A Level Playing Field:
Black and Jewish Athletes
and the 1936 Olympics
"Although Coubertin and his followers were not immune to the racism of their day, their liberalism was - at least theoretically - colorblind. The Olympic Games were also meant to symbolize the irrelevance of race within the world of sports and, ultimately, within the political realm. The removal of racial barriers was a less explicit goal than the elimination of hostilities based on national and religious differences, but interracial harmony has gradually become a major tenet of Olympism."

(Allen Guttmann, The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games, 3)

"I think my experience in 1936, my experience in athletics generally, specifically in '36, made me aware of the fact that I am not different than other people of the world. I am not different than blacks or browns or yellows or whites. That we're all one...I've learned to appreciate other people I think because of my experience in '36 and my experience in athletics."

("Interview with Marty Glickman, (May 20, 1996)," 71).
Table of Contents

I. Introduction: Understanding the Black and Jewish Athletes of the 1936 Olympics........................................................................................................1

II. Destination Berlin?: The Controversy Surrounding the 1936 Olympic Games........................................................................................................7

III. A Lifetime in the Game: The Social and Psychological Effects of Sports Participation..............................................................................................39

IV. In Their Own Words: The 1936 Olympics from the Athletes’ Perspective..............................................................................................................49

V. Conclusion: The Effect of Sports Participation on the Black and Jewish Athletes of the 1936 Olympics.................................................................60

VI. Bibliography........................................................................................................68
Jesse Owens was about nine years old when his family moved from Oakville, Alabama, to Cleveland, Ohio, where he would attend grade school for the first time. On the way to his third day in his new school, he got lost and wandered around for forty minutes before finally finding the building. Being so late, Owens was required to get a late note from Charles Riley, the physical education teacher at Fairmount Junior High School. Riley was an unassuming man, white and short (about five feet, eight inches tall), born in Pennsylvania of Irish heritage.\(^1\) Riley was astounded by Owens' thin frame, a result of his battles with pneumonia, and told the boy the only way he would survive the harsh Cleveland climate would be to start running. Riley asked Owens to go out for the track team, and he would be the young boy's coach. There was only one problem, however. Owens had all of his time outside of school taken up by jobs he needed in order to raise money, so, he recalled, "...the only time I could practice running was an hour and a half before school."\(^2\) Unfazed, Riley capitalized on the little time he had with Owens and began to coach him every day on the sidewalks outside the school before the bell rang. Riley quickly became more than just Owens' coach, however. He became his friend and mentor, bringing Owens food to keep him nourished and often bringing the young boy to his house for lunch. The racial difference between the two did not seem to be an issue for Riley but it was not lost on Owens. "We never talked about white and colored," Owens

recalled. "There was no reason to. He taught *that* by example."\(^3\) Throughout those days on the sidewalks outside of their school and through Owens' first few years as a runner, Riley taught and molded the young athlete, giving him lessons not only in running, but in life, as well. Some time later, after numerous collegiate and Olympic victories, Owens remembered how "Mr. Riley did a lot more than train me to be a runner...he brought me ideas. He trained me to become a man as well as an athlete."\(^4\) Later in life, Owens would face new situations which were no longer personal and comfortable like those with Riley had been. These situations would show him that American society and athletics were often filled with prejudice and discrimination, and would challenge his faith in the overriding importance of ability. One such situation was the 1936 Olympics. Yet Owens decided to go to Berlin and compete and he ended up having his childhood beliefs and values reaffirmed.

The experience of the black and Jewish athletes who, like Owens, qualified for the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin has not received much attention in the time since. There exist few works that chronicle the lives of the athletes, their experiences during the debate that took place concerning an American boycott of the Olympics, and their motivation in traveling to Berlin. Because of this, it is difficult to get a complete understanding of what these athletes went through in what is perhaps one of the politically most charged moments in the history of sports. If one wants to understand this moment from the perspective of the athletes themselves, one has to rely on more general sources on the topic, but they provide information that is too general and they fail to address the specifics


\(^4\)Ibid., 125.
of the black and Jewish athletic experience. Sources on the Olympics and the boycott debate that preceded them, and on black and Jewish athletes, both provide such information. Works on the experience of playing sports and the effect of participating in athletics can also be helpful.

The books and articles that have been written on the 1936 Olympics and the boycott debate that surrounded them focus mainly on the facts. The works on the Games themselves are overwhelmingly descriptive. They painstakingly go through each important event from the time Berlin received the Games, through the preparation and arrival of the athletes, to the completion of the events and the lasting effect of the Olympics. Sources on the boycott debate that took place before the Games describe the two sides that fought over American participation, as well as the primary players and arguments of each group. By focusing on the fighting between those who favored and those who opposed American participation, the works largely ignore, or gloss over, an important group of people: those stuck in the middle. The athletes who qualified for the Games were caught in between the two sides that debated American involvement and were faced with a difficult decision about their own participation in the Olympics.

The experiences of black and Jewish athletes in the United States have received some scholarly and journalistic attention. Often working chronologically through the history of black and Jewish participation in athletics, choosing stories and athletes from various sports, they have a very general focus, attempting to understand what it meant for these athletes to be competing in sports as blacks and Jews. If these sources cover the Olympics at all, it is only briefly, and, because the space available is so limited, they generally choose to focus on one specific story from the Games.5 An understanding of the

5Most notably, Peter Levine's *Ellis Island To Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience* focuses on the story of one of the Jewish athletes
experiences of the black and Jewish athletes at the Olympics must then be pieced together from a variety of fragmentary materials.

Finally, there have been numerous books written on the subject of sport and what participation in sports means to an individual, a topic which can provide even more background on the black and Jewish athletes of the 1936 Olympics. Beginning at an early age, people involved in athletic activities can acquire important behavioral traits and can learn important moral lessons about acceptance and tolerance. Being on a sports team teaches about cooperation and working with others. Overall, participating in sports can be very influential for an athlete, and can affect behavior both on and off the field. Works written on sports and the sporting experience are valuable for the background information they can provide in order to obtain a better understanding of athletes and to throw light on the personal experiences and motivations of black and Jewish athletes at the Games. Because they are so general, however, these sources only occasionally mention actual examples in organized athletics, and these rarely concern the Olympics. Still they, like the sources mentioned above, can help in getting a more complete understanding of these athletes.

Since the specific topic of the experiences of black and Jewish athletes at the 1936 Olympics has thus been largely ignored, this thesis will attempt to piece together their story from the sources discussed above. These athletes were bombarded on all sides by the boycott debate that took place in the years leading up to the Games, hearing arguments from prominent sports and religious officials, as well as from the newspapers from their communities. Moreover, these athletes had their own values to uphold, values which might conflict with who went to Berlin, Marty Glickman, and David K. Wiggins' Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America devotes a chapter to the response of the black press to the boycott debate and the Olympics.
the decision to participate in Olympics contests that were being held in a country that was systematically taking away the rights and privileges of some of its citizens. The largest participants of the boycott debate were the officials who ran sports, however, and not the athletes themselves. The playing field is viewed quite differently by those who play on it than by those who organize sports, and because of this, many of the issues which consumed those involved in the debate over participation were of little importance to the athletes themselves. In the end, most of the athletes who had qualified for the Games decided to go, largely ignoring the debate. Remarkably, in giving testimonies years later, these athletes barely even mention the boycott, a fact that is hard to imagine given the amount of attention paid to the subject in the secondary sources that chronicle the period. Moreover, not only did the athletes disregard the boycott debate, but they also then traveled to Berlin and socialized with athletes of all nationalities, races, and religions. These are the first signs of how different the Olympic experience was for these black and Jewish athletes as compared to the way the Olympics have been described in the sources mentioned so far.

The question remains as to how these athletes made their decisions so easily and how they were able to go to Germany, compete, and interact comfortably with their teammates and competitors. Reading about the effects of sports participation on these athletes suggests that the reason they were able to ignore the pleas of pro-boycott advocates was because of what they had learned in their experiences taking part in sports. Years of participation in athletics, on teams and individually, made them see that the racial and religious distinctions that consumed so many in the boycott debate were irrelevant. Even in this extreme situation, they viewed themselves and their peers not as black athletes, Jewish athletes, and white athletes, but simply as athletes, and because of this, they could travel to Berlin without a heavy conscience. In many cases, they
viewed all of their competitors on the playing field as equals. Sports provided this common ground.

A fuller understanding of the nature and experiences of these Olympic athletes requires several steps. First, a thorough description of the boycott debate surrounding the 1936 Olympics will give valuable background information on the exact situation in which these black and Jewish athletes found themselves. From there, a more complete explanation of the nature and effect of sports participation can shed light on the experiences that would influence these athletes in their decision and their actions. Finally, a word from the athletes themselves concerning what they went through after making their decision to go to Berlin and compete will provide a first-hand account. These three steps together should then lead to a better understanding of the experiences of the eighteen black athletes and six Jewish athletes, among them Jesse Owens, who competed at the 1936 Olympics.
II. Destination Berlin?: The Controversy Surrounding the 1936 Olympic Games

"Nothing in ancient history inspired more revery in me than Olympia..."
- Baron Pierre de Coubertin

"The Germans were hosting the Games and, with each passing day, were coming to represent everything that free people have always feared."
- Jesse Owens

Consumed by ideas of social and tranquillity among nations, the Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin engineered a successful revival of the Olympic Games in 1896. Coubertin was intensely interested in the effect of sport and physical education on young people. He felt the Olympics could have a profound influence on its participants, as athletes from all over the world could travel to different countries and meet and compete against athletes of all nationalities, learning more about themselves and their peers in the process. The effect of these new Olympics could also reach beyond the individuals to the growing "global village" of the late nineteenth century. who would participate. Coubertin felt the first of these modern Games should be held in Athens, the site of the ancient Olympics, and, once there was international approval, the modern Olympic games were born. After overcoming early problems of organization and participation, and interruptions such as the First World War, the Games slowly gained popularity and their recurrence every four years came to be expected.

