

Marketing National Identity: The Olympic Games of 1932 and American Culture

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From the moment of their recreation in 1896 the Olympic Games served American culture as an arena for displaying national prowess. During the 1920s the Olympic Games had become, particularly for the United States, spectacles which revealed and shaped powerful national ideologies.¹ The Olympics provided a community of discourse where Americans could tell stories about themselves to their fellow citizens and global audiences. A rich sporting language pungent with political and social symbols filled sporting pages in American newspapers and magazines with images of a nation which ought to exist or reflections of realities which belied idealized promises. That sporting language had an enormous public following. “We loved our daily tales” from the sport pages remembered Paul Gallico, one of the most prominent American sportswriters of the 1920s and 1930s. “We were all suckers for the theology of good guys and bad guys.”²

In 1932 the United States hosted the summer Olympic Games at Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Olympics marked a watershed in American self-definition through sport. By the 1930s the movie studios of Hollywood and Culver City rivalled the publishing firms and advertising corporations of New York City for control of symbol-making in American mass culture. Los Angeles had become the American center for generating theologies of good guys and bad guys. The Olympic Games would find an ideal venue in the west coast capitol of culture production. From Los Angeles compelling and disturbing visions of the United States and its stature in the community of nations would be broadcast by print and electronic media throughout the country. In a nation approaching the nadir of devastating economic and social calamity which had earned the designation Great Depression, the 1932 Olympics at Los Angeles offered many consoling, and some troubling moments.

Hollywood’s Olympic Village

First and foremost, the Olympics served as a nexus for producing cultural images and myths. Far from the realities of the Great Depression lay a magical landscape where a special village was under construction. New York *Times* reporter Duncan Aikman discovered the village perched on the hills “overshadowing the vast motion picture factories of Culver City.” This magical kingdom existed far enough from Los Angeles’ “business centre” that the disaster of America’s economic slump

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could not tarnish it. The village had been erected in the pastoral magnificence of Baldwin Hills which overlooked the blue Pacific and “cooled by morning fog and afternoon trade winds,” escaped the fury of Southern California’s summer sun. Oil derricks dotted the lower slopes and gullies of this particular paradise, symbols of America’s wounded but still great industrial strength. On the hilltop nearest to Los Angeles there had “sprung up an enormous spread of pink and cream-colored bungalows” which were in Aikman’s estimation “not displeasing to the eye.”

This was no squatters’ camp for “Okies.” Neither the Joads nor any of their real-life compatriots found respite in this promised land. For this was not the California of the Great Depression which John Steinbeck chronicled. Rather it was a place in which reality seemed conveniently suspended. Indeed, suspended reality was Hollywood’s specialty. This was the Olympic Village.

According to Aikman the village would actually be a miniature city on a hill, with “everything but department stores and city hall politics.” It had miles of sewers and paved roads. California evergreens and palm trees gave it the look of “a baronial motion picture estate.” On the grounds were more than forty different types of athletic training baths and comfortable four-occupant bungalows with beds “specially tested for comfort and rest-producing qualities.” Close by were several training fields. The American managers of the Games of the Tenth Olympiad had done their best to make the athletes’ stays “pleasant, leisurely, restful and free from strain.”

American officials carved up the Olympic Village so that the various national teams would be situated “in accordance with their known national sympathies.” Thus one quarter of the village housed the Latin Americans, excepting the Brazilians who were “bunked” with the Southern Europeans. France would live with her Little Entente allies. Germany and the former Central Powers wound up with the Scandinavians. Great Britain shared shelter with the many other representatives of the British Empire. Perhaps the Los Angeles organizers thought that the Olympic ideal of the brotherhood of humankind should not be pushed too far.

The organizers had made sure that Hollywood’s motion picture stars “of both native and foreign persuasion” would bolster the morale of the Olympians and urge their fellow nationals to victory. Each evening, the studios filming the Games planned to release previews of the days events which would include slow-motion footage. Hollywood’s image-makers also promised special showings of feature films and social gatherings for the Olympians staged informally--“in the American manner rather than obligatory.”

The American Olympic planners made their greatest efforts at accommodating foreign athletes in the Olympic Village’s kitchens. According to Aikman, “Frenchmen were promised that they would not have to forego their delectable sauces for American gravies if they would only let Los Angeles know what goes into a first-class fricassee of bouillabaisse.” Englishmen could enjoy Southdown mutton, rather than Spring lamb of Southern California. Peruvians would find *vicuna* chops, Guatemalans could have chicken tamales, Bulgarians their “Metchnikoff bacillus ration as nearly as possible just as mother used to prepare it,” revealed Aikman. He assured his readers that even the Asian teams were provided with special fare “as the China Coast, rather than the local chop suey restaurants, recognizes it.”

The American organizing committee had gone to great lengths in order to make the Games “alibi-proof” proclaimed Aikman. He recounted the belly-aching about food, training conditions, climate and atmosphere which had plagued Olympic celebrations in the 1920s--most of it emanating from American mouths. Los Angeles was convinced that it could reverse the Olympic trend toward creating more alibis than champions. Aikman concluded that Los Angeles “believes that the acrimony of Olympic athletics can be softened to the vanishing point by making participation in the games less of a penance and more of an old-fashioned American do-as-you-please, eat-as-you-please party.”³

Thus the Games of the Tenth Olympiad built a headquarters in fantasyland, a safe place in pastoral America where the morals and virtues which had always sustained the Republic could be nurtured. The Los Angeles organizing committee determinedly worked to make sure that the Olympics would be an American extravaganza. City officials and business leaders produced so much ballyhoo about the Games that Jim Thorpe, the former Olympic hero, remarked “that the city of Los Angeles ruined the name ‘Chamber of Commerce,’ just as a brand of evaporated milk despoiled the word ‘contented’ for any other use than in reference to cows.” Thorpe assured the public the Games would be a great show. “America, whether its team wins or loses, is going to show the world what a marvelous thing the Olympics can be . . . when staged by AMERICANS,” he declared.⁴ The Los Angeles Olympic boosters published pamphlets which pictured Southern California as an idyllic facsimile of Olympia more easily accessible by motor-car, rail or cruise ship than the original version. They thought that American ingenuity and customs were bound to produce the best Olympics that the world had yet seen.⁵ But would a Depression-racked world pay attention?

Advertising the Los Angeles Olympics

Certainly Americans would notice. *Country Life*, the magazine for the country club set, marketed the Los Angeles Olympics as *the* vacation of 1932. “Are there not mountains in California greater than those in all Hellas, beside which even Olympus itself is but a foothill?” mused the Bible of gentility’s Warwick S. Carpenter. Carpenter promised that in spite of the specter of the Depression, Americans planned to stage the grandest Olympics of all, ancient or modern. A picture of the mighty Los Angeles Coliseum led the story bearing the caption: “The 1932 lodestone for the world’s foremost athletes, the massive Olympic Stadium in Los Angeles, despite the fact that it contains enough seats for three times the number of mortals that were in the army of Alexander the Great will undoubtedly display the S.R.O. (Standing Room Only) signs on July 30th when President Hoover opens the Olympic Games.”⁶

Carpenter recommended to travelers that they make the Los Angeles Games the crown jewel in a tour of the natural wonders of the American West. The Standard Oil Company of California heartily concurred with *Country Life*’s travel suggestions. “For once in a lifetime you and your children can see the Olympic Games in a 2 week vacation or less,” trumpeted an advertisement for the “Red, White and Blue Dealers” of Standard Stations, Inc. “Last time in the U.S. for 50 years!” warned the

commercial. Standard urged parents to take their children to the spectacle to witness American domination. "'Crack' and the fastest American runners are off--to *beat the world*." Parents, students, teachers and schools could send a postcard to Standard Oil and receive a four-color copy of the classical Greek sculptor Myron's "the discobulus." And consumers were reminded that whatever road they took they could "find the same fine Standard Products and the same helpful Standard Service to make your Olympic Vacation pleasanter and easier."⁷

