

## The Triumph at the Berlin Olympics

There have been many truly memorable moments in black history where the blatant wrongness of racial discrimination has been dramatically put on display. The 1936 Olympics in Hitler's Germany may be one of the most dramatic because of what the madman wanted to happen and what really happened.

Hitler was pleased to host the Olympics because he felt it was a chance to put on display one of his core philosophical concepts which was the superiority of the Aryan race. Or to put it more bluntly, Hitler wanted to show the superiority of the white man on the Olympic fields. Looking back on his arrogance, and knowing what we do today, you wonder how he could have been so deeply wrong about something. But if he had never questioned that theory, he should have given it serious review after the Berlin Olympics.

Once again, it was a man whose name in black history has become one of great pride that turned the day for justice and equality. That man was Jessie Owens who came to those Olympics not to make a racial statement or start a movement but to do his best and show his pride as a black man, as an American and as an athlete. And that pride shown through as he won four gold metals and turned Hitler's hopes for an Aryan romp over the black man to dust.

Hitler's response was infantile and nauseating storming out of the stadium as Owens won event after event and then refusing to shake Jessie's hand when the time to award the metals came. But there is another side to this story that sheds another light on where we were in black history at that time. And that was the experience Jesse Owens had in Germany from the other athletes and from the German citizens who were warm and welcoming to him and treated him as the athletic hero he was as a result of his great accomplishments.

History tells us that during the long jump competition, Jesse's German competitor Lutz Long gave him advice and was friendly throughout the competition. As he continued to put on display his remarkable athletic ability, the German citizens, some 110,000 strong cheered him enthusiastically and eagerly asked him for his autograph when he was on the streets after the competition. In fact, Owens enjoyed equality that is common among athletes as he traveled with his fellow white athletes, ate with them and stayed in the same living accommodations with them, something that would have been out of the question in America at the time.

There are many lessons we can gather from Jesse's experience beyond that obvious that Hitler's ideas of Aryan supremacy were deeply wrong and offensive to all mankind, not just to the victims of discrimination. We see that even in a

society that has become characterized as racist, such as Germany in the 1930's, the people, the common everyday folk of Germany had no room in their hearts for such racism that was being pushed upon them by their leadership. This can be a source of inspiration and hope for all of us and an encouragement not to prejudge a people who we might even perceive as being racists because many times the good people, the common everyday people will have nothing to do with such evil.

And we can celebrate this great victory in a very difficult circumstance in which it wasn't speeches that proved that race or color or creed don't make a man superior. Instead it is the talent, the integrity and the hard work of each individual that shows the quality that is from within. Jesse Owens demonstrated that even to the likes of Adolph Hitler. And we have that opportunity to demonstrate that same principle every day in our daily lives.

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