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7Owens, I Have Changed, 18.
8Guttmann, The Olympics, 7-11.
Meeting in 1931, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) voted to award the 1936 Games to Berlin. The subsequent rise to power of the Nazi Party and its leader, Adolf Hitler, soon caused many in the international community to worry about the status of the Games. A fierce verbal battle between two groups in the United States soon began. One group opposed American involvement, feeling that due to the racist and anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi government, Berlin was not the proper venue for the Games. The other group was comprised mainly of the American Olympic Committee (AOC) and its leader, Avery Brundage, who favored American participation. Included in the debate were American black and Jewish communities. It was blacks and Jews who had been especially targeted by Nazi racist and anti-Semitic sentiments and so the two communities had strong feelings on the participation of their athletes. The issues that consumed the major players in the boycott debate were not the issues that were most important to the athletes themselves, however, as the sporting world can be viewed quite differently by each group. This meant that, despite the eventual decision by the AOC to accept Germany's invitation, not every athlete's participation was assured. Each athlete had to weigh his or her own feelings on the Nazis and the Olympics, the opinions expressed by those for and against a boycott, and those expressed by their community newspapers, before making a decision. This was the tense climate in which the black and Jewish athletes who had qualified for the Games found themselves and there was seemingly no easy way to reach a decision.
i. Germany after the Awarding of the 1936 Games

The road back to international acceptance after World War I had been a difficult one for Germany but receiving the 1936 Games from the IOC was a major step. Berlin had been previously selected as the host city for the Olympics of 1916, but the outbreak of World War I caused the cancellation of these Games and later, because of its role in the War, Germany was forbidden to take part in the Olympics of 1920 or 1924. The country came back strong in 1928, however, posting the second highest medal total at the Games in Amsterdam. Throughout these years, the president and secretary of the Organising Committee in Germany, Dr. Theodor Lewald and Carl Diem, were working hard to ensure an Olympic festival in Berlin, just as they had for the Games of 1916.9 Most likely swayed by their efforts, and by the attraction of a stadium and other facilities which already existed there,10 the IOC decided to award the Games to Berlin, which beat out second choice Barcelona 43 votes to 16 (with 8 abstentions).11 At the time Berlin received the Games, Heinrich Brüning was Chancellor of Germany and the government was a democratic one.12 By the time the Organising Committee first met on 24 January, 1933, however, Hitler and the

11There exists little information on the feelings behind this decision, however, so it is difficult to understand the motivation behind the votes of the IOC members. A consensus exists that Berlin was an easy choice for many reasons, including the cancellation of the 1916 Olympics, the existence in Berlin of many of the facilities that would be needed, and a desire to welcome Germany back into the international community following World War I. Perhaps because of these factors, there was never much of a debate among IOC members, leading to the overwhelming vote in favor of Berlin which took place (Hart-Davis, 43-44; Mandell 43-44; Allen Guttmann, The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement, (New York, 1984), 62).
12Guttmann, The Games, 62.
Nazis were less than one week from seizing power in Germany.\textsuperscript{13} Once they did gain control, the Nazis made it clear they were not very enthusiastic about hosting the Games, especially given the bad financial situation from which the country was emerging.\textsuperscript{14} Moreover, the Modern Olympics, with its emphasis on internationalism and competition, clashed with the ideals of the Nazi party, which was much more enamored with the gymnastics movement Turnen.\textsuperscript{15} Inspired by the nineteenth-century nationalist Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, Turnen emphasized the simplicity and nobility of the individual body, on which the Nazis felt that sport inflicted a political education.\textsuperscript{16} The party’s desire to tighten its grip over Germany soon won out over its feelings on sport, however. With the help of Hans von Tschammer und Osten, Germany’s Sport Leader, and Joseph Goebbels, the Reich’s Propaganda Minister, Hitler soon came to see the enormous potential the Olympics had for strengthening Nazi control domestically and improving German standing internationally.\textsuperscript{17} His enthusiasm was increased by his belief in "athletics as an indispensable means of strengthening German youth"\textsuperscript{18} and because "the games were a splendid opportunity to demonstrate German organizational talent and physical prowess."\textsuperscript{19}

The beliefs and subsequent domestic policies of the Nazis soon began to create problems for Hitler’s grand plans, however, as their strong belief in Aryan supremacy led to numerous acts against non-Aryans. First came a two-day

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\textsuperscript{13}Hart-Davis, 44. \\
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 45. \\
\textsuperscript{15}Guttmann, The Games, 62-63. \\
\textsuperscript{16}John Hoberman, Sport and Political Ideology, (Austin, Texas, 1984), 162-165. \\
\textsuperscript{17}Hart-Davis, 46. \\
\textsuperscript{18}Moshe Gottlieb, "The American Controversy over the Olympic Games," American Jewish Historical Quarterly, Vol. 61, Num. 3, (March, 1972), 182. \\
\textsuperscript{19}Guttmann, The Games, 65. 
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boycott of all Jewish businesses that began on 1 April, 1933, and within a week Jews were being removed from such prominent professions as lawyers, judges, journalists, and doctors. Largely due to his success over the last few months in bringing Germany out of economic trouble, Hitler gained widespread popularity and support for his programs among the German public. His support was further strengthened by government-sponsored anti-Jewish propaganda that portrayed Jews as "seducers of children, usurers, racketeers, spreaders of disease, the great danger to civilisation." The movement to remove the Jews from German society had begun and would grow in speed at an alarming rate.

It was not long before discrimination against Jews reached the sporting world, as well. As mentioned earlier, the Nazis believed the body to be very important, but they saw distinct differences between German and Jewish bodies. "Observing the movements of a Jew, one has the feeling that his limbs are fitted in their joints in a manner which differs from that of the German. Legs and arms dangle, their movement apparently uncontrolled, as though they were to some extent independent of the will of their bearer." Perhaps because of this negative view of Jews, the Nazis began to restrict Jewish access to sporting opportunities. The same day that the boycott of Jewish businesses was announced, the German boxing federation announced it would no longer include Jewish fighters. On 2 June, 1933, the Minister of Education, Bernhard Rust, announced that Jews were to be excluded from "youth, welfare, and gymnastic organizations and that the facilities of all clubs would be closed to them." Therefore, not only could Jewish

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20 Hart-Davis, 15.
21 Unemployment fell from six million to under one million between 1933 and 1936. (Ibid, 20.)
22 Ibid., 27.
23 Quoted in Hoberman, Sport and Political Ideology, 164.
24 Mandell, 58.
athletes not participate in sports organizations, but the training rooms and fields of these clubs were closed to them as well, leaving them with few places to train. Before the laws went into effect, approximately 40,000 Jews had participated in sports in some 250 sporting clubs. Now, all of these athletes found themselves with few options for participation or even practice. One official reaction to the change in policy came from Julius Streicher, the editor of the anti-Semitic newspaper Der Stürmer. "We need waste no words here, Jews are Jews and there is no place for them in German sports. Germany is the Fatherland of Germans and not Jews, and the Germans have the right to do what they want in their own country." The ultimate effect of the exclusion from official clubs and sports organizations was the inability of Jewish athletes to train for the Olympics.

Even those higher up in the German sports world did not find themselves immune to Nazi policy. Dr. Theodor Lewald, who was at the time president of the German Olympic Committee (GOC) and headed the Organising Committee of the Games, became a target because his father was born Jewish. Although his father later converted to Christianity, Lewald was still branded a "Mischling," or one of mixed ancestry, and some in the Nazi press called for his removal from office.

25Ibid., 60.
26Quoted in Ibid., 58-59.
27Guttmann, The Games, 63; Mandell, 70. Both Lewald's official position and his status in that position are unclear. Some sources name him as president of the GOC, but others as head of the Organising Committee. Most likely, he served in both roles. As for his specific fate in these positions, he was either removed as president of the GOC, or he was simply threatened with removal. In the end, some sources claim Lewald was eventually retained as head of the Organising Committee, another asserts he was simply given an advisory role with the Committee, while one final source maintains he was kept as head of the GOC (Mandell 70; Gottlieb 183, 186; Hart-Davis 43, 60, 61; Guttmann 63, 65).
ii. American Reaction and the Beginning of the Boycott Movement

The growth in discrimination against Jews in general and Jewish athletes in particular did not go unnoticed in the United States. Starting in 1933, many Americans began to express concern over the situation in Germany and hesitation over the Olympics being held there. Over the next three years a public argument developed over American participation in the Games, with some of the most prominent government and sports officials, as well as newspapers and magazines, entering into the debate. Those concerned with the treatment of Jews in Germany, and fearful of similar treatment at the Olympics of athletes from abroad, advocated an American boycott of the Games, hoping to send a strong message of disapproval to Nazi Germany. There were others who were opposed to a boycott and argued for American participation, defending the sanctity of the Olympic Games and the need for a separation of sports from politics. The debate continued all the way up until the Olympic year.

In early 1933, newspapers in the United States began to carry stories of the events unfolding in Germany and readers became aware of the issues involving the upcoming Games, even though they were still three years away.\textsuperscript{28} American Olympic Committee Avery Brundage spoke on one of the key issues: "Direct jurisdiction on the venue of the Olympic Games is in the hands of the International Olympics Committee which meets in Vienna this summer...My personal, but unofficial opinion, is that the Games will not be held in any country where there will be interference with the fundamental Olympic theory of equality of all races."\textsuperscript{29} Brundage was not the only person to see the upcoming IOC meeting as crucial to the future of the Berlin Games. In May, the American

\textsuperscript{28}Mandell, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{29}Quoted in Gottlieb, 182-183.
Jewish Congress, which was vocal in its opposition to Nazi policies, met and wrote a resolution to be sent to the American IOC representatives. In it, they resolved that the representatives should take a strong stance at the IOC meeting against American participation for several reasons, including of Germany's anti-Semitic policies, the fact that discrimination was against the basic tenets of sport and the spirit of the Olympic Games, because no Jewish athlete could participate without fearing embarrassment and personal harm, and "because no self-respecting Jew in America could bring himself to the point in accepting hospitality in a land where others of his race are being subjected to every indignity and made the objects of a brazenly cruel and tyrannical persecution..."  

The three U.S. representatives, General Charles Sherrill, Colonel William May Garland, and Commodore Ernest Lee Jahncke (among whom Sherrill was the most vocal, frequently expressing his reservations about the Germans hosting the Games), took these and other similar requests with them to Vienna for the IOC conference in June, 1933.

The Americans made two demands at the conference: that Lewald be reinstated to the German Olympic Committee and that discrimination against Jewish athletes be ceased immediately. Without these concessions, the representatives claimed, Germany should lose the right to host the Games. After a difficult battle, Sherrill, Garland, and Jahncke succeeded in getting German promises on the two issues. Lewald was retained, but purely in an advisory role, many claimed, and was immediately authorized to declare that Germany would follow all Olympic rules and Jews would not be excluded from

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30 Quoted in Ibid., 184-185.
31 Or allowed to retain his position on, depending on the source
32 Mandell, 70; Hart-Davis, 60.
German teams. In a cable to Rabbi Stephen Wise, the Honorary President of the American Jewish Congress, Sherrill relished in his victory, describing how hard the fight had been. First, he said, he had gotten them to allow Jews from other nations, then he had then gotten them to make a vague statement that they would follow the rules, and finally he had gone at them strongly, "insisting that as they had expressly excluded Jews, now they must expressly declare that Jews would not even be excluded from German teams...Finally, they yielded because they found that I had lined up the necessary votes," he recalled. The agreement was written up and it was officially approved on 7 June, 1933.

Although the IOC was seemingly satisfied with the German pledges, there were groups in the United States that were not. This was perhaps due to the fact that only a few days after the IOC resolution, Reich Sports Leader von Tschammer und Osten noted to a group of German sports officials that "You are probably astonished by the decision in Vienna, but we had to consider the foreign political situation." Two months later, he went even further, saying in an interview that the question of Jewish athletes in Germany was still unsettled. Clearly, von Tschammer und Osten viewed the concessions made by Germany at the convention as not completely honest and to him, the situation was still open for consideration.