The national media advertised the Olympic Games as a "Depression-buster." *Literary Digest* proclaimed that "a \$6,000,000 sock on the jaw is the sport world's answer to the depression." The magazine insisted that the Olympics would put at least that much money into circulation as well as creating jobs for thousands of people. *Literary Digest* cheered the "good-sized contribution from sportdom to the cause of normalcy!"⁸

Indeed the president of the American Olympic Committee, Avery Brundage, insisted that sport had prevented a society confronted by the Depression from collapsing. "It is a remarkable fact that in this unprecedented period of financial and industrial distress there has been practically no disturbance, disorder or social unrest," noted Brundage in glossing over the Depression's details. "Undoubtedly this is due in a large measure to the training our boys and girls receive on the fields of sport," he surmised. Brundage, himself a former Olympic athlete, proposed that "the ability to take it on the chin and come back for more--the knowledge that the game is not over until the last whistle is blown--the spirit of never-say-die learned on the playing field are invaluable to us in times like these." Brundage touted sport as the quickest cure for the economic collapse.⁹

Brundage had taken over the presidency of the American Olympic Association from General Douglas MacArthur in 1928. He quickly moved to try and heal the breaches between the A.A.U. and the N.C.A.A. which had plagued the Olympic movement in the United States during the 1920s. In 1929 the A.A.U. gave in to the N.C.A.A.'s desire to control the certification of collegiate athletes. In 1930 Brundage engineered the construction of a new constitution for the A.O.A., which both the A.A.U. and the N.C.A.A. accepted. In his address to the N.C.A.A.'s 1930 national convention, Brundage further cemented the alliance between the previously warring amateur athletic bodies in a conciliatory speech which preached an end to the incessant hostilities in the interests of national strength.¹⁰

For Brundage and like-minded promoters of the 1932 Olympics, American sport produced the very qualities on which the American economic ethos was constructed. In the midst of the vast economic crisis of the 1930s they urged the nation to look to Olympic playing fields to rekindle its spirit. Sporting promoters argued that athletics could do more than any other institution to shore up the tottering edifice of the American economy. Besides, the Olympics in and of themselves made for good business. Standard Oil was not the only firm to market the Olympic Games. The Union 76 Petroleum Company urged motorists to "Select your gasoline by the Olympic motto!" They explained how *Citius, Altius, Fortius* (faster, higher, stronger) described their gasoline as well as the Olympic purpose. Nisley Shoes ran advertisements in the *Los Angeles Times* for "Olympic Winners." A Los Angeles department store, the May Company, planned to serve shoppers from around the

world. The store boasted that “the employee who wears your nation’s flag speaks your nation’s language.” Their salespeople claimed to converse in a myriad of dialects, including Esperanto.¹¹ Pep Bran Flakes from Kelloggs, Weiss Binoculars, Safeway, and many other products and corporations launched major Olympic campaigns. Piggly Wiggly offered Olympic emblems for fifty cents each, which they boasted were “sold at no profit to us,” in order to underwrite the United States Olympic team.¹²

Underwriting a Wholesome Olympics

Piggly Wiggly buttons alone could not finance the Tenth Olympic Games. The American Olympic Committee set a goal of \$350,000 for their 1932 Fundraising efforts. The A.O.C. launched a nation-wide campaign to raise the money.¹³ In their quest for \$350,000 the A.O.C. finance committee set a quota of “a penny a person” from every American in cities of over 15,000. Brundage feared that since previous Olympic funds had been raised to send Olympic teams abroad and the 1932 Olympics were scheduled for American locations the public might hesitate to answer the Olympic call. He set in motion an intense campaign.¹⁴

In New York governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared a “national boys’ week and Olympic week” in order to stimulate enthusiasm. “Let us impress upon our boys that we are more than passively interested in their activities and let us be conscious of the duty of offering every facility to enable them to qualify for this and for future Olympiads,” commanded Roosevelt. “In no better way can we emphasize our expectations that they always conduct themselves as men and maintain the traditional American valuation of sportsmanship and fair play,” he proclaimed.¹⁵ In New York City mayor John J. Walker announced an Olympic week through the public school principals. He boasted that over one hundred American Olympians had attended New York City public schools and asserted that he wanted to “inspire every child to take an active and wholesome interest in sport.”¹⁶

In order to insure the wholesomeness of the Games the United States planned to enforce prohibition on the athletes of the world. The chief administrator of the Federal Prohibition Department, Amos W. W. Woodcock, told the press that “possession and transportation of liquor is a violation of the law and there is nothing in the act that would enable the prohibition director to extend immunity to visiting athletes.” Woodcock added that “only Congress could extend immunity, and it would be interesting to determine whether Congress could do so legally.”¹⁷ One jokester laughed that the “Volsteadian difficulties” of imbibing nations might be overcome by customs agents giving “athletic equipment” some “quasi-diplomatic privileges.”¹⁸ The Associated Press later reported that the French Olympic team had substituted Cuban cane sugar syrup for wine and that “their trainers think it will give them the same pep as the wines of their native land.”¹⁹

A Winter Interlude at Lake Placid and The Specter of Red Ink

The liquor agents got to practice their athletic embargo in New York, before their summertime campaign in Los Angeles began. On a cold February day in Lake Placid, the third Olympic Winter Games began. New York Governor Franklin

Delano Roosevelt presided over the opening ceremonies. Roosevelt tried to invoke the theme of Olympic harmony in his remarks. Recalling the truce that reigned among warring states during the ancient Olympiads Roosevelt wondered, "can those early Olympic ideals be revived throughout all the world so that we can contribute in a larger measure?" The Governor and Mrs. Roosevelt stayed after the opening ceremonies and watched as Lake Placid native Jack Shea won a gold medal in the first event--the 500 meter speed skating race. Later that afternoon Mrs. Roosevelt took a wild ride down the bobsled run with the top American driver. That evening the Roosevelts attended the I.O.C. dinner at which the Governor again stressed the importance of the Olympics in building international friendships.²⁰ The I.O.C.'s president, Count Henri Baillet-Latour, echoed Roosevelt's sentiments. At Lake Placid Baillet-Latour found abundant "proof that the Third Olympic Winter Games have promoted brotherhood and good feeling among the nations, which is one of the ideals of the International Olympic Committee."²¹

Both the National Broadcasting Company and the Columbia Broadcasting System reported the Winter Games to a national radio audience. Americans who listened heard the details of a stunning upset.²² When the Winter Games ended as they had begun with an American victory--William Fiske guided the U.S. four-man bobsled team to first place--the United States had defeated the traditional Scandinavian powers in winter sports.²³ American experts crowned the U.S. with 103 points as champion, followed by Norway with 77, Canada with 49, Sweden with 28 and Finland with 25. Cynics such as *New York Sun* reporter Edwin B. Dooley might have remarked that the U.S.'s ninety-odd contestants "combined point-scoring ability totaled only a few more than did the handful of Norwegians." But the U.S. still won. Lake Placid's Winter Olympics served the American public with powerful omens presaging both American athletic supremacy and financial uncertainties in the coming Los Angeles Games.²⁴

The Winter Olympics left Lake Placid with a deficit of more than \$50,000. But if the town's taxpayers greeted that news with something less than enthusiasm, finance committee chairman Willis Wells painted a rosy picture of the Games as a long-term boost for the region's economy. The A.O.C. quickly turned its attention away from Lake Placid's red ink and began to solicit funds for the summer Games in earnest.²⁵

