

The Berlin Olympic Games of 1936: The Response of the Black Press

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The purpose of this essay was to determine the response of a select number of Black newspapers towards the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936. America's Black press viewed the 1936 games not only as an outstanding sporting event but as an affair of extreme cultural significance to this country's Black community. Since its inception in 1827 the Black press has always given wide publicity to any campaign by a Black individual or group for racial equality, recording events week after week until they run their course. And the Berlin games were no exception. Such nationally known Black newspapers as *The Baltimore Afro-American*, *Chicago Defender*, *Indianapolis Recorder*, *Michigan Chronicle*, *New York Age*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and *The St. Louis Argus* frequently gave front page headlines chronicling the athletic achievements of America's "Sepia" stars in the 1936 games. With the possible exception of the second Max Schmeling - Joe Louis heavyweight boxing match, no single sporting event received such broad coverage in the Black press during the decade of the 1930s than did the Berlin Olympics.

In the view of the Black press the success of Jesse Owens and the other black athletes in the 1936 games had some significant ramifications for the rest of Black America - both positive and negatively. On the negative side, most Black newspapers felt that all the hero worship being paid to the Black athletes after the games was a temporary phenomenon and it would not take long before they were again mired in anonymity and relegated to second class citizenship. In addition, the 1936 games had made it patently obvious to the Black press that America's Black colleges were failing to produce any outstanding track and field performers like the predominantly white universities. Not one athlete from a Black college made the American Olympic team and it proved to be a source of great irritation to many Black newspapers who felt these institutions were irresponsibly devoting too much of their energies to the game of football rather than track and field. On the positive side, the success of the Black Olympians proved beneficial to the rest of Black America because it proved to the rest of the world what a minority group could accomplish when given an equal opportunity. Last, and maybe most important, the games were of particular significance to the Black press because they were influential in persuading the people of the world that Hitler's belief in Aryan superiority was untrue.