In November 1933 the American Jewish Congress again spoke up about its displeasure regarding the German Olympic situation. The group still felt that Jewish athletes were not receiving equal treatment and it petitioned the

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33Mandell, 70; Hart-Davis, 60; Gottlieb, 185-186.
35Gottlieb, 186.
36Quoted in Mandell, 71.
37Gottlieb, 186.
American Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) to place the issue of the withdrawal of the Games from Germany on the agenda of its upcoming convention.\textsuperscript{38} The AAU held considerable power in the Olympics situation because it was responsible for certifying all the amateur athletes in the United States. Since professional athletes are not allowed at the Olympics, the AAU could theoretically prevent American Olympic participation by not permitting almost every eligible athlete to compete. With the issue of Berlin in mind, the AAU delegates met in Pittsburgh and voted nearly unanimously for a boycott of the 1936 Olympics unless German policy towards Jewish athletes was reversed.\textsuperscript{39}

Obviously disturbed by the AAU decision, the German Olympic Committee cabled AOC secretary Frederick W. Rubien that "we declare solemnly that the pledge undertaken in Vienna by German Government and German Olympic Committee regarding participation of German Jews in the Games...will be strictly observed..."\textsuperscript{40} Well aware of the importance of an upcoming AOC meeting, to be held just days after the AAU meeting, the GOC wanted to reassert its commitment to the pledges made in Vienna in hopes that the other influential sports organization in the U.S. would not vote to boycott as well. When the AOC met on 22 November, it adopted a resolution that was slightly less harsh than that of the AAU, but still expressed "the hope that Germany would lift all restrictions on Jewish athletes."\textsuperscript{41} In effect, the AOC was delaying its final vote on American participation, something it would continue to do until almost one year later.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 187-188.  
\textsuperscript{39}Mandell, 71.  
\textsuperscript{40}Quoted in Gottlieb, 188.  
\textsuperscript{41}Hart-Davis, 63.
For the first half of 1934 a war of words took place between some of the most vocal pro-boycott proponents (including the American Jewish Congress and Emmanuel Celler, a Jewish Congressman from Brooklyn) and their anti-boycott adversaries (including IOC representatives Garland and Sherrill, who had been convinced by the promises Germany had made). The former group argued for a continuing investigation of the status of Jewish athletes in Germany while the latter repeated its claims that Germany was living up to its promises. The arguments came to a head at the AOC meeting in June, when the Committee placed the responsibility for a decision with its president, Avery Brundage, who would make a trip to Germany for an inspection of the situation later that summer.

With Brundage's visit approaching, the Germans suddenly made a number of concessions to Jewish athletes. In early June, von Tschammer und Osten announced that five athletes from two Jewish athletic societies had been named as Olympic candidates, and later that month two more Jewish sports groups (Maccabi and the Reich League of Jewish Front Soldiers) proposed another

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{42}}\textsuperscript{Gottlieb, 190.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{43}}\textsuperscript{Gottlieb, 191. Brundage is one of the most intriguing figures of the Berlin Olympics. He had competed for the United States in the decathlon in the 1912 Stockholm Olympics and in 1930 he became president of the AOC and the American Olympic Association. Part of his program was to centralize the control of amateur athletics and, by receiving the support of both the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the AAU, he was able to pacify the American amateur athletic world. Brundage also was close to Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Olympics, and was convinced of his brilliance. His views on the boycott debate underwent a sharp change over time. While initially he was skeptical of the German pledges, he soon came to be a fervent supporter of American participation. Driven by his beliefs that sports and politics should remain separate as well as his belief that American participation in the Games would not necessarily signify support for the Nazis Brundage fought hard against the pro-boycott forces and was the most outspoken anti-boycott advocate (Mandell, 71-72; Guttmann, \textit{The Games}, 71; Hart-Davis, 65).}\]
twenty-one candidates for Olympic status.\textsuperscript{44} The move was met with skepticism, however, possibly due to its convenient timing. George Messersmith, an American consul general in Germany, stated his belief that "It is not impossible...that in order to put up a screen a few Jews may be allowed to train and to figure on teams; but I think that it should be understood that this will be merely a screen for the real discrimination which is taking place."\textsuperscript{45} Messersmith was proved correct by a directive from the Reich Sports Leader's office stating that in order to "'gag the Jewish agitation from abroad,'" the athletes from the two organizations mentioned above would be "'allowed to practice until the Olympics of 1936 (my emphasis).'"\textsuperscript{46} This directive was probably not made public at the time, and Brundage made his trip to Germany most likely unaware of the true intentions of the Germans.

Brundage returned home on 25 September, convinced that the Germans had been living up to their promises. He had met with representatives of various Jewish sports clubs (although always with German officials present) and with von Tschammer und Osten, who assured him again that there was no discrimination against Jewish athletes in Germany.\textsuperscript{47} He was met upon his return by many critics claiming that he had made his decision before traveling to Germany and that he had allowed himself to be tricked by the Germans.\textsuperscript{48} Despite these claims, the AOC met on 26 September to make a final decision on American participation. The representatives to the AOC were judges, members of the armed forces, and sports officials who represented over seventy

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{46}Quoted in Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{47}Guttmann, \textit{The Games}, 70.
\textsuperscript{48}Gottlieb, 193.
organizations that worked with amateur sports and the Olympics. These were the men who, after weighing the evidence in Brundage's report, were to vote on sending a team to Berlin. Brundage said that Germany's claim that it would continue to abide by Olympic rules, as well as its claim that foreign Jews would receive fair treatment, led him to favor participation. He was especially pleased with the information he had received from the Jewish authorities he met with. Apparently ignored in his report was evidence from anonymous Jewish athletes who complained about being denied training facilities and who claimed that a few Jews had been given access to facilities merely for show. These athletes claimed that they were being denied the opportunity to compete on the same level as their German counterparts. After examining all the information, the AOC resolved that "In light of the report of Mr. Brundage and the attitude and assurances of representatives of the German Government, we accept the invitation of the German Olympic Committee to the 1936 Olympic Games."

At this point, the debate over American participation had been raging for almost two years. Many Jewish leaders in the United States had become increasingly concerned over the state of Jewish athletes in Germany and had called for a thorough investigation of the Nazis and their actions. The AAU had weighed the evidence and decided on a stance opposing American participation. The AOC, led by Avery Brundage, had decided that German pledges to abide by the rules had been sincere and had voted in favor of participation. The situation was far from over, however, as the AOC still needed the support of the AAU to get athletes certified to compete and to help raise money to send the team to Germany. The battle lines had now been drawn with Brundage and the AOC on

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50 Gottlieb, 194.
51 Quoted in Ibid., 194.
one side and the AAU (with its leader, Jeremiah T. Mahoney) and many Jewish organizations on the other. With the Olympics still almost two years away, the debate was to continue for many more months.
iii. The Two Sides of the Debate

It is important to pause briefly to outline the arguments of the pro- and anti-boycott forces. The two sides viewed American participation in the Games and the situation in Germany very differently and both clung to their arguments strongly. At the heart of the debate lay different feelings about the importance of sport and the Olympic Games, as well as about Nazi views and policies. Although both sides openly despised Nazi racist practices, they viewed the proposed boycott as having very different meanings and implications.

The anti-boycott forces offered a range of arguments for American participation. Some who favored sending a team maintained that sports and politics should remain separate, while at the same time others argued that sending a team would be the best response to Hitler's racist and anti-Semitic policies, a tacit acknowledgment of the mixing of sports and politics. Those in the first group feared the effect of a boycott on the sanctity of the Olympic movement. Brundage at one point wrote to his fellow AOC representative Gustavus Kirby that the "very foundation of the modern Olympic revival will be undermined if individual countries are allowed to restrict participation by reason of class, creed, or race..."52 Brundage felt that an American boycott would be a setback to the Olympic movement which had steadily been gaining steam since its beginning in 1896 and which he fiercely believed in. Another anti-boycott claim centered on one of the basic tenets of sport; namely that it should remain separate from politics. Again Brundage made public his feelings on this notion, agreeing with American IOC representative Garland. "Frankly, I don't think we have any business meddling in this question. We are a sports group...When we

52Quoted in Guttmann, The Games, 66.
let politics, racial questions, religious or social disputes creep into our actions, we're in for trouble, and plenty of it...”\(^{53}\)

Some of the other arguments put forth by those opposed to a boycott of the Games concerned Nazi policies on race. One was the belief that sending an American team of mixed races and religions to compete and win in Germany would be a strong statement against the Nazi view of Aryan supremacy and "would make the German youth think that the edicts of their government were not as sound as they had been led to believe."\(^{54}\) Moreover, anti-boycott advocates were quick to point out that merely sending a team to the Olympics in Germany was in no way a display of support for the Nazis or their policies.\(^{55}\) Finally, General Sherrill, who had earlier fought hard to get German concessions on the treatment of Jewish athletes, stated his belief that there would be a backlash from the athletes who had trained for the Games against the Jewish people in the United States if the decision to boycott was made because of anti-Semitism in Germany.\(^{56}\)

The arguments used by those people supporting a boycott dealt with the same issues of the Olympics and sport and Nazi policies. They believed that in discriminating against athletes and not allowing them to participate, the Nazis were violating the basic Olympic ideal of open competition.\(^{57}\) Moreover, this ban on participation was antithetical to the basic tenets of fair play in sports, denying athletes the opportunity to compete simply because of their religion.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{54}\)Ibid., 229.

\(^{55}\)Hart-Davis, 65.

\(^{56}\)Gottlieb, 188-189.

\(^{57}\)Hart-Davis, 62.

\(^{58}\)Kass, 232-233.
Another boycott argument centered on the fact that the Nazis were using the Olympics as a means of propaganda, to display to the world the advantages of their National Socialist society. In effect, "Hitler and the German government were playing politics with the Olympics," further proof that a boycott could preserve some of the sanctity of the Games. Moreover, a boycott could make a strong anti-Nazi statement to the world, offsetting the Nazi desire to use the Games as propaganda. The diplomat George Messersmith claimed a boycott "would be one of the most serious blows which National Socialist prestige could suffer within an awakening Germany and one of the most effective ways which the world outside has of showing to the youth of Germany its opinion of National Socialist doctrine." The United States, Messersmith thought, could send a very strong anti-Nazi message to the world and to those people inside Germany. Finally, the pro-boycott movement had a very simple argument against American participation. How could Jewish athletes go and compete in a country where people of their own religion were being treated so poorly? The simple answer to that problem was a boycott of the Games.

The main arguments on both sides of the boycott debate fell into similar categories, including the basic ideals of the modern Olympic Games and sport, as well as the policies of the Nazis. Each of the groups saw these issues from very different sides, however, and both adhered to their views very strongly. Because they viewed the same issues from two different perspectives, the two groups would have a hard time conceding on a single issue. In the end, it is most telling how neither group seemed to have the concerns of the athletes themselves in mind while arguing over their participation. This was a trend that continued throughout the boycott debate.

59 Ibid., 233.
60 Eisen, 68-69.
iv. The Boycott Debate Continues

Throughout 1935, the boycott debate raged on in the media, with more groups and individuals joining the fight against American participation and more assurances from anti-boycott advocates that the Germans were keeping their promises. The debate would come to a head at the end of the year when, in December, the AAU would meet again to make a final decision on participation in the 1936 Olympics.

The summer and fall of 1935 was a particularly distressing time for the supporters of American participation. Already on record as opposed to sending a team from the U.S. were the American Jewish Congress, which had officially taken the stance in August 1933 and the Jewish War Veterans, who had made their declaration on 2 September, 1934. Beginning in the summer of 1935 and continuing throughout the fall, the flood gates opened, as a more religiously and ethnically diverse group of organizations declared their opposition to the Games. The list included a group of one hundred and thirty-eight Protestant clergymen and educators, the German-American League for Culture, the Catholic War Veterans, the Friends of Democracy (a German-American group), the National Council of the Methodist Church and the American Federation of Labor, as well as the Jewish War Veterans, who renewed their pledge for withdrawal. Also joining the fight were During this time, a number of major newspapers and other periodicals also went public with their opposition to the Games, including

61 Gottlieb, 184.
62 Ibid., 192.
63 Ibid., 200-201, 207; Mandell, 77.
the Protestant *Christian Century* and the Catholic *Commonweal*. Finally, two U.S. Senators, Peter G. Gerry of Rhode Island and David I. Walsh of Massachusetts, joined their House counterpart Celler in declaring their desire that the United States consider a withdrawal from the Olympics. All of these declarations were especially significant in terms of the diversity of the groups making them. While before, opposition had come mostly from Jewish groups, the list now included Protestant and Catholic groups and periodicals, as well as members of the United States Senate.