The Olympic fund received donations from most of its traditional sources. The Armed Services chipped in. The N.C.A.A. contributed \$10,000. Various universities came forward with large sums. The tryouts for the different sports at sites around the United States produced large revenues.²⁶ But by the late spring of 1932 the *Literary Digest* was reporting that only one-tenth of the A.O.C.'s \$350,000 goal had been raised, and revealed that the possibility of "drastic cuts" in the American Olympic team was being discussed. "The depression in some measure accounts" for the Olympic shortfall explained A.O.C. official Lawson Perry. Perry thought that changes in the A.O.C. plans for selecting a team might have to be made. "It might well happen that instead of the tryouts now projected, outstanding performers in various sports would be selected by appointment and sent to Los Angeles," worried Perry. "This would be a nationally humiliating expedient, and would be productive, of course, of a great deal of ill-feeling throughout the country--charges of favoritism

and all sorts of ill-temper.” But, warned Perry, “just the same, it may have to be done.”²⁷

The African American community feared that some major American track and field stars such as Ralph Metcalfe, Eddie Tolan, Eugene Beatty, Phil Edwards and Edward Gordon, as well as unknown young talents such as Cleveland, Ohio’s Jesse Owens, would not find the financial backing necessary to compete in Los Angeles. In the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), *The Crisis*, Roy Wilkins reported that black journalists had warned him that “in curtailing expenses, Negro athletes are likely to be dropped first.” The “last hired, first fired” axiom which plagued African American industrial workers during the Depression extended even to amateur athletes.²⁸ Another critic in *The Crisis* complained that the Olympics obscured the reality of the Depression. “Talk about whistling for courage; 12,000,000 of us have no jobs and we’re holding Olympic games at Los Angeles.”²⁹

On May 27, Avery Brundage announced that the United States’ entries in the summer Olympics would indeed have to be cut. He insisted, however, that the Games should not be postponed or curtailed.³⁰ Other nations heeded Brundage’s call that the Games must go on. Theodore Lewald, president of the German Athletic Federation, revealed that “how deeply the Olympic idea has seized the imagination of the world may be seen in the fact that nowhere in Europe despite the economic crisis, was Olympic participation abandoned.”³¹ Germany’s Chancellor, Heinrich Brüning, announced that “he considered sport one of the most powerful agencies for improving international relations and therefore warmly welcomed the prospect of German’s youth meeting other nationalities, especially Americans, in friendly competition.”³²

Brüning, firmly committed to the principles of the Weimar Republic, had a much different appreciation of sport than his successor, Adolf Hitler, would manifest. The Germans, who had been awarded the 1936 Olympics, sent one of the largest contingents to the Los Angeles Games. The financially devastated nation shipped almost a hundred athletes to the competition. Beset by a decimated economy and rampant inflation, the German Olympic Committee still somehow managed to raise most of the money to finance the Olympic trip from private sources. With German currency in desperate straits, the president of the *Reichsbank* initially rejected the team’s request for the foreign exchange which the German Olympians needed in order to travel. But he backed down after being asked: “Do you want to keep the German flag away from the Los Angeles stadium?”³³

The United States Olympic effort had its own financial problems. But Leslie A. Henry, president of the Pacific Southwest A.A.U., was unperturbed by the proposed cuts in the American team. He thought that Western athletes, “with the addition of a few of the East’s top performers, could put a great Olympic team into the field at a greatly reduced cost without the planned curtailment.”³⁴ Henry’s cost-cutting plan proved unnecessary. By July of 1932 Arthur J. Daley of the *New York Times* reported that the Olympic fund needed only \$48,000 to reach its goal. According to A.O.C. treasurer George W. Graves the fund had lagged badly early in the collection process and the team had been limited to 340 members. Athletes from Los Angeles were required to stay in their own homes, and team members from other sections of the country were to leave the Olympic Village as soon as they had finished competing.

The lacrosse, yachting, rifle-shooting and modern pentathlon teams were paying their own ways. The American equestrians needed only housing, and the cyclists planned to provide their own transportation to the Olympic celebration.³⁵

California and the city and county of Los Angeles held their own fundraising campaign in order to stage the Olympics. In 1929 California voters approved a \$1,000,000 bond issue for construction of Olympic facilities. Profits from the Games were supposed to refill the public coffers. *Every Week Magazine* reported that the total cost of the Games would exceed \$2,000,000. The Olympic Village cost \$500,000. The Los Angeles Coliseum, built in 1924 for \$800,000, had received a \$900,000 face-lift which would allow it to seat 125,000 spectators for "the greatest show on earth." The city built Olympic Auditorium for \$500,000, a marine stadium in Alamitos Bay for \$250,000, the Olympic Swimming Stadium at Exposition Park for the same amount, and an equestrian site at the Riviera Country Club near Santa Monica, for \$25,000.³⁶

Anticipating American Victories

The organizers laid a special clay track at the Coliseum, which they touted as the world's fastest. On that fast track the United States would face, as American analysts and pundits quadrennially insisted, the assembled athletic might of the world. Grantland Rice breathlessly informed the public of a war "that will send some fifty rival nations of the world against the United States at Los Angeles in late July and early August." Sport had entered its "Golden Age," hyperbolized Rice. Though there were no modern statesman to measure up to Pericles, nor philosophers to compare to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, "when we compare runners and jumpers, discus and javelin throwers, the betting shows that the Olympic winners of ancient Greece would be left far behind the coming record-breakers at Los Angeles." Rice warned of a foreign threat to American supremacy. The Germans alone planned to send over 250 athletes he cautioned, oblivious to Germany's catastrophic economic conditions. He also indicated that Finland, Sweden, Great Britain, France, Canada and Italy would have strong teams. Given the "ghastly showing" of Americans at the 1928 Olympics, the United States had great cause for concern Rice concluded.³⁷

Los Angeles Times reporter Braven Dyer predicted that Germany, Japan and Finland would "present the most formidable threat to our peace of mind." However, he also admonished that "if the United States does not win the Olympic Games we might as well quit trying." The fact that the Games were to be held in "our own backyard" made it the best opportunity ever for America "to prove its athletic supremacy."³⁸ Track star Babe Didrikson assured the public that American women would help the cause of athletic domination. "We will win the Olympics all right," bragged Didrikson. "I don't know how good the foreign girls are, but I don't think it will be good enough to beat us."³⁹

While American athletes bragged and dreamed, a small political struggle was developing around who would preside over the opening of the Games. President Herbert Hoover had announced early in 1932 that because of the economic crisis facing the nation he would not attend the Olympics. He asked former president Calvin Coolidge to replace him. But Coolidge, through his press secretary, Harry

Ross, said he would not go. In his typically “silent” fashion he refused to “simplify” his answer or comment further. He also continued his silence on the upcoming presidential campaign and declined comment on the speculation that he might replace Hoover on the Republican ticket.⁴⁰ Will Rogers, after hearing the news that Hoover would not open the Games, observed that it meant that “his political advisers have assured him that the state [California] is ‘safe.’” Rogers jibed that the president “will not only miss some votes, but will miss some awfully good running and jumping. Maybe he has seen enough of that in Washington,” joked Rogers.⁴¹ The Olympic organizers finally secured Vice-President Charles Curtis to preside over the opening ceremonies.⁴²

