur Ashe Award for Courage for his 1968 Olympic salute. He was recognized at the White House by President Barack Obama in 2016. Carlos continues to work for human rights and is a founding member of the Olympic Project for Human Rights.

[The American Visionary Art Museum \(AVAM\)](#) is a Congressionally-designated national museum and education center dedicated to intuitive, self-taught artistry. AVAM champions the role intuition plays in creative invention and evolutionary innovation of all sorts — be it in the field of art, science, health/wellbeing, engineering, humor or philosophy, and especially in inspiring compassionate and creative acts of social justice and betterment.

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