The case for American participation was further weakened on 15 September, 1935, when, in Nuremberg, Germany, Hitler announced the beginning of the "Nuremberg Laws." Two of the laws enacted at this time were the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor. The Reich Citizenship Law defined a citizen of the Reich as one of German blood, and declared that "'The Reich citizen is the sole bearer of full political rights in accordance with the Law,'" basically denying Jews citizenship and protection under the law. The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor was motivated, it claimed, by "'the understanding that the purity of German blood is the essential condition for the continued existence of the German people and inspired by the inexorable determination to ensure (the existence of) the German nation for all time..." In order to accomplish this, the law forbade formal contact between Jews and Germans, including marriage and sexual relations between the two out of wedlock. The argument that Germany

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64 Gottlieb, 200.
65 Ibid., 201.
66 Mandell, 74-75.
68 Quoted in Ibid., 71.
was denying equal status to Jews and Jewish athletes was clearly gaining strength.

Those opposing a boycott continued their fight, however. General Sherrill, one of the three IOC representatives from the United States, traveled to Germany towards the end of October to oversee Olympic preparations. He returned determined that Germany should keep the Games and claimed he was surprised at the level which the boycott argument had reached, fearing a possible anti-Semitic backlash in the United States due to the debate. He also stated his belief that the Americans had no right to become involved in the Germans' selection of their team, asserting "...I would have no more business discussing (the obstacles facing Jewish athletes) in Germany than if the Germans attempted to discuss the Negro situation in the American South or the treatment of the Japanese in California." Finally, Sherrill was pleased with his efforts to get two Jewish athletes placed on the German team, although both of the athletes were actually only half-Jewish. The high-jumper Gretel Bergmann and the fencer Helene Mayer were both invited to join the German Olympic team due to Sherrill's efforts.

Sherrill's visit to Germany was followed up only a few days later by a visit from IOC President Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, a Belgian, who had been vocal in his belief that the German Olympic situation should not be disturbed.

69Quoted in Gottlieb, 203.
70Hart-Davis, 80. Bergmann, however, did not make the final Olympic team. Although a world-class athlete who had won the English championships in 1934 and had equaled the German high-jump record before training camp, Bergmann's performance was deemed to be not good enough for her to warrant a place on the team. The most troubling aspect of the decision was that the final German team had only two high-jumpers, instead of the allowable three. Mayer, on the other hand, went on to win a silver medal in fencing in Berlin (Eisen, 72; Hart-Davis, 80; Mandell, 181-182).
He reiterated this claim on his return from Germany and echoed Sherrill's beliefs that the internal policies of a country were not the business of the IOC. These events took place while the size of the pro-boycott movement was growing in the United States. By October 1935, the AAU convention was less than two months away and it was time for each side to make one last push for their cause.

v. Dueling Pamphlets

In October and November of 1935, respectively, the AOC and the newly-formed Committee on Fair Play in Sports issued contrasting pamphlets concerning American participation in the Berlin Olympics. The AOC pamphlet, entitled "Fair Play for American Athletes," argued against a boycott, while " Preserve the Olympic Ideal" stated the Committee on Fair Play in Sport's case for a boycott. The pamphlets clearly outlined the two side's different, and often completely opposite, arguments.

"Fair Play for American Athletes" was a mixture of original material on the boycott debate interspersed with newspaper clippings and quotes from prominent individuals. On the first page, the two sections "The Issue," and "The Facts" outlined the basic arguments of the pamphlet, which were very similar to the arguments that AOC President Brundage and IOC representative Sherrill had been making in public for some time. The Games and politics must remain separate, the AOC argued in "The Issue," and the future of amateur sport was threatened by the boycott debate. "The Facts" stated that athletes from the U.S. would receive fair treatment at the Games and that the Jews must know that the Games cannot be used as a weapon in their boycott of the Nazis. The rest of the

71Hart-Davis, 77.
72American Olympic Committee, 1.
original material in the pamphlet appears in short passages that address the key issues of the debate. The Games were awarded to Berlin and not to Germany, the AOC argued, and the organizers of the Olympics were appointed by international organizations and not by Germany. The pamphlet reiterated the claim that the internal affairs of a country were not the business of the international community so the United States had no reason to become involved in the situation. The newspaper sections and personal statements placed throughout were used to back up the AOC's claims. Excerpts from the New York and LA Times and many smaller newspapers were put in, as well as statements from religious leaders, sports leaders, and sports writers. Finally, the pamphlet contained the opinions of one former athlete and six current athletes (including black track star Ralph Metcalfe), all favoring participation. Overall, the pamphlet seemed to offer little new material in the argument against the boycott and many of the main points are not backed up with enough information.

"Preserve the Olympic Ideal" existed in stark contrast to the AOC publication. The pamphlet was written by the newly formed Committee on Fair Play in Sports, which was made up of doctors, a lawyer, a college president, and the Governor of Massachusetts, James M. Curley. The pamphlet labeled itself as a response to "Fair Play for American Athletes" and offered a well-organized and well-written argument that challenges many of the points in the AOC's publication. The Committee claimed early that the issue at hand is not whether the United States should compete in the Olympics, but if it should compete in the Olympics if they were held in Germany. The Nazis had brought the issues of race, politics, and religion into the debate and mixed them with sports, and had continually refused to keep the promises they made concerning Jewish athletes.

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73Gottlieb, 201-202.
Moreover, the pamphlet argued, the AOC had threatened earlier to withdraw from the Games if the Germans did not keep their promises. Now, even with proof that they were not, the AOC had begun to claim that a threat of withdrawal was a terrible and potentially damaging notion.\(^74\)

The pamphlet countered the AOC argument that the internal affairs of another country did not concern the United States. In 1933, the Committee argued, the IOC forced Germany to make pledges concerning the selection of members to its team, but suddenly now the AOC argued that this same selection was not the business of the United States.\(^75\) Finally, the Committee countered the AOC assertion that American participation would not be an approval of German policies. These policies determined the make-up of the German Olympic team, the selection of which the Americans investigated. Knowing the facts, the AOC approved American participation, in effect approving of the way in which the Germans selected their team, and, in turn, approving of Germany's policies.\(^76\)

The pamphlet ended with a call to the AOC that the issue was still open and should be reconsidered. The decision to participate rested with each individual athlete, but, the Committee claimed, "For our part we refuse to believe that American athletes value the opportunity to compete in the Games and to win the Olympic Crown more dearly than they value fair play...American athletes should refuse to answer the summons of Hitler."\(^77\) The pamphlet's second half is devoted to statements against participation from a large number of sources, including seven newspapers, ten famous sportswriters, and twenty athletes (including former Olympic champions) and trainers, as well as civic

\(^{74}\) Committee on Fair Play in Sports, 12.  
\(^{75}\) Ibid., 10.  
\(^{76}\) Ibid., 30-31.  
\(^{77}\) Ibid., 36-37.
leaders (a former governor, diplomats, college presidents), and youth, religious, and sports organizations. The pamphlet ends with a chronological list of Nazi restrictions on Jewish athletes, a copy of the 1933 AAU resolution condemning Germany, and a quote about the Olympic Ideal from de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Olympics. A statement on the final page asserted that Germany has no right to host the Games.

With these pamphlets, the two sides in the Olympic boycott debate stated their cases to the American public. Although "Preserve the Olympic Ideal" had the advantage of being written later and having more material to use in its argument (including the AOC pamphlet), both sides made convincing cases, and both were backed up by other, often influential, sources. With the publication of these two pieces, the boycott debate reached its pinnacle and a resolution was not far away.

vi. The End of the Debate

On 7 December, 1935, the Amateur Athletic Union met in New York to issue a final declaration on the Berlin Games. The arguments for each side had been laid out over the last several years and no amount of posturing could influence the delegates whose minds had probably already been made up. Still, those favoring a boycott brought with them a petition with signatures of 500,000 people and resolutions from organizations representing another 1,500,000 people, all opposing American participation. On 8 December, the executive committee of the AAU met for five hours to listen to speeches on both sides of the issue, after which its members defeated the proposed resolution against

\[\text{\textsuperscript{78}}\text{Mandell, 78.}\]
participation by two and one half votes, $58^{1/4}$ to $55^{3/4}$. A similarly narrow majority then passed a motion favoring participation which also called on the IOC and the International Amateur Athletic Foundation to continually investigate Germany to ensure fair play and the upholding of Olympic standards and repeated the claim that this acceptance was by no means an approval of the policies of the Nazi government.\(^\text{80}\) The fallout began immediately as AAU head Jeremiah T. Mahoney, a fierce advocate of a boycott, resigned and was replaced by Brundage in a unanimous vote.\(^\text{81}\)

The AAU vote was the final act of the boycott debate that had begun almost three years earlier. The two major sports organizations of the United States, the AAU and AOC, as well as the IOC, had pledged support for the Berlin Olympics and participation was now certain. This did not mean that every athlete who had qualified would go, however. Although the IOC, AOC, and AAU had all made decisions on participation, the final decision lay in the hands of each individual athlete. The decision was especially difficult for the Jewish athletes, whose community leaders and newspapers writers had been arguing the issue for many months, and whose fellow Jews had been the target of Nazi aggression in Germany. Black athletes faced a similarly difficult choice, knowing that Nazi beliefs devalued them, as well, and that they could possibly be targets at the Games just like the Jewish athletes. The decisions of these athletes were made more difficult by the vocal stand their newspapers had taken during the boycott debate.

\(^{79}\)Ibid., 79; Guttmann, The Games, 74.
\(^{80}\)Gottlieb, 210.
\(^{81}\)Hart-Davis, 81.
vii. The Opinions of the Black and Jewish Presses

Those athletes who followed the Olympic situation throughout the years leading up to the 1936 Games encountered pronouncements on the subject that were not only national, but local, as well. Regional newspapers that served the black and Jewish communities of the United States were significant participants in the boycott debate, not only covering the events on the road to the Games, but also entering into the debate by weighing in with their opinions on participation. Editorials and sports columns carried the opinions of the newspapers that served important roles in the black and Jewish communities and the athletes who were faced with the decision of participation undoubtedly saw the comments of these influential sources, making their decisions even more difficult.

The Jewish press was especially vocal during its coverage of the Olympic situation with articles and editorials throughout the boycott debate. The stance most of the newspapers took was similar to that of the Jewish groups (such as the American Jewish Congress) that had been vocal in their support of a boycott. "Along with the obvious concerns about the oppression of Jews, these papers also called for a boycott...as a means of denying the Third Reich its stated objective of using the games as a means of showcasing Nazi accomplishment and power." The newspapers, like many of the prominent Jewish leaders, saw the dangerous potential the Games had for strengthening Hitler's hold on Germany.

The Los Angeles B'nai B'rith Messenger was one of these newspapers and a look at the way its articles and editorials changed in the years leading up to 1936 can shed light on the atmosphere in which Jewish athletes found

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82 Peter Levine, Ellis Island To Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience, New York, 1992), 220.
themselves. The Messenger spent much of its time in these years faithfully recording the growth of Nazi aggression in Germany and the resulting actions in the United States, with a keen eye towards the meaning of all of the events for Jews worldwide. Included in this was the Olympic situation, which the paper covered factually and editorially, giving press both to the events surrounding the debate and its resulting effect on the Jewish community.