Visions of Olympic Harmony

As the Games approached, the usual paeans to the ideals of Olympism appeared. Major George van Rossem, secretary of the Netherlands Olympic Committee, lauded the Olympic village concept. “This idea of the athletes of the world living together as neighbors will go a long way toward promoting world peace.”⁴³ According to the *Los Angeles Times*’ Muriel Babcock, the East Indian field hockey team represented Olympic idealism in microcosm. The four Moslems, four Hindus, one Sikh and nine Anglo-Indians who made up the team “all eat together and are encamped together without regard for race or custom. Legendary caste systems are laid aside.”⁴⁴

Few negative notices about the upcoming spectacle at Los Angeles appeared in the American press. But *The Christian Century* scathingly satirized the Olympic idea in an editorial entitled “Well, Let’s Hope For the Best.” The editor recalled that “a gentleman who was introduced as the publicity representative of the Olympic games committee spoke over the radio the other night on the approach of this ‘greatest ath-a-letic event in human history’ and begged his listeners to send in the dollars and get a button *as* reward.” *The Christian Century* revealed that “the button would show that they had contributed to the support of the American team which, in the Los Angeles stadium, will begin this week to demonstrate its superiority over the rest of mankind in the various events that make up the Olympic program.” *The Christian Weekly* noted that the last attempt at such a demonstration “rather failed to come off, since the winners in the events that command most public interest proved to be a strange collection of Firms, Germans, British, South africans [sic], Canadians, and even an unknown who came wandering in from some spot on the Sahara desert, or thereabouts, to win the prize event of all, the Marathon race.” The editor joked that “this time, however, under the inspiration of the southern California climate and the promised presence of practically the entire feminine population of Hollywood, the Americans are expected to clean up.” The editor scoffed at the notion that the Olympics aided the cause of world peace. “As promoters of good will the Olympic games of the past have been about equal to a second-rate war. So far as we know, no one has been killed yet at one of these athletic love feasts,” quipped *The Christian Century*.^{4 5}

Most coverage of the Tenth Olympics contained far rosier predictions. The *New York Times* insisted that “here is one enterprise with a budget that is balanced before

the goods are delivered. A fine and healthy spirit, excellent for international understanding, persists in the human mind to make this possible."⁴⁶ The *Los Angeles Times* announced that "thirty-six flags of thirty-six peoples, created equal in opportunity, will float above the city of Los Angeles in the democ[r]atic free-for-all struggle for world athletic honors; not one will be hoisted above the others except to herald a winner in fair and open contest."

The *Los Angeles Times* daily claimed that "instead of the depression discouraging the Tenth Olympiad, the Tenth Olympiad is discounting the depression." The Olympic motto, "Citius, Fortius, Altius," expressed "perfectly the aspirations of all athletes in the field of sports," wrote the editor. But he thought that the motto did even more than that. "It typifies the ambitions of Los Angeles to lead the civic procession to a bright fresh start dating from August, 1932."⁴⁷

An Olympian Publicity Machine -- Hollywood-style

The hyperbole surrounding the Los Angeles Games far surpassed any of the media frenzies at previous Olympics. Innumerable stories appeared in the American press about all the mundane and personal aspects of Olympians' lives. The Los Angeles social register helped promote hype. A local gossip columnist reported that three Olympic gala balls had been planned and revealed that many socialites would be returning from California's beaches and mountains to help with the festivities.⁴⁸ But Hollywood made the most generous contribution of all to the glut of glitz. The *Los Angeles Times'* Muriel Babcock gabbled that the Olympians at least outwardly showed more interest in meeting motion picture stars than in winning gold medals. Some of the studios threw parties for the athletes at which things got out of hand. Babcock gossiped about a Paramount gala at which some Argentine Olympians chased Marlene Dietrich and her bodyguards around the studio lot.⁴⁹

A Los Angeles department store, the J.W. Robinson Co., hyped both the Games and a new book by rescuing one of America's finest and most neglected Olympians from obscurity. They brought the "greatest all-around athlete of all time," Jim Thorpe, to their store to autograph copies of a *History of the Olympics* written by Thorpe and Thomas F. Collison. The advertisement included an endorsement from long-time Olympic track and field coach Lawson Robertson who wondered "Who could be better qualified than a double champion to picture a history of the greatest of international sports, the Olympic Games?" The copywriter added that "Thorpe's engrossing publication confirms Robertson's opinion." The advertisement announced that the public could find Thorpe in Robinson's book section between 2 and 4 P.M. on July 20 autographing copies of his book.⁵⁰

On Saturday, July 30, 105,000 spectators filled the Los Angeles Coliseum--it apparently never reached the 125,000 seat capacity the *Every Week Magazine* had projected--for the opening ceremonies of the Tenth Olympic Games.⁵¹ Jim Thorpe, given the "cold shoulder" at ticket headquarters, moped disconsolently outside the stadium until a "last minute gift ticket" gained him entrance to the press box. Thorpe reportedly "sobbed softly as the United States flag dipped in salute" before Vice-President Curtis' box.⁵² The American flag, which legend had it was never lowered for a foreign pontiff, was cursorily lowered before an American

vice-president. The next day, after reading of Thorpe's plight in the Sunday paper, the vice-president, whose maternal great grandmother had been the daughter of a Kaw Indian chieftain, got film mogul Louis B. Mayer to grant Thorpe a "season" Olympic pass.⁵³

Los Angeles provided all the familiar pageantry that made for a standard Olympic kickoff festival -- white doves, twenty-one gun salutes, the lighting of the Olympic torch, and a vast choir singing the Olympic hymn. Dr. Robert Gordon Sproul, president of the University of California, gave the benedictory address. "With one heart and with one voice, we who are here assembled, spectators and competitors alike, dedicate these Games to the high purpose in which the original Olympiad was conceived, and to which it ideally administered--to clean sport and fair play, to the development of sound minds in sound bodies, to the loyalties of the team underwriting the loyalties of life, to respect for opponents, win or lose, and to the brotherhood of mankind," prayed Sproul.⁵⁴

The parade of nations had by 1932 become a spectacle which underscored all the myths Americans cherished about the Olympic Games. According to American tradition, the opening ceremonies highlighted the brotherhood of nations which Olympism promoted, revealed the character of nations in the demeanor of their teams, and sanctified the spirit of fair play--of which the Americans thought themselves the foremost practitioners--by ceremony and oath.

Gazing through the eyes of an American reporter in Los Angeles on opening day reveals the mytho-poetic power of the Olympics in the American culture. The reporter imagined Uncle Sam himself greeting the athletes of the world, and claimed that the national symbol had done a better job of opening the Games than anyone since 776 B.C. (the date of the first recorded Olympiad in ancient Greece). Following Uncle Sam, Vice-President Charles Curtis entered the stadium to a spectacular roar and joined the "bigwigs" at the Tribune of Honor. The crowd hushed when the first flag-bearer led his nation's team into the stadium. Greece headed up the procession, the position of honor theirs for the genesis of the Olympic idea. Following the Greeks came the nations of the world in alphabetical order, impressing on the assembled multitudes how the "Olympiads make Mother Earth small." Each team left an indelible impression of its national character on the spectators. The Argentineans were "browed by pampas suns," the Brazilians "bronzed boys." The crowd murmured at Holland's blonde beauties and were astonished by the colorfully turbaned Indians and fezzed Egyptians. Italy, militarily precise in blue and white, thrilled the crowd with a fascist salute. Surprisingly, Canada, Finland, France, Hungary, India, Mexico, New Zealand and Switzerland also greeted Vice-President Curtis with what the press thought were fascist salutations.⁵⁵ Soon after came "the perfect little brown gentlemen of Japan in their black coats and white trousers." Their politeness bothered Western sensibilities. "Why must they be so absolutely correct, these Japanese?", remarked the reporter.

Finally the Americans entered the stadium. Clad in "severely proper street wear" the red, white and blue legion let a "choking sensation" with the observer as he watched the "magnificent body of our nation's priceless flower" enter the arena. "Here are peace-time defenders of the Stars and Stripes, whose straight lines and generally conservative arrangement are characteristic of America's own personality

and actions.” In the reporter’s eyes, the Americans stood out from the rest of the world, neither rakish nor bombastic like the South Americans, nor imperial like the Germans or Mussolini’s minions, nor dangerously polite like the inscrutable Japanese.⁵⁶

An Orgy of National Self-Congratulation

With the opening ceremonies completed the Games began. Each victory for the United States would be a vindication of the American way of life and proof of superior national character. And victories would come fast and furiously for the hosts of the Games of the Tenth Olympiad.

A *Los Angeles Times* cartoon best symbolized America’s athletic domination. It pictured a vigorous young American Olympian hurdling over a wall emblazoned by the Olympic rings, the shield of the United States and the Olympic motto; while a smiling globe and “Miss L.A.” looked on. Captioned “Swifter, Stronger, Higher,” it underscored the United States’ sporting supremacy.⁵⁷ And what a show the United States put on, not only as athletes but also as hosts. The media gushed that the Los Angeles Olympics had produced “feats that may live as long in human history as those of their ancient Greek prototypes.” An Eastern editor reported incredulously that “Los Angeles reproduced ‘the glory that was Greece’ in a grand manner and on a vast scale.” Or, as a rube from the hinterlands was reported to have remarked, “gosh, what a spectacle!”⁵⁸

As the Americans turned the spectacle into an overwhelming display of their athletic prowess, the press engaged in an orgy of nationalistic self-congratulation. “Uncle Sam Cleans Up,” “America Runs Rampant On Olympic Battlefield,” and “Sons of Uncle Sam Again Win Crushing Victories,” headlined odes to American athletic virtuosity.⁵⁹ In their special Olympic sections, the *Los Angeles Times* prominently pictured the flag of that day’s top Olympic winner. Most days the Stars and Stripes headed the *Los Angeles* daily’s coverage. On the day the Tenth Olympic Games concluded, sportswriter Paul Lowry triumphantly asked, “who won the Olympics? The answer comes echoing back from the hills like a clap of thunder. The United States. Use any set of mathematics known to the human mind, and you can arrive at only one conclusion.” Once again, by their own reckoning, the United States had beaten the world.⁶⁰

“What is the ranking of the nations in the realm of muscular power, skill and the dynamite that wills to win?” *The Literary Digest* coyly put that question to its readers, knowing full well the answer. The magazine set its answer forth in statistical fashion. One table, borrowed from the Associated Press, showed that based on team finishes in the various types of events the United States ranked first with 110 points, followed at a distance by Italy (42), Germany (41), and France (29 and 1/2). Another graphic illustration, gleaned from the *New York Times*, indicated that based on individual performances, the United States had far outscored its nearest competitors, racking up 740 and 1/2 points to Italy’s 262: and 1/2, Japan’s 160, Sweden’s 154 and the 151 points of France and Germany.⁶¹ The *Report of the American Olympic Committee* on the 1932 Olympics showed the United States with 41 gold medals, 32 silver medals and 30 bronze medals. Italy finished a distant second with 12 gold, 12

silver and 11 bronze medals. Next in the medal parade came Sweden, France, Finland, Japan and Germany. No matter how it was scored the United States had achieved an overwhelming victory.⁶²

“The total of forty-one Olympic championships won by athletes of the United States is the largest ever won by a single nation in post-war Games,” gloated Olympic organizing committee member William Henry. He pointed out that the United States had won more than any other four nations put together and had gathered more than one-third of the total prizes. Henry admitted that the U.S. fielded the largest entry, but he steadfastly maintained that the United States won mainly “because they were outstanding stars and not because of the absence of good competition.”⁶³

In the same issue in which *The Literary Digest* graphically illustrated the American dominance at the Games the magazine also attempted to explain why the Americans won so handily. They first dismissed the notion that holding the Olympics in, as they put it, “our own back yard” gave the United States an insurmountable advantage by pointing out that American middle distance runners--generally regarded as the world’s best--were whipped by English and Italian runners. With that dubious point made, the magazine went on to assert that “the foreigners to fail conspicuously were not the high strung runners, but the shot-putters--just the type least likely to be affected by travel.”

The key to American success, claimed the *Digest*, was American sports science. Pointing to the work of University of Iowa coach George Bresnahan on sprinters’ starting techniques, A.C. Gilbert of Yale’s cinematic studies of pole vaulting, and the Intercollegiate A.A.A.A. wind tunnel experiments to discover what effect breezes had on discuses and javelins, the *Digest’s* reporter described sport as a “specialized study that reaches from dietetics into the sphere of muscular reaction” and gave credit for U.S. triumphs to the scientific method.⁶⁴

Accolades for American triumphs poured in from every part of the country. The *Richmond News-Leader* lauded the financial success of the Games and indicated that record-making performances “show conclusively that in stamina and muscular coordination the human race is not deteriorating.” The *Richmond* daily saluted the United States team which “crashed through for spectacular victory.”⁶⁵ The *New York Times* proudly announced that on the list of winners bound for the I.O.C. archives in Lausanne, Switzerland, were the names of forty-one American teams and individuals, “the greatest number of championships ever collected by a country in a modern Olympiad, with American entrants winning more titles than any four other nations.”⁶⁶

William May Garland, president of the Olympic organizing committee, credited the entire nation for making the Tenth Olympic Games a success. “Without boasting and without fear of criticism I feel that I can say that the games were the finest ever held,” proclaimed Garland.⁶⁷ *New York Times* correspondent Chapin Hall cheerfully labeled the Games the “flop that failed.” Californians had forgotten local and state politics and even the “alleged depression” when Olympic fever overtook them reported Hall. An average of \$40,000 a day flowed into the organizing committee’s coffers from seat sales alone. Fears of empty blocks of benches in the stadium were soon replaced by the concern over the “clamoring hordes” who could not get tickets.⁶⁸ Newspapers estimated that \$2,000,000 in gate receipts had been collected

and more than 1,000,000 people had attended the Games by the time the closing ceremonies rolled around on August 14.⁶⁹

Revelations of National Character and Status

The Olympics offered proof of American superiority, provided escapist entertainment, and were depicted as an economic success amidst the dislocations of the Great Depression. They also afforded unique perspectives for viewing what the public understood as the essential natures of other nations through the medium of their athletic performances. Individual stars supposedly highlighted national characteristics at the Olympics. The American press celebrated Argentina's Juan Carlos Zabala, the newsboy who won the Marathon with a Latin flourish; and Luigi Beccali, the Italian filled with braggadocio, who no one thought had a chance and yet won the 1500 meters. Chuhei Nambu, the great Japanese long-jumper, shamed himself when, because of a leg injury, he could take no better than third in the event in which he held the world's record. "Chagrined at this failure, Nambu called upon superhuman strength and with the characteristics of his race, refused to allow any handicap to deter him from his main course," wrote an American commentator on the Japanese star's effort in the triple-jump. Trailing Erik Svensson of Sweden and faced with a last attempt, Nambu uncorked a world record leap to garner the gold.⁷⁰