The newspaper began expressing concern over the Olympic situation as far back as 1933 when, in a special year-end Rosh Hashanah edition, it commented on the recent acts of exclusion of Jewish athletes in Germany. This prejudice, it claimed, was against the Olympic spirit and if the situation did not change, there would be countries not fairly represented at the Games.83 Two months later, the concern had obviously grown when the primary editorial was titled "MOVE OLYMPIC GAMES." Responding to the recent AAU resolution that the United States would boycott if the situation in Germany did not improve, the paper responded "There is an alternative action which the Olympic Games Committee might take, and which we fervently urge: Remove the Olympic Games to some civilized country."84 The paper was clear in its belief that Nazi pledges to include Jews were false and that discrimination would remain, and, if Jews were not allowed to compete, neither would the United States. The IOC would then have no choice but to move the Games.

The events of the next year and a half clearly made the paper change its desires, however, as the primary editorial of 30 August, 1935, was titled "Boycott the Olympics!" Athletes who favored the fair selection of participants could not

allow the Games to be held in a country that treated its citizens like Germany did, the paper claimed. Despite false Nazi claims, the American public must be kept apprised of the true facts about Germany so as to force a change and "fight to take these games away from the barbaric land of the Nazis."85

Much of the rest of the paper's feelings on the subject dealt with the morality of a boycott. An article printed just a week after the boycott editorial was titled "Sport and Moral Victories," and described the profound effect of an Olympic contest without athletes from the United States. The noise of the spectators packed into the stadium in Berlin would be deafened by the silence of the U.S., which could be heard around the world. Upholding good sportsmanship was the most important cause but the American Olympic Committee could not take the proper stand on such a moral issue. The United States would have to boycott then and, despite the medals that other countries would receive, "...for absent America there is such a prize as has never been won before in ancient or Modern Olympiads: A moral victory."86

The decision to participate came only a few months later and the paper covered the news with a reluctant tone. In an editorial, it noted how the Nazis would now certainly move ahead with plans to use the Games as a means of propaganda to further their image. Moreover, it moaned that "American athletes are...misled in that they are not informed of the true state of affairs and of the new determination of Nazi propagandists to make of the Olympics a Nazi spectacle."87 It can be understood from the tone of the editorial that the

newspaper would fill in this gap and provide the true information to American athletes, perhaps in hopes that they would choose correctly in the participation decision they now faced.

While the plight of Jews and especially Jewish athletes was the concern of both the Jewish and national media, the situation of black athletes was not as widely covered. "There was never any real attempt to communicate the thoughts and feelings of those in the black community or to assess their philosophical position on the boycott issue. That task was left to the black press." 88 Perhaps as a result of this need to cover a much larger base of beliefs, the stances of black newspapers on the boycott debate were not as uniform as those of the Jewish newspapers.

Early reaction to the boycott debate was greeted with frustration by the black press because so much attention was being paid to the treatment of minorities in Germany and little was being done to confront racism in the United States. 89 This was clearly shown in an article that appeared in the Pittsburgh Courier, commonly believed to be the most influential black newspaper, in August 1935. In an article covering the gubernatorial primary in Mississippi, the paper stated that "There isn't an upright Negro in Mississippi who wouldn't swap places with a Berlin Jew and pay him a bonus. There isn't a Jew in Germany who, having agreed to come to Mississippi and live as a Negro, could be compelled to keep the bargain." 90 Clearly, the paper felt that the Negro situation in the South was worse than that of the Jews in Germany, and deserved as much, if not more, attention from people in the United States.

89 Ibid., 63.
Even more disturbing to some black newspapers was that many of the actions of U.S. sports officials were aimed at Nazi concessions on the treatment of Jewish athletes, with no mention made of black athletes. There were concerns about the treatment black athletes would face in Germany, knowing that the Nazis had not supported the participation of black athletes in the 1932 Olympics and that their policies were not only anti-Semitic, but racist as well. The Pittsburgh Courier led the charge in attempting to ensure that both black and Jewish athletes would be treated equally in Berlin by cabling Hitler on 15 July, 1935, claiming that many in the United States were curious about an official statement from Germany on the participation of those athletes. The paper proudly displayed the answer it received in its article "Courier 'Scooped' Nation On Inquiry About Germany's Attitude Towards Negroes in Olympics---Here's Proof," printing a cable from Berlin that assured no discrimination against any athletes at the Games, regardless of their race or religion.

Eventually, the black press split in its views on participation. Those newspapers favoring a boycott included the New York Amsterdam News, which placed an open letter to prominent black athletes on its front page, calling on them to boycott the Games in order to make a strong statement against the Nazis. The letter claimed, "We beg you to display that spirit of self-sacrifice which is the true mark of all greatness," and decide not to go to Germany. Other papers took a stance similar to the one many others who had spoken against participation, repeating the claim that going to Germany would signify support for the Nazis.

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91 Wiggins, 64.
94 Wiggins, 66.
There were other black newspapers that favored sending a team, however, arguing, like many others who opposed a boycott, that American victories would make a strong statement against Nazi policies. One of these papers was the Pittsburgh Courier, which printed an editorial that directly responded to the Amsterdam News' open letter. While praising the motive behind the letter, the editorial claimed a better option existed. "We think it will strike a greater blow at Hitlerism and the idea of Nordic supremacy if the colored athletes go to the Olympic Games in Berlin and beat the Nazi youths to a frazzle. That will lift the prestige of the despised darker races and lower the prestige of the proud and arrogant Nordic."95 The editorial also pointed out that it was "a little funny" that blacks in the United States were getting so involved in a debate about the conditions in Germany while "worse atrocities occur right at home about which the mass of these Negroes do little or nothing,"96 a claim which was repeated by many other black newspapers.

In the end, however, the views of most of the black newspapers became uniform once the final decision had been made. When the AAU voted to accept Germany's invitation, many in the black press backed off, claiming any more "opposition to sending U.S. athletes abroad was senseless."97 The Courier was one paper which respected the AAU decision, calling the Union "perhaps the only institution in America that stands for unqualified Americanism," and claiming that "if there is an institution in this country that gives the Negro every chance commensurate with his ability, that institution is the Amateur Athletic Union."98

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96Ibid.
97Wiggins, 70.
In the midst of the arguing over American participation in the 1936 Olympics, the black and Jewish presses faithfully recorded the events of the debate, occasionally weighing in with their own arguments. These newspapers provided this information not only to the black and Jewish communities of the United States, but to the athletes of these communities, as well, adding a strong and influential voice to the boycott debate. The strong pronouncements, both for and against participation, that came from these newspapers served to make the athletes' decisions even more difficult. By the end of 1935, both the sports officials and the local papers had made their decisions on participation. It was now up to the athletes themselves to determine if they would be on the field in Berlin, competing for their country.

viii. A Personal Choice on Participation

After a period of almost three years, the situation with the Berlin Olympics had been settled and no doubt remained during the holding of qualifying competitions. An American team would be sent to Germany, made up of the most qualified athletes, regardless of their religion or race. Even though an official decision had been made on participation, there remained a more personal decision for each individual athlete which required weighing his or her feelings on going to Germany and the message such a decision would send. The arguments of the boycott debate still swirled around them, however. Certainly, the athletes had heard the arguing that took place about the Games and were undoubtedly affected by it, and the strongly-worded statements in their local newspapers must have been hard to ignore. The argument over participation, however, took place outside the realm of sports that the athletes occupied. The concerns of the national sporting officials and group leaders who took part in the
boycott debate were drastically different than the concerns of the individual athletes. The reason they thought and acted differently than those who were involved in the debate was because of their experiences taking part in athletics. A lifetime of sports participation had profoundly influenced these athletes and had given them a unique perspective on the sporting world. This factor also played a large role in the decision they now confronted.
III. A Lifetime in the Game: The Social and Psychological Effects of Sports Participation

"Through sports we can develop and express moral virtues and vices, and demonstrate the importance of such values as loyalty, dedication, integrity, and courage."99

The sports journey begins in the backyard, with dirty t-shirts serving as bases, or a rickety hoop made from a crate. For many, it continues in the hours after school and on weekends, with increased instruction and competition. For a select few, it reaches the highest pinnacle of professional competition on a nationwide or international scale. Throughout this time, the settings, the rules, and the ability all change but the dreams never do. For the driven athlete, the constant desire to learn, absorb, and excel never dissipates. The sports journey is a learning process. Years of participation in sport have profound effects on the athletes involved, influencing their behavior, their values, and their attitudes both on and off the field. As a result, athletes' interpersonal relations are affected and they are often better acclimated to deal with situations they may confront both during sports participation and during everyday life. One such situation was the difficult decision faced by the black and Jewish athletes before the 1936 Olympics. A better understanding of their psychological state at the time requires an examination of the effect of sports participation.

The numerous effects that participating in athletics can have on an individual are very difficult to measure or study. There are certain results, however, which have been uncovered during the numerous research studies that

have been conducted in the examination of the sociology and psychology of sports. First, participation in sports can aid an individual's moral development and character development. Second, involvement in team sports can increase the bond between athletes and can teach important goal-setting techniques. Finally, bonds between team members and the importance of ability above all else can aid in race relations. Together, these results point to the powerful result of sports participation on creating individuals of strong moral character who are prepared for numerous life situations.

i. Sports and the development of important moral and social values

The game that takes place on the field seems rather simple when viewed from afar, as two teams battle for the victory, one leaving the winner and the other leaving the loser. There is far more complexity to sport, however. The real importance of a sporting event lies not in what it shows, but in what it represents. Sports reflect the world outside the stadium, with individuals and groups relating to each other, acting on impulses, and driven by necessity. "All games indicate, even if haltingly, the central values of behavior in the real world. Games are of the real world." Encapsulated in a sporting event are the same behaviors that are evident outside of the event. At the same time, however, sports participation goes a long way in developing the personality traits that influence this behavior.

In their book, Sport and Social Systems: A Guide to the Analysis, Problems, and Literature, authors John W. Loy, Barry D. McPherson, and Gerald Kenyon sum up the three types of social learning resulting from sports

participation: the first results in the development of personal traits and skills; the second produces a better understanding of the environment and the roles of others; and from the third comes an awareness of how to interact and cooperate with others.\textsuperscript{101}

On an individual level, sports aid athletes in their perceptions of themselves, or what is deemed "self-concept."\textsuperscript{102} Included in this can be an increase in confidence, self-esteem, and assertiveness, which result from good performance, positive feedback from teammates and coaches, and experiencing pressure situations. "All in all, the psychological importance of sports lies in its provision of avenues to attain or increase intrapersonal and interpersonal competence and thereby reach higher levels of self-conception."\textsuperscript{103} This increased self-conception can then improve performance both on and off the field. At the same time, however, a person's self-concept can be profoundly influenced by the way other's view him or her and, when openly expressed, these views can affect the behavior of the targeted person.\textsuperscript{104} In the often competitive arena of sports, relationships are not always cordial, and criticism and ridicule of others are common results of poor performance. Athletes can often be criticized, and this can then have a negative effect on an their self-concept.

Sports can affect an athlete's outward persona, as well, influencing his or her relations with other people and increasing positive interpersonal behavior.\textsuperscript{105} Interacting with teammates and coaches on a regular basis increases sociability

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{102} R.B. Alderman, \textit{Psychological Behavior in Sport, (Philadelphia, 1974), 143.}
\bibitem{103} Seppo E. Iso-Ahola and Brad Hatfield, \textit{Psychology of Sports: A Social Psychological Approach, (Dubuque, Iowa, 1986), 113.}
\bibitem{104} Alderman, 143.
\bibitem{105} Iso-Ahola and Hatfield, 113.
\end{thebibliography}
and working with others in game and practice situations teaches sharing and teamwork. An athlete already possesses a positive view of him or herself, and he or she can then become more confident and secure in dealing with other people. The acquired traits of sociability and extroversion create an individual who is "good natured, easy going, ready to cooperate, attentive to people...trustful, adaptable, and warm hearted," as well as "Outgoing...involved in group activities, sociable, friendly..."[106] There is a negative side to extroversion, however, as individuals can also easily lose their temper, have an inability to keep feelings under control, and be aggressive.[107] Aggressiveness can be one of the more prevalent traits of athletes, as the desire to win at all costs drives each individual.