Nambu's triumph highlighted the best showing that a non-European nation--excluding the United States, of course--had ever made in the modern Olympics. The Japanese won seven gold, seven silver and four bronze medals at the Olympics. They did particularly well in swimming. Their seven first places put them in fifth position in that category at Los Angeles. Lou Handley, coach of the United States swimming team, explained that the Japanese domination of men's swimming owed to the fact that they had utilized motion picture technology to "scientifically" perfect their strokes. Grantland Rice revealed that at Los Angeles the Japanese had turned their cameras on the world's best rowers in hopes of unlocking the secrets of form that would allow a Japanese crew to take home the gold medal in 1936. Rice noted that the United States had often been criticized for taking sport to extremes, but that Japan's methods had cast a new light on that old sin. "Their angle is that if sport is worth while, then winning is worth while," wrote Rice. "If you are going into something--why be content with second or third place."⁷¹ Former Olympic swimming star and then movie Tarzan, Johnny Weissmuller, agreed with Rice. The United States would have to adopt the Japanese attitude. Then, "if all the coaches and swimmers will work for national success instead of individual or club glory America will be in a position to challenge Japanese swimmers on equal terms at Berlin in 1936"⁷²

As the Japanese team prepared to embark for the voyage home, Mayor Porter of Los Angeles thanked them for the high standard of sportsmanship which they had set. Baron Takeichi Nishi, the Japanese army lieutenant who had won a gold medal in the equestrian competition and was the acknowledged leader of the Japanese team, thanked the mayor for the hospitality Los Angeles had extended to the Japanese team. At the docks 10,000 Japanese-Americans saw their compatriots off with shouts of

“see you in 1940”--since Tokyo had been selected as the site of the Games of the Twelfth Olympiad.⁷³

But the Japanese also took some unpleasant memories of the “city of angels” home with them. According to an editorial in the *Japan Times*, when Japanese Olympians tried to enter dance halls or first-class restaurants they were met at the door with assertions of “Mexicans are not admitted.” When they protested that they were Japanese it simply made matters worse. “Most disgusting of all,” continued the reporter, “was the fact that the second generation Japanese and those resident in California took such a situation for granted.” The newspaper lamented that the Japanese athletes were gravely distressed by American bigotry and that the “matter of racial prejudice is perhaps the profoundest impression carried in the hearts of the Japanese team.” The Japanese Olympians remembered that their treatment by officials and spectators at the contests, however, was quite fair and polite. But they thought that Los Angeles itself was not quite up to the modern standards of Tokyo’s architecture and the “general lack of etiquette” among casual Californians astonished them.⁷⁴

Shifting the Olympic Discourse -- Countervailing Spectacles

While the Los Angeles Games were altering American perceptions of the Japanese, they also stirred up debate in the United States about the place of women in American society. The 1932 Olympics provided a showcase for women’s athletics. But not every observer came away a convert. One well-known writer opined that “women could never learn to throw properly and I don’t believe they will ever learn to run and jump gracefully.” He recommended that female athletes be confined to tennis, swimming and diving.⁷⁵ Dr. Frederick Rand Rogers, former head of the New York State Department of Health and Physical Education and then the dean of student health and physical education at Boston University, blustered that the Olympics in particular and competitive sports in general were “women’s greatest enemy, because they will cause her to lose her womanliness.” The professor, “speaking bluntly,” dusted off an old objection to women’s sport in warning that “girls trained in physical education to-day may find it more difficult to attract the most worthy fathers for their children.”⁷⁶ The general opinion, according to Grantland Rice, was that “the female of the species may or may not be deadlier than the male, but on the athletic field she isn’t as graceful.” Grace was the centerpiece of the argument for it signified in Rice’s opinion a treasured quality in females--a quality cherished by both men and women.

The lack of grace among female track and field competitors represent the major argument against women’s participation in the Olympics put forward by a group of women with whom Rice had chatted. While Rice claimed that women athletes were not then more graceful than their male counterparts, nor would they probably ever be--women possessing less strength, the key ingredient in grace in Rice’s estimation--he pointed out that they had far less practice and experience in track while “men have had the heritage of centuries to work with.” He also noted that a woman’s world record was broken in each of the six track and field events which women contested at the Los Angeles Olympics. “Certainly for sheer grace there were

few men at Los Angeles who had any large edge on Babe Didrikson,” Rice wrote. “It was a treat to watch her.” The *Dallas News* added that “perhaps she supplies the proof that the comparatively recent turn of women to strenuous field sports is developing a new super-physique in womanhood, an unexpected outcome of suffragism which goes in for sports as well as politics, and threatens the old male supremacy even in the mere routine of making a living.”

Rice went to great lengths to assure his readers that these new “super-physiques did not detract from the “fairer sex’s” fairness. He admitted that America’s female Olympians labored under the condition that their sporting activities must not detract from their beauty. Rice gushed that sport had certainly “not hurt the looks of Helen Wills, Glenna Collett, Eleanor Holm, Josephine McKim, Georgia Coleman, Virginia Van Wie, Jane Fauntz and a flock of others I might mention.” He even lauded Didrikson’s looks--she was commonly perceived as less than pretty. At a slender 126 pounds she proved that “a woman doesn’t have to look like a weight lifter or a piano mover to star in sport.”⁷⁷ Westbrook Pegler wrote that on first inspection Didrikson appeared plain, “but the mouth can relax and the eyes smile, and the greatest girl athlete in the world just now, with a special liking for men’s games, is as feminine as hairpins.”⁷⁸ The male sportswriters wanted to reassure the public that Didrikson and the other American Olympic heroines could find “fathers for their children.”

The Natural -- Babe Didrikson

In media mythologies Babe Didrikson represented a quintessential American sporting stereotype, the “natural” who had captured the attention of a coach when she dropped by a sporting goods store and did “tricks” with a fifty-pound weight. Two years later she was the foremost all-around athlete in the United States. She dominated American track and field, twice earned All-American honors in basketball, held the world record for the baseball throw, became a world-class golfer nearly instantaneously, and in every way merited the exalted plateau on which she resided in American popular culture near her namesake, Babe Ruth. Didrikson’s feats in Los Angeles had astounded the nation’s sportswriters and captured the public’s imagination.⁷⁹ In fact, they took on the proportion of legend--a peculiarly American legend, in the “exaggerated” tradition of American folk heroes and heroines. It was widely reported that she had won the javelin on a toss which had “slipped.” True or not, the story embellished her image. Braven Dyer described her triumph over the world record holder in the javelin, Ellen Braumuller of Germany, as the triumph of strenuous Americanism over the decadent Old World. The robotic German “put everything she had into her work, but couldn’t quite match the skill and strength of this confident kid from the wilds of the Lone Star State.”⁸⁰

The scribes of the athletic world always reassured the public that the “Texas Tornado’s” talents were more than merely muscular. They tempered their athletic accolades with careful praise for her feminine qualities. They pointed to her cooking and sewing talents, non-athletic skills her namesake, the Yankee slugger, never needed to impress sportdom’s chroniclers. Babe soon became so adored that the *Atlanta Constitution’s* sports editor Ralph McGill hoped she would ignore all the “chisellers” offers to turn her glory into cash and wished that she “goes back to Dallas

and her job and wins a few more prizes for sewing box pleats at the state fair.” After all, she “must be a rather swell, natural sort of person,” he gushed.⁸¹ Certainly no sportswriter ever hoped that Babe Ruth would forsake the spotlight and return to blue collar obscurity in his hometown of Baltimore. Nor did anyone worry that he would not find a “worthy” mother for his children. But American popular culture in the 1930s required different things from men and women.