The sports experience deeply affects the moral and character development of athletes and causes changes that influence almost every aspect of their lives. Starting at an early age and continuing through their participation in sports, athletes learn the important social values that affect their behavior. They learn to think more highly of themselves, increasing confidence and self-esteem, and they also gain traits that affect their relations with other people, becoming more outgoing and extroverted. At the same time, athletes become more sensitive to the views of their peers, and similarly acquired traits of emotional instability and aggressiveness can have negative consequences. The more positive traits they develop can become especially important when athletes find themselves in team settings, where they must work with others to achieve goals.

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[106] Alderman, 139, 141.
[107] Ibid., 141.
ii. The strong bonds of team play

In team sports, winning is not the achievement of a single athlete, but of a group of athletes working together. Each participant contributes their individual skill, be it on the organizational level, in talent, or in leadership. Athletes on a team spend their entire athletic time together, practicing, performing, and celebrating as a group. As a result, a tight bond develops linking the team members together, teaching them acceptance and the importance of sharing and working with others. A team situation makes a necessity out of these traits, as little can be accomplished without acknowledging that the participation of everyone is essential for victory. In the end, there can be positive results for every team member.

The first result of experience on a sports team is a close bond between all the members of the team. Whether in practice or a game setting, teammates work together in order to reach a common goal. In this situation, the accomplishments of the individual are de-emphasized and each athlete must learn to adapt to best perform in a group setting. Once this is accomplished, a higher level of performance is attainable in the "community" of the team and each athlete is deeply affected. The team "is not a community that diminishes each individual, or demands the submersion of the individual. Quite the contrary. Each feels himself to be acting at his very best, better than his individual best..."108 At the same time, however, team settings, indeed sports settings in general, can create competitive situations in which the athletes must operate. For example, on a team, where the premise is to have teammates working together, there can often be occasions when numerous individuals compete for the same positions.

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Competitive circumstances, between members of the same team, between two teams, or between individuals, can have negative effects on the participants. "Competition in sport, in some instances, comes close to being conflict...One must realize that conflict engenders hatred, resentment, and implicit destruction..."109 One inevitable product of competition is the failure of an individual or team and failure can have negative effects, such as scapegoating. When frustration cannot be taken out on the figure that actually caused the failure, a susceptible group is found to then be the target. "The needed outlet for aggression is found through an attack upon an innocent minority group which is blamed for the frustration."110 This is the unpleasant side of athletics that can result from team settings.

Participating in team athletics, then, has the potential for both positive and negative experiences. There is only the potential for negative results due to competition and conflict, however. Failure does not always result in scapegoating, nor does competition necessarily always cause animosity between team members or competitors. The positive lessons of the team setting are often inevitable. Being on a team increases athletes' awareness and acceptance of others and ties them to their teammates. Together, these individuals work together for a common goal and share in the glory of victory. Athletes realize that a contribution from each member of the team is essential for victory and that working together and acknowledging each other's strengths and weaknesses can produce the best results.

109Alderman, 105.
110Nancy Theberge and Peter Donnelly, eds., Sport and the Sociological Imagination, (Fort Worth, Texas, 1984), 145.
iii. Race relations in sports

The traits that are learned from a team experience can become extremely helpful when the make-up of the team can threaten to disrupt the harmony necessary for victory. Just like the world outside the stadium, sports teams are not homogeneous groups. Prejudices that exist off the field have the potential to effect play on the field when members of ethnic and racial groups that are discriminated against are placed on teams. This was certainly the case in American sport in the 1930s in terms of Jewish and black athletes. In American society at this time, blacks and Jews faced considerable prejudice in their jobs and were discriminated against in their everyday lives, as they were barred from certain clubs and restaurants. The sports world was not immune to these problems. At this time, Jewish athletes had the ability to participate in professional baseball and basketball and frequently excelled in track and field competitions. But while they were able to compete in these sports, they often faced considerable prejudice as, for example, they were often barred from many track clubs.¹¹¹ Those Jews that did participate in professional basketball and baseball were often the subject of taunting and the target of racial epithets from fans, coaches, and their fellow players.¹¹² The situation for black athletes at the time was much worse. A separate baseball league existed for blacks because they were barred from professional baseball, and professional football instituted a Jim Crow law and became segregated in 1933. Black athletes who wanted to participate in athletics at predominantly white universities were forced to choose from those in the North, as they were not accepted by any such institutions in the

¹¹²Ibid., 26, 40; Levine, 55, 125.
South. Some of the few sports in which black athletes were accepted were professional boxing and amateur track and field.\textsuperscript{113}

Despite the discrimination that blacks and Jews experienced, the playing field remained one area that could often be free of the prejudice that consumed American society. This was due to the fact that the structure of sports, which can mirror the structure of society, is different from the actual practice of the athletes. Sports are run by the commissioners and sporting officials who are intimately tied to the society around them, but sports are played by individual athletes who decide their own fate. Therefore, even if the owner of a professional basketball team in 1933 decided he did not want to play one of his players simply because the man was Jewish, the basketball players on the team could still make sure he played because his skills could be necessary to help the team win.

In sports, it is ability and performance that matter most, not someone's personal characteristics. The team setting can provide an opportunity for a diverse group of people to work together towards a common goal, a setting in which racial and religious distinctions are rendered irrelevant. In a practice where performance matters more than any other personal trait, the ease with which a diverse group of participants can exist together is increased. Therefore, "...sport can be a powerful force in uniting diverse sections of communities - whether the divisions are tribal, social, or racial,"\textsuperscript{114} and can be a place where "racial barriers are weakened."\textsuperscript{115} Racial acceptance can also be increased when a specific goal is set and the athletes must work together to attain it. Prejudice in this situation decreases because the group members see that they are working towards the same end, they are dependent on each other, and they are all of an

\textsuperscript{113}Wiggins, 68.
\textsuperscript{114}Richard Thompson, Race and Sport, (London, 1964), 9.
\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., 72.
equal status. This can produce better relations between individuals because they will "perceive themselves to have similar attitudes and beliefs."\footnote{Theberge and Donnelly, 141.} This reinforces the equality of all involved and produces a higher level of attraction between previously dissimilar groups.\footnote{Ibid., 144.}

Athletes on teams learn that working with others and adapting to accept the best individuals will present the best possible scenario to reach the common goal, so to discriminate against certain people would be foolish and counterproductive. Combining personality traits they have developed during years of sports participation with the understanding that acceptance of others and the ability to adapt will produce the best results, athletes create a situation where everyone can be equal.

iv. The effect of sports participation on athletes

The sports journey is a learning experience which begins the first time the athlete picks up a ball or bat and lasts until the day they die. Throughout that time, as they take part in sports, competing sometimes against themselves and sometimes against others, they are constantly learning and changing. Participation in sports affects many aspects of the athletes' lives, aiding in their moral development, influencing their behavior, and changing the way they view others. The resulting changes are both internal and external. Athletes eventually come to feel better about themselves, gaining more confidence and self-esteem, and they also learn to deal better with others, both their teammates and their competitors. These relations are not always positive, however, as athletes also can become aggressive or emotionally unstable. The team setting can help
develop more positive personal traits by teaching athletes such things as working better with others to achieve a common goal and helping them gain the ability to adapt to situations where the emphasis is on the group, rather than on the individual. Also because of this, athletes learn to be more accepting of others, as the most important quality of any person is ability, rather than race, religion, or ethnicity. Because sports offers a world which is structured differently than that of society, the discrimination and prejudice that exist outside the stadium do not always translate to the playing field.

Because of these lessons they have learned, athletes are well prepared for many situations in life. Even more so, they are very prepared to confront difficult situations that could arise that would test their morals and their beliefs. This was the situation that confronted the black and Jewish athletes who had qualified for the 1936 Olympics. Bombarded on all sides by propaganda telling them how to act in the boycott situation, they faced a difficult decision. They could protest Nazi policies and choose to stay home, thereby depriving themselves not only of the chance to compete and win, but also simply to be with their teammates and to step out onto the playing field with them. The other option for these black and Jewish athletes, to go to Berlin for the Games, meant traveling to a country that either was discriminating against other members of their religion, or had openly professed the view that members of their race were simply inferior and did not belong. The decision was difficult to be sure, and challenged many of beliefs these black and Jewish Americans held. Just as it had many other times in their lives, it was their experiences as athletes that would ultimately influence their decisions and the experiences they had after making those decisions.
IV. In Their Own Words: The 1936 Olympics From the Athletes' Perspective

"The single most important thing I got from the Games was the fact that the other athletes of the world were just like me. And I was just like they. I worked out with Hungarian athletes and Romanian athletes and British athletes, French, Japanese athletes. We had many things in common...I'd jog along side of the different athletes. I walked along side of them in the village."118

For amateur athletes, the Olympic Games represent the pinnacle of achievement. At the Games, athletes have the chance to prove themselves the best at their sport in front of the entire world. They are among the best athletes alive when they compete and no athletic experience can equal it. It takes years of training to reach Olympic caliber, however. Constant training and practicing, competing, winning and losing is involved through the years so as to reach the skill level to reach the Games. Throughout this time of training and competing, these athletes gain specific character traits and values which influence their behavior when the time to be an Olympian arrives. Their composure during qualifying meets, traveling with the American team, and at the Games themselves is affected by their years of athletic participation. The athletes of the 1936 Olympics were presented with a unique situation that few athletes before them had experienced. They were pressured by people throughout the country and often by their own communities not to go, even though they had spent months, and in some cases years, training for the chance. Despite the enormous amount of arguing that took place in the three years leading up to the Games, an

118 Interview with Marty Glickman (May 20, 1996), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, 1936 Olympics Collection, (RG - 50.429*04), 39.
an amazing thing happened. Only a few athletes stayed home. Most of the athletes who qualified for the Olympics that year went to Germany, and didn't think twice about their decision. During their time they easily met and spent time with athletes of varied backgrounds and competed without any worries. They had incredible experiences at the Games, and it becomes clear from a close examination of their accounts that it was their life-long participation in athletics that shaped their experiences.

Only the athletes themselves can tell these stories, however. Their accounts of their Olympic experiences are filled with stories of their early athletic experiences, with accounts of the time they spent with other athletes at the Games, and finally with their feelings on equality in sports and what the Olympics meant to them. In telling their stories, they appear to have the traits that lifetime athletes develop, as they were confident and self-aware and socialized easily with people they met. Many of them had never even considered going to the Olympics until they had begun the qualification process a few months earlier, yet they felt strongly enough about themselves to leave the only country they had ever known and travel across the world. And most importantly, they easily accepted the other athletes they came into contact with, regardless of their race or religion. The stories these athletes tell reveal the incredibly influential experiences they had during their time at the Olympics.

i. Feelings on the boycott debate

While the arguments over American participation raged in the media throughout the United States, the athletes sat and absorbed all the information that was put forth. In their testimonies, the athletes remark how they were acutely aware of the situation in Germany, although they admit that what they
knew then and what they later learned were drastically different. Herman Goldberg, a 20 year-old Jewish man from Brooklyn who was a catcher for the American baseball team in 1936 when baseball was merely an exhibition sport, stated that he saw coverage of the situation in Germany in the media. "The press gave some space to the problems in Germany. Not full space...But there was enough information coming because Hitler was beginning to make demands which were so great and impossible that you had to have a feeling that you were into something that was going to be very, very rough."119 Clearly, even though the amount of information on the true situation in Germany was minimal, Goldberg could see that the troubles that had been mentioned were only the beginning of something greater. Anyone who followed the stories of the events in Germany could see that discrimination and prejudice against non-Aryans had been building in the years preceding 1936 and that the situation could only get worse.

At the same time, however, these athletes were unequivocal in their support for participation. Goldberg had grown up in Brooklyn in a very religious family, and his Judaism was especially important to him. Yet he responded to the question of whether he, as a Jew, had considered not going with the strong statement "Not for one minute, absolutely not one minute."120 The accounts of some of the athletes reveal that the topic of a boycott was rarely even discussed. John Woodruff, a 21 year-old black track star who won a gold medal in the 800 meters for the Americans in Berlin, remembered that the topic of a boycott was rarely discussed among the team. "...we heard it and we heard something about

119["Interview with Herman Goldberg (May 15, 1996)," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, 1936 Olympics Collection, (RG - 50.429*03), 25.
120Ibid., 27.
The reason why Woodruff found it so easy not to discuss a boycott was that the situation involved mixing sports and politics, two topics that, in his mind, should remain separate. For the athletes, going to Germany, competing, and trying to win as many medals as possible was the only matter of any interest, Woodruff believed. While growing up, Marty Glickman, a 19 year-old Jewish track star from Brooklyn, had learned the joy and importance of sports, and his participation in football and basketball and his running were a critical part of his life. Perhaps because of this, he came to believe in the purity of athletics and so he echoed Woodruff on the boycott and the inappropriateness of mixing sports and politics. "The first man across the finish line wins. No matter what the race...There are no politics amongst the athletes. You talk about politics amongst the nations, certainly. But not as far as the Olympic Games are concerned...Politics are not involved in terms of winning and losing." Because of feelings like these, the decision to go to Berlin and participate was easy. Even later, when the truth about what was going in Germany came out, many athletes didn't change their views. When asked to reflect back on the decision to participate, knowing what was later revealed about the Nazis, Woodruff still believed the right decision had been made. "...I feel...they should have gone on with the Olympics as they did...it would have been very hurting for the athletes who had made so much preparation, who had trained so long over the years." More than just believing they had made the right decision, Woodruff realized the damage of denying these athletes the opportunity for advancement that sports presented, as it was his participation in

121"Interview with John Woodruff (May 15, 1996)," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, 1936 Olympics Collection, (RG - 50.429*02), 23.
122Ibid., 15.
123"Interview with Marty Glickman (May 20, 1996)," 29.
124"Interview with John Woodruff (May 15, 1996)," 58.
athletics that helped him escape the problems of his childhood. In the small town of Connellsville, Pennsylvania, the Woodruffs had been one of only two black families in the town. John had dropped out of school at the age of 16 and tried to work in a factory, but was denied employment because he was black. He then tried to join the Navy but was turned away because their black quota had already been filled. He finally returned to school, where his performance on the track team earned him a scholarship to Pittsburgh University and an eventual trip to Berlin for the Olympics. To Woodruff, and perhaps many of the other athletes on the American team, a lifetime of sports participation had taught them that sports can provide important social and economic opportunities for minorities, and can serve as a significant socially equalizing force.

ii. Relations with other athletes during the Games

Only days after the final qualifying meets, the athletes of the American teams found themselves packed into a boat bound for Germany. Most of these athletes didn't know anyone else around, except for the occasional person who had been their competitor in earlier contests. Moreover, most had never left the country before and were experiencing long travel for the first time. Given this situation, one could assume that relations between the athletes were awkward and that, at least early on, not much socializing took place. This was not the case, however. Their testimonies are filled with stories of friendships that developed at the Games, as athletes hung out together, trained together, and, in some cases, even kept in touch years after the Olympics were over. Their experiences in athletics had prepared them well for this situation.

Marty Glickman and Herman Goldberg, the runner and catcher, became good friends during the Games. Both men had grown up in mixed (Jewish and
non-Jewish) communities in Brooklyn and their participation in athletics had brought them into contact with many different people. They found each other while on their Olympic trip and spent some time together. Goldberg tells the story of how one day, with nothing else to do, the two of them set out from the Olympic village to go to Berlin, a good thirty minute ride. Having missed the official bus that would take them to the city, they were forced to walk, only to later try and hitch a ride from some Germans, who may not have realized they were Jewish, Goldberg believed. They finally arrived in Berlin, where Goldberg went to the opera and Glickman to other pursuits.\textsuperscript{125} Glickman also became close to the other athletes with whom he was scheduled to run the 400 meter relay with him, the Jewish runner Sam Stoller and white runners Foy Draper and Frank Wycoff. Every day, these four runners spent time together practicing their baton passing so as to best prepare for their race.\textsuperscript{126}

The most remarkable example of friendship between athletes during the Games came from its biggest star, the black runner Jesse Owens. Owens won four gold medals during the Berlin Games, with one coming from the high jump. During the trials for the event, Owens faulted on his first two attempts to execute a legal jump. With one more fault, he would be disqualified from the event. Nervous and wondering what had gone wrong while he waited for his third attempt, Owens was approached by Lutz Long, his German competitor in the event. In broken English, Long offered Owens a few words of consolation and advice. After this, Owens went on to make a successful jump and later win a gold medal in the event while setting a new Olympic record.\textsuperscript{127} Owens recalled of Long, "After he failed in his last attempt to beat me, he leaped out of the pit

\textsuperscript{125}Interview with Herman Goldberg (May 15, 1996)," 27, 32.
\textsuperscript{126}Interview with Marty Glickman (May 20, 1996)," 47.
\textsuperscript{127}Baker, 96-97.
and raced to my side. To congratulate me. Then he walked towards the stands pulling me with him while Hitler was glaring, held up my hand and shouted to the gigantic crowd, 'Jesse Owens! Jesse Owens!' The stadium picked it up."¹²⁸ Later that night, the two men spent two hours together talking in Long's room in the Olympic Village.¹²⁹ The friendship the two forged was remarkable, made even more so by the fact that the two kept in touch for a few years after the Games, until Long was killed fighting for Germany in World War II.¹³⁰ A picture that remains of the two of them underscores exactly how amazing their friendship was. The two men lie on their stomachs, arms crossed, obviously deep in conversation. On the left is Long, the Aryan model with his thick blond hair and white skin, while on the right is the smaller, darker Owens. With the photo centering on the two of them, their differences are enhanced and the profundity of their friendship is made clear. Owens recalled of Long years later, "Lu(t)z Long had been my competition in the Olympics. He was a white man - a Nazi white man who fought to destroy my country. I loved Lu(t)z Long, as much as my own brothers. I still love Lu(t)z Long."¹³¹

The Long-Owens friendship was just one of the many that emerged during the Games, although it was perhaps the most remarkable. It symbolizes well how relationships can be different for athletes because of the experiences they have had participating in athletics. Although thrown into a difficult situation when they left the United States for the Games, the athletes used the skills and traits they had learned throughout their life to make a meaningful experience for themselves. Many of the friendships created during the Olympics

¹²⁸Owens, Blackthink, 191.
¹²⁹Baker, 98.
¹³⁰Owens, Blackthink, 192.
¹³¹Ibid., 192.
lasted well after the Games were over, a true testament to how strong they must have been.

iii. Equality Among Athletes at the Games

It is clear from following the statements made during the boycott debate that American religious leaders and sports officials were more concerned with racial and religious distinctions than were the athletes themselves. Simply because they were black or Jewish, certain athletes were asked not or urged to participate. These distinctions seemed to have been irrelevant to the athletes themselves, however, as their statements on the subject of equality in sports are some of the most emphatic that exist in their testimonies. Given the effect of sports participation described above, this should come as no surprise, however. On the playing field, ability is the only characteristic which differentiates one athlete from another, and a situation can be created where individual matters such as race and religion are rendered irrelevant. The Olympics, many of these athletes felt, was the perfect place in which this distinction-free environment could thrive.

An example which drove home the equality of the Olympic situation was the lack of segregation of the American team, even if there existed many examples of segregation in American society. John Woodruff gave the simple reason for this: "It shouldn't have been any segregation because we were all a member of one team, the American team. We all had one objective and there was, there should not have any segregation and there wasn't any segregation."\(^{132}\) Woodruff strongly believed that the athletes should stay together during the

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\(^{132}\) "Interview with John Woodruff (May 15, 1996)," 20.
Games, and his thoughts seem to stem from his earlier experiences. Although there was discrimination against blacks in his hometown, he faced none of these problems during his time as an athlete there. It seemed logical to him, then, that he and his fellow athletes should not be separated while on board, and this lack of segregation subsequently allowed all the athletes to immediately view the Olympics as a place where all the athletes could operate on an equal footing.

The Olympics also provided an opportunity for athletes to learn about each other, and learn the most important thing that tied them together: that, deep down, they were all very much alike. Being at the Olympics allowed Marty Glickman to fully understand this. "...I began to realize that I'm just like the other athletes of the world...and they're just like me. We're all alike. We're all brothers. And the whole point of the Games, the whole point of all athletic competition is to learn to respect each other, to like each other, to love each other, to get to really know each other." When placed into situations like this, with the opportunity to learn about and understand each other, the athletes could learn the true meaning of equality and the irrelevancy of racial and religious distinctions. While the outside world saw them as blacks, Jews, Americans, and Germans, they saw each other simply as athletes. John Woodruff recalls, "...that's what the Olympics does...you become acquainted with a lot of people in particularly people on your team, and you become very close to them. And you don't think in terms of race when you're dealing with them see. And they don't think in terms of race with you."

**iv. Reflecting on the Olympics**

133° Interview with Marty Glickman (May 20, 1996), " 58.
The testimonies of the athletes who participated in the Berlin Olympics paint a picture of the remarkable experiences they had during their time there. Although the sample of testimonies cited here is quite small, the unanimity among them is quite striking. For many of these athletes, their time in Berlin impacted them greatly and this was due to the way in which they dealt with the situations presented to them. Because of the feelings they had on the boycott, the camaraderie they felt with their teammates and other athletes, and because they accepted the Olympics as a place of equality, these athletes were able to ease any tensions they felt or fears they had about going to Germany. The result was a truly amazing and unique experience.

Many of the athletes commented on the feelings they took away from the Games. Some of the black athletes were especially proud of their accomplishments because of the statement their victories had made in Nazi Germany. John Woodruff commented on how he was "very happy for myself as an individual, for my race, and for my country." Jesse Owens was much more descriptive about the effect he felt his accomplishments had. "It was as if I'd destroyed Hitler and his Aryan-supremacy, anti-Negro, anti-Jew viciousness. The good guys had won. In fact, not just 'the good guys,' but the best possible 'guy' - an American Negro." Even though the athletes themselves were not caught up in racial and religious distinctions, they were aware that Hitler and the Nazis were, and they hoped that their victories would send a message about the equality that truly existed.