Aileen Riggin, who won the first gold medal ever garnered by an American woman when she captured the diving title at Antwerp in 1920, thought that by 1932 a woman’s place was on the playing field. She observed that women had been banned from the first revival of the modern Olympics in 1896. “That naughty mauve decade was just about to die, however, and woman was to emerge as a person and not as a mere bit of scenery,” declared the former Olympic champion. “The emancipation of woman became the cry and, almost before anyone realized it, women were voting, swimming and really living for the first time,” Riggin asserted.⁸² Some women found increased opportunity and raised consciousness through sport. Ada Sackett Taylor, who headed the women’s committee of the A.A.U., rebutted Dr. Rogers’ charges that athletic women had a hard time finding fathers for their children by invoking one of the cherished beliefs of American sporting ideology. “As far as attracting a worthy father for her children is concerned, the fact that a girl is trained in physical education should help her use her head along with her heart when it comes to selecting a life mate,” opined Sackett.⁸³ *Mens sana in corpore sano* applied to women as well as men.

The media’s analysis of Babe Didrikson and the rest of America’s women Olympians was that they had performed valuable national services. Good looks represented a fortuitous bonus, proof that sport did not defeminize the so-called “weaker sex.” They had provided eleven gold medals for the cause of athletic nationalism, and even if they had been among the least handsome women in the Republic their achievements would still have been hailed since they helped keep the United States on top of the world and added to the country’s Olympic mythology. But despite some increased avenues for achievement, sport still reinforced traditional feminine roles. Popular attitudes still required the defense of sport for women as a beauty aid.

Other Naturals -- The “Sable Cyclones”

African-Americans also made a significant contribution to the U.S. victory. Eddie Tolan and Ralph Metcalfe dominated the sprints finishing first and second respectively in both the 100 meter and 200 meter dashes. Edward Gordon won the long jump. Phil Edwards finished third in the 800 meter race. Often referred to in the press as America’s “dusky” Olympians or the “sable cyclones,” Tolan, Metcalfe and the other African-American stars were heartily congratulated for their quiet, polite demeanor. The press rewarded them for appearing to know their places. Grantland Rice employed their skin color in his poetic palette. He painted their bursting upon the scene like “two black bolts from the Azure of a California sky.” Yet most of the mainstream press accounts never addressed the social conditions

which American culture manufactured around skin color nor the significance of the “midnight express’s” (Tolan) two gold medals to America’s racial dynamics.⁸⁴

Certainly the African-American press celebrated their victories. Tolan appeared on the cover of the September issue of the N.A.A.C.P.’s *Crisis*. The journal triumphantly reported that the man who had been “the victim of a brazen discrimination and Jim Crow snobbishness” by his American teammates at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam was now an American Olympic hero.⁸⁵ The governor of the state of Michigan, Wilbur Brucker, declared September 6, 1932 “Eddie Tolan” day to honor the University of Michigan champion. A fatigued Tolan, frustrated by the constant pressure, told the press “I don’t think I’ll ever run again.”⁸⁶

White America mostly ignored the race issue in American sport. Only someone as blunt as Will Rogers could speak about the contribution that America’s most oppressed citizens made to the nation’s pride. “The man that brought the first ‘slaves’ to this country must have had these Olympic Games in mind, for these ‘senegambians’ have just run the white man ragged. Every winner is either an American Negro or an American white woman,” Rogers mused. “Wait till we get to golf, bridge or cocktail shaking, then the American white man will come into his own.”⁸⁷

Rogers’ jests touched on a subject which was rarely discussed in mainstream society. Like Joe Louis, Tolan and Metcalfe were African-American men who excelled in sports controlled by whites, and who beat all white challengers. That produced a huge undercurrent of discomfort in American society. But in 1932 it did not produce any serious discussion of the social role of blacks or of racial inequality. In a sense, sport had become the new “plantation” for blacks. They toiled diligently at athletics adding luster to America’s mythology of equal opportunity for all. Gold medals won by black Olympians confirmed to most white Americans the superiority of the American system by helping to keep the United States ahead of the world at the Olympics. In reality blacks were shut out of most mainstream American cultural and political systems by racism as surely as they had been before the 13th Amendment by their legal status as slaves.⁸⁸

Particularly in the South even black Olympic heroes remained mostly “invisible men.” Atlanta mayor James Lee Key revealed in his proclamation of September 23, 1932 as “Ralph Metcalfe Day” the tragedy of segregation. Barred by Jim Crow practices from Southern universities, the Atlanta-bred Metcalfe had pursued athletic fame at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Mayor Key urged white as well as black Georgians to honor Metcalfe in “such a manner as to give due recognition to the internationally known athlete who was born in Atlanta, and who, if he had remained here, would probably have been a rose ’born to blush unseen, its fragrance wasted on the desert air.”⁸⁹

The 1932 African-American Olympians did not bloom totally unseen. Their accomplishments added to the rising black consciousness in the United States, a consciousness which would be greatly stirred by the exploits of the “black Messiah,” Joe Louis, during the 1930s.⁹⁰ That consciousness would also be heightened by Jesse Owens’ performances at the next Olympic Games. The struggle to win civil rights for African-Americans and the struggle to win Olympic medals would soon be linked.

Transcendent Olympism

In the eyes of much of the public America's Olympians, of all races and genders, had once again proved that their nation was specially blessed. The Los Angeles Games had been a financial success and a grand spectacle. Hollywood itself could not have produced a better version of the Tenth Olympics. The Games also gave a major impetus to the growth of Olympism. The American press coverage of the Games was filled with references to the friendship between nations that the Olympics produced. The Olympics appeared the most essential institution ever created for promoting world peace.

An anecdote from the Olympic Village underscored the effect that converts believed Olympism had on building understanding between nations and preventing war. Dr. T. Yamamoto, the Waseda University professor in charge of the Japanese track and field team, gave Terrel DeLapp of the *Los Angeles Times* an interesting interview at the end of the Games. "We do not care what your Secretary, Mr. Stimson, says about us," intoned Yamamoto. "Because we know you now." The professor insisted that "in sport the man is naked. His real character comes out, in victory and defeat. We get a clear picture of each other. We are face to face. We become truly friends in battle. There is brotherhood in this." Yamamoto announced that because of the competition at Los Angeles "our Japanese men know your men now. We admire them. Japan is now closer to you. We will take back the word. No, we do not care what statesman say: we know you now."⁹¹

For its believers, Olympism could build understanding among even the most suspicious foes such as the United States and Japan. They hoped that the camaraderie which flowed from friendly competition would heal breaches that frustrated even the most astute statesmen and diplomats. Even religious leaders praised the positive role the modern Olympics played in global affairs. "The flower of the world's youth came to Los Angeles, but this time not to the accompaniment of the shriek of shrapnel, whine of bullets, booming of Big Berthas and withering fumes of poison gas," Dr. John Snape thankfully told his congregation at Temple Baptist Church in Los Angeles on the day the Tenth Olympics ended. "The hands extended had in them not bayonets but the proffer of a linked fraternity pledged to noble ends," continued Pastor Snape. "The Olympiad has left a residuum of good will that will make it difficult for forty-eight nations ever again to engage in war, a residuum of good sportsmanship that was unmarred in any serious way, a residuum of good experiences both of defeat and victory, that revealed the wholesomeness, development and nobility of youth that become at once the pride and hope of mellow men."⁹²

Not only did the Olympics make the world a safer place, believed the *Christian Science Monitor*, but "it is quite possible there may be a connection between this movement and the wider acceptance of democratic government in recent years." The *Monitor* stressed the correlation between the sacrifices of personal interest for communal goals as a necessary ingredient of both sport and republican forms of government. Thus the *Monitor* firmly intertwined the sacred American mission of spreading the American way of democratic life with participation in international sport. Teaching the world to elect good men, to paraphrase Woodrow Wilson's threat

to Latin America, could be done at the Olympic Games. The *Monitor* warned that athletic nationalism might soon undermine Olympism. The media medal count and their crowning of a particular nation as the Olympic champion presented the "real danger that enthusiastic nationalism and an overzealous press will put the emphasis on national rivalries," warned the *Monitor*. Such an outcome would destroy the best vehicle that Americans knew for the promotion of world understanding and the spread of democracy.⁹³

A Dissenting Voice

Only the *Christian Century* strongly dissented from the common opinion that athletic competition was a cure-all for the world's problems. The *Christian Century*'s editor began condescendingly enough. "Every meeting and mingling of peoples in the spirit of good nature is an excellent thing, so far as it goes, and cynical remarks about the limited value of any particular episode should not be taken too seriously." But, the editor admonished his readers, the spirit of sportsmanship "is never enough to determine attitudes in the serious business of life. Habits learned in sports are not transferable to the field of reality, and it has never been demonstrated that the courage and other virtues supposed to be acquired in football and other games are effectively carried over into the real moral crises that are encountered later." The editor admitted that the Los Angeles Olympics were the first that had not "broken up in a row." But he wondered whether Olympism deserved the credit for the global harmony demonstrated at the Olympics. "Perhaps the Olympic athletes have been teaching peace to nations," concluded the editor, "or perhaps they have been learning it."⁹⁴

One gentleman reader of *The Christian Century*, a Mr. Harold T. Janes of Pasadena, California, chided the periodical for its negativism. Mr. Janes wrote that "many of our citizens, for example, came away from the games with a deep sense of humility after they had seen many of our best athletes go down in defeat before the representatives of other countries." The "anti-Japanese Californians who cheered the diminutive Japanese pole vaulter as he went higher and higher, could not help but leave with their egoism deflated and their appreciation of the talents of other nationalities enlarged," declared Janes. "Perhaps the most comforting thing about the Olympic games in Los Angeles was this: 100 per cent Americans found little comfort in them."⁹⁵

Appeals To American Athletic Nationalism

German sport scholar Carl Diem, who would mastermind the 1936 celebration of the Olympics, told Americans that he and his nation could only hope to equal Los Angeles' extravaganza.⁹⁶ Americans congratulated themselves for showing the world that despite the Great Depression their nation still thrived. "If there was any lingering doubt of the important position occupied by amateur sport in the life of our times it was dissipated in Los Angeles in August, 1932," began Avery Brundage's A.O.C. official report on the 1932 Olympics. Brundage pronounced the Games "a huge and unqualified success athletically, socially and even financially, the greatest event of its kind ever held." Brundage insisted that the Olympics had lifted the gloom

and despair of the Depression. He congratulated the champions, pointing to the widely distributed success of various races and nations. He imagined the influence of the Los Angeles Games spreading through the world in ever widening circles. The Olympics could not help but “advance the cause of mankind” felt the A.O.C. leader.

In the future, Brundage suggested that the United States develop better strategies for raising money in order to support its athletic missionaries. “National subsidies as granted in other countries have never been favored here, and it has always been felt that the sport loving public of the United States would willingly defray the cost of sending their teams to the Games.” Brundage found “no reason to believe that this assumption is not correct.” But Brundage felt that a better system had to be found to “lighten the colossal task” of raising several hundred thousand dollars which the A.O.C. faced quadrennially. He suggested that perhaps an endowment or a tax levied on amateur sport was the answer. “At any rate,” he thought, “there is a growing conviction that those interested in each sport on the Olympic program should be responsible for financing that sport.”

For the present, Brundage believed, the Olympics were the last, best hope for humankind. “Midst the crash of social systems, governments and other man made structures of various kinds, amateur sport with its shining ideals of friendly courtesy and fair play stands firm and the Olympic torch lights the way to mutual respect and understanding and international good will,” he concluded.⁹⁷

Brundage’s republican rhetoric underscored the fact that most athletic leaders and much of the public believed that sport resided at the heart of the American social system. The “theology of good guys and bad guys” generated by the marketing of United States Olympians in the national press proclaimed that American society and its sporting institutions produced superior athletes and better citizens than any other nation on earth. The press concluded that the national commitment to egalitarianism and representative democracy, even in the face of economic disaster, had once again propelled “America’s athletic missionaries” to Olympic victory.

While a few alternative views which focused on gender and race raised questions about the social realities behind the Olympian images, American Olympic chroniclers preached to a choir which in the main believed that they were the “good guys” and that the rest of the world was governed by social systems which produced some not quite so “good guys” and some “bad guys.” The national identity marketed by the Los Angeles Olympics fueled patriotic visions of providential superiority. It also confirmed the idea that sport, particularly Olympic sport, provided a crucible in which to cast a world-beating citizenry to people the American republic. The triumph of nationalism in American ideas about the Olympics would have important consequences at the next Olympic celebration, scheduled to be held in 1936 in Germany.

Notes

1. As the historian Allen Guttman has pointed out the modern Olympic Games themselves are organized by a distinctively Western political ideology which makes universalistic claims about the power of sport to shape national character. Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games* (Urbana: University of

Illinois Press, 1992) and *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

2. Paul Gallico, *The Golden People* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 13-28, as cited in Bruce J. Evensen, "Jazz Age Journalism's Battle Over Professionalism, Circulation, and the Sports Page," *Journal of Sport History* 20 (Winter 1993), 229-246.

3. Duncan Aikman, "Making the Olympic Games Alibi-Proof," *New York Times Magazine*, June 19, 1932, 6 and 19.

4. Jim Thorpe and Thomas F. Collison, *Jim Thorpe's History of the Olympic Games* (Los Angeles: Wetzel, 1932), 276-277.

5. Harry Spencer Stuff, *The Story of the Olympic Games: With Official Records* (Los Angeles: Times-Mirror, 1931); H. Grenier and L. Gidley, *Olympic Games Old and New* (Rivera, Cal.: American Printers, 1932).

6. Warwick S. Carpenter, "On to the Olympic Games!," *Country Life* (62), June-July 1932, 74.

7. *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1932, 4.

8. "Olympic Games As a Depression Buster," *Literary Digest* (113), June 18, 1932, 28.

9. "Brundage Orders Team Reductions," *New York Times*, May 27, 1932, 29.

10. Allen Guttman, *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 35-37; Avery Brundage, "The Olympic Ideal, and American Participation in the Olympic Games," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention of the National Collegiate Athletic Association*, Held at New York City, New York, December 31, 1930, 111-122.

11. *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1932, 5; *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1932, sec. 2, 2; *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1932, sec. 3, 20.

12. *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1932, sec. 2, 9.

13. "\$350,000 to Be Raised in Cities Over 15,000 to Defray Costs of America's Olympic Squad," *New York Times*, January 13, 1932, 28.

14. "\$350,000 to Be Raised," 28.

15. "Gov. Roosevelt Proclaims First Week in May As Period to Stimulate Interest in Olympics," *New York Times*, April 23, 1932, 18.

16. "Proclaims Olympic Week," *New York Times*, May 3, 1932, 13.

17. "Law is Law, Says U.S. Dry Chief, as He Bars Beer and Wine in Diet of Olympic Invaders," *New York Times*, April 22, 1932, 25.

18. Aikman, "Making Games Alibi-Proof," 19.

19. "French Olympic Team to Get Sugar in Place of Wines," *New York Times*, April 13, 1932, 15.

20. "Roosevelt Invokes An 'Olympic Peace,'" *New York Times*, February 5, 1932, 21.

21. "Count Baillet-Latour Says Harmony Rules Among Nations at Winter Games," *New York Times*, February 12, 1932, 27.
22. "Two National Radio Chains to Give Details of Winter Olympic Contests at Lake Placid," *New York Times*, January 12, 1932, 31.
23. Arthur J. Daley, "Fiske's Team Wins Olympic Bob Title," *New York Times*, February 16, 1932, 25.
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