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135 The pool from which to take the samples was similarly small, however, because, as mentioned earlier, only 6 Jewish athletes and 18 black athletes represented the United States in Berlin.
136 "Interview with John Woodruff (May 15, 1996)," 46.
137 Owens, I Have Changed, 19.
The Olympics were also a learning experience for the athletes that attended. Most were still young, in their late teenage years or early twenties, and had never traveled far or met so many different people before. For them, the Olympics was a remarkable event where they could experience feelings and emotions they had never felt before. The camaraderie of the Games, caused by all of the different athletes being together, was not lost on Herman Goldberg, to whom the Olympics were "...being friendly...being togetherness, trying to work together, trying to understand each other from different parts of the world." 138

What the athletes did, what they saw, and who they met at the Games profoundly influenced them and left a lasting impression. But they were not the only people who learned something at the Olympics. The American athletes, who had learned about the irrelevance of race and religion when it came to sports, were able to pass this on to the German spectators who filled the stadiums to watch them compete. The black athletes who won showed these Germans that the Nazi view of Aryan supremacy and the inferiority of blacks was not as solid as they might have once believed, a point that must have been underscored by the sight of Jesse Owens and Lutz Long beside the long-jump pit. Marty Glickman marveled at how the "shout of Sieg Heil was matched by the sound of Jesse Owens' name...It was a remarkable thing to see this marvelous black athlete saluted by a hundred and twenty thousand Germans." 139

The 1936 Olympics were a truly influential experience for everyone present.

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138\textsuperscript{138} Interview with Herman Goldberg (May 15, 1996)," 41.
139\textsuperscript{139} Interview with Marty Glickman (May 20, 1996)," 36.
On 5 August, 1936, Jesse Owens ascended the medal stand for his third gold medal of the Olympics, this one for the 200 meters. Although Owens would go on to win one more medal, in the relay, this would be the last for which he would accept a medal on the stand. He had just become the first track and field athlete to win three gold medals in one Olympics in over thirty-five years and the mostly German crowd roared its approval. These athletic victories represented only a few of Owens’ accomplishments in Berlin, however. He had at first made the decision to participate in the Games, knowing full well he was putting himself at risk by going to such a hostile environment. The Nazis had openly expressed their view of blacks as inferior, and Owens had no way of knowing what the reaction to his competing would be. Once in Germany, despite being under the constant specter of Hitler and the Nazis, he flourished. He won medals on the field and friends off it, most notably his long-jump competitor, the German Lutz Long, and hundreds of German fans who followed him around outside the Olympic stadium. He owed much of this success to his first coach, Charles Riley, who took him in as a malnourished young boy and made him into a world class athlete. Soon after his mentor died, Owens remarked how "Charles Riley was the source of what I do and what I say today." The track star had learned a lot from his years in sports, and a lot from Riley, who not only taught him about running, but about life as well. "He was the first white man I really knew and, without every trying, he proved to me beyond all proof that a white

140 Baker, 100-101.
141 Quoted in Ibid., 195.
man can understand - and love - a Negro. I don't have to say how much I loved him."142

Jesse Owens was not the only victorious United States athlete in Berlin, however, nor was he the only victorious black athlete. The United States captured 66 medals, second only to Germany, and black track and field athletes accounted for 11 of those, plus another for the 400 meter relay.143 The Jewish athlete Sam Balter also brought home a gold medal with the basketball team. Many people in the United States still felt as if the Games had been a propaganda success for Hitler, however, and "agreed that the host nation had done a magnificent job, and 99 out of 100 people who went to Germany that summer came away thinking the Nazi regime could not be as bad as rumour claimed."144 Still, the numerous victories of the black athletes had an effect on the Nazi view of Aryan supremacy, as those who had advocated American participation believed they would. "Although such things are impossible to measure, it seems likely that because of the widely publicized black victories, more people remained skeptical about racial myths such as those of the Nazis than would otherwise have done so."145 The American black and Jewish athletes had proven themselves off the field, as well, as they had succeeded in carrying themselves professionally and properly in representing their country. Their actions undoubtedly affected their status once they returned home, helping to lend credence to others of their race or religion. Because of the factors above, and because of the experiences the athletes remember that were so influential and

142Owens, Blackthink, 96.
143Wiggins, 73.
144Hart-Davis, 228.
important to them, it seems that the decision to participate in the Olympics was indeed a good one.

This thesis has attempted to reconstruct the experiences of the black and Jewish athletes who competed in the 1936 Olympics and explain why it was that they ignored the boycott debate that raged around the Games and went on to have incredibly influential experiences in Berlin. A description of the debate preceding the Games surrounding American participation and an explanation of the effects of a lifetime of sports participation have given useful background information in trying to understand what influenced these athletes as they faced a decision on their own participation. Despite numerous pleas to boycott, as well as an almost equal number of appeals to go, most of the American black and Jewish athletes traveled to Germany. Their Olympic experiences had profound effects on them, as they met many American and foreign athletes and they learned valuable lessons about the equality of all people.

Making the decision to compete was no easy task. By the fall of 1935, only months before the Games, the debate over an American boycott had grown extremely intense. The Nazis had gradually been taking away the rights and privileges of the Jews of Germany and soon Jewish athletes were barred from training for the Olympics. The Nazis also openly expressed their feelings on the inferiority of blacks. Despite German pledges that there would be no discrimination of athletes either from Germany or from abroad, there remained little evidence to support their claims. As a result, a growing number of sports officials and religious leaders in the United States began to call for an American boycott of the Games. The Nazis were openly defying Olympic ideals of equality and fair play, they claimed, and a lack of American athletes at the Games would send a strong message to Hitler that his policies would not be tolerated. An
equally vocal group continued to favor American participation, however, claiming that a boycott would mix two separate areas, sports and politics, that should never be combined. Moreover, a diverse group of American athletes competing and winning would be a severe blow to Hitler's belief in the supremacy of the Aryan race. The debate came to a head at the end of 1935, by which time the two major sporting organizations in the United States, the American Olympic Committee and the American Amateur Athletic Union, both made final decisions favoring American participation.

The debate was covered so heavily on a national basis that it would have been almost impossible for the athletes to ignore it, but they were also subjected to messages that came from sources much closer to home, the black and Jewish newspapers that were so influential in their communities. These papers made pleas, both for and against participation, that probably carried more weight for the athletes than any national newspaper would have. The issues that were most important to those involved in the boycott debate were different than those that were important to these athletes themselves, however. Despite this fact, the sheer amount of space given to the debate made it impossible to completely ignore. It was in this situation that the black and Jewish athletes of the 1936 Olympics found themselves, and they were in the end left to make their own decision on whether or not they would participate.

These blacks and Jews were athletes and had been involved in athletics for most of their lives. This experience had a profound effect on both the decisions they made about competing in the Games and the experiences they had once they were there. A lifetime of athletic participation had influenced them in becoming the people they were in 1936. They had acquired important social traits, such as a good self-concept (which brought with it confidence and self-esteem), sociability, extroversion, and the accepting of others. Those that had
participated in team sports learned the importance of working with others and the value of contributions from each member of the team. Competition and struggle against possibly unforgiving coaches and teammates strengthened their resolve and determination. They learned to sacrifice personal gains and accomplishments in order to achieve the satisfaction of group victories. As the track star John Woodruff recalled, "...in athletics...it's stronger than a fraternity when you're working with, when you're running together, training together, trying, trying to reach certain goals...in your sport, you become very, very close." Finally, these athletes had discovered the irrelevance of racial and religious distinctions and the equal playing field that sports created. When participating in athletics, the most important personal characteristic is ability, not outward appearance. To athletes, winning isn't dependent on whether an athlete is black or Jewish or white, but rather on whether or not they possess the skills necessary for ultimate victory. Moreover, in a team, the participation of every skilled athlete is necessary so accepting every athlete who can help is the best way to win. Because of this, the sporting world can be a place where the prejudices and discriminations of the outside world disappear.

It was these conscious and unconscious lessons that probably influenced the black and Jewish athletes who were faced with a decision concerning the 1936 Olympics. Because of the flood of arguments surrounding the Games, it would not have been surprising if these athletes had found it difficult to decide whether or not they would travel to Germany, or if they had agonized over what would happen when they got there. From the testimonies they left behind, however, it seems as if they hardly thought twice about going to Berlin, and it's clear that they had amazing experiences while there. The reason for this is that

146"Interview with John Woodruff (May 15, 1996)," 12-13.
their life-long participation in sports left them with the necessary social traits and beliefs to overcome any concerns or fears they had about participating. First, they largely ignored the pleas of the pro-boycott forces, something they were able to do for several reasons. Unlike some of the sports and religious officials in the United States, the athletes did not want to mix sports and politics. To them, competing and winning was what mattered most about a sporting event, not the political meaning behind it. Moreover, these athletes had learned about the importance of equality in sports, and so were able to overlook the racial and religious factors that caused many to argue against participation. While the people who favored a boycott saw the Olympics as an event which would pit black athletes and white athletes and Jewish athletes against each other, the American athletes saw it merely as a competition between equals. Finally, these athletes were able to ignore the boycott arguments because they occupied a different area of sports than those who were involved in the debate. Sports can be viewed much differently from the playing field than from the offices high above it.

With the decision to participate made, there could still be difficult times ahead for the athletes who were leaving home for the first time and traveling with people they hardly knew. Their experiences as athletes had prepared them for this, however. Having acquired the traits of extroversion and sociability, they were able to easily interact with the athletes they met during the Olympics, both American and foreign, and some strong friendships were developed. This was poignantly shown by the friendship that developed between Jesse Owens and his German competitor, Lutz Long. Although one a black American and the other a white German, the two became close friends during the Games and continued to communicate for several years after the Olympics were finished. Because they had spent years working and establishing close bonds with their peers, athletes
such as Owens became good at meeting and being around other athletes, and they were able to create some incredibly strong bonds of friendship as a result.

It was the lessons they had learned concerning equality and acceptance of others, however, that resulted in the most profound part of the Olympic experience for these athletes. They went to Berlin and were able to see all of their fellow athletes as equals, people who, deep down, were just the same as they were. At the Games, they spent their time with so many different athletes from all over the world who were of different races and religions, and because they did not immediately judge them based on any outward characteristics, they were able to form deep bonds with them. In the end, they left the Games with their beliefs in equality reinforced, as they were able to see this large group of very diverse athletes competing together in the same events and spending time together in the same places. Needless to say, the athletes would not have had these experiences had they decided to stay home.

The testimonies these athletes have left behind clearly show the extent to which their time at the Olympics deeply affected them. As mentioned earlier, although the sample of testimonies is quite small, the feelings conveyed in each are strikingly similar. Prior experiences prepared these athletes well for the situations they would face in Berlin in 1936 and the time they spent at the Olympics taught them even more about human beings and the relations between people. Overall, their participation in sports was what influenced their lives the most. To John Woodruff, sports had "done so much in order to make the country a better country in terms of social relationships between peoples."\textsuperscript{147} To Marty Glickman, sports was the "great equalizer,"\textsuperscript{148} a place where all personal distinctions save ability are unnecessary. At the bottom line, sports teaches

\textsuperscript{147}Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{148}"Interview with Marty Glickman (May 20, 1996)," 72.
people to be more aware and understanding of others. "I think the experience of all athletes makes me more conscious of other people, of bias and prejudice against Blacks, and Asiatics, and Latins, and Jews. I think that we're people. I've learned that through sports."149 This is just one of the many lessons learned through sports that influenced the basic feelings and beliefs people have, such as those that drove the black and Jewish athletes of the 1936 Olympic Games. A lifetime of sports participation made their Olympics experience, which had the potential to be a disaster because of the political turmoil that surrounded it, into a positive time of learning and growth. Because of their time as athletes, these black and Jewish athletes could truly strive for the Olympic ideal of "Farther, Higher, Stronger."

149Ibid., 71-72.
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