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Abstract

Track and field in the 1930s provided a unique opportunity for athletes of all races, gender, and ethnicities to come together and compete on an equal playing field. This helped bridge the tension and divide that existed within segregated America but also showed the power that athletics has in highlighting common human characteristics. The evidence that will primarily illustrate this comes from a number of primary sources including six oral histories conducted by the United States Holocaust Museum as well as The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics Archives. These interviews give a glimpse into what the 1936 Olympic experience was like for many of the athletes that did not receive the same level of recognition as their teammate Jesse Owens. The Pan American Games which took place in Dallas in 1937 highlighted some of the harsh realities of racism in the American South despite the meet promoters intentions of holding a "harmonious" track meet not centered around race.[1] Overall these sources will contribute to the field by highlighting track and field's involvement in healing social divides far ahead of its time.

[1]Dyreson, Mark. "The Original Pan-American Games? The 1937 Dallas Pan-American Olympics." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 1/2 (January 2016): 6–28.

Keywords

Race, Track and field, Gender, Ethnicity, Sports

Track and Field's Influence on Race, Gender and Ethnicity in the 1930s, including the 1936 Olympic Games.

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Track and field in the 1930s provided a unique opportunity for athletes of all races, gender, and ethnicities to come together and compete on an equal playing field. This not only helped bridge the tension and divide that existed within segregated America, but also showed the power that athletics has in highlighting common human characteristics. The evidence that will primarily illustrate this comes from a number of primary sources including six oral histories conducted by the United States Holocaust Museum as well as The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics Archives. These interviews give a glimpse into what the 1936 Olympic experience was like for many of the athletes that did not receive the same level of recognition as their teammate Jesse Owens. The Pan American Games which took place in Dallas in 1937 highlighted some of the harsh realities of racism in the American South despite the meet promoters' intentions of holding a "harmonious" track meet not centered around race. Overall, these sources will contribute to the field by highlighting track and field's involvement in healing social divides far ahead of its time.

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Since the ancient Olympics in Greece, people have laid down their weapons and competed to see who can run the fastest, jump the highest, and throw the farthest. These events were considered to be a true test of the human spirit. The athletes had a greater respect for someone out running a man than killing one. Fast forward to the 20th century and just as in ancient Greece, track and field in 1930s America continued to be a sport that deals with mutual respect for others. It helped bridge the gap of racial, gender and ethnic discrimination in the United States by providing an equal playing field in a very unequal society.

When talking about athletics in the 1930s, many first think of Jesse Owens and the "heroic" sweep of four gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. However, this well-known narrative provides a one-sided view of the true experience of being a racial minority within athletics during this time period. While this common depiction of Jesse Owens may not display the full picture, athletics during the 1930s was, nevertheless, a particularly

transformative period for racial and gender minorities. The truth of the matter lies somewhere between the progress made and the hardships, along with discrimination, that was many times overlooked in the broader analysis of 1930s athletics. It was the adversity that shaped the athletes of the time and ultimately would lead to changing cultural viewpoints throughout society. The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin were a major part of this change and one of the most remembered events in history, in large part due to their location and timing. The struggles faced by minority athletes during the 1930s would help pave the way for creating an equal playing field in sport, but also led to action in breaking down social barriers in the United States.

The historical study of race and gender within sport is a relatively new discipline. A number of historians have looked at the overall changes that have occurred in the 20th century, including discrimination within sport coupled with the fight for equality. A majority of historians have only thoroughly begun to address these issues starting in the 1970s and onward. Their work has

predominantly focused on shifts in treatment, participation, and cultural norms within society regarding race and gender.¹ Historians have generally centered on a time window surrounding the late 1800s and continuing until present day. The field has continually developed along with the rapid change in societal views in the late 20th and early 21st century.

Primary sources that will be examined in this paper include that of African Americans and women who competed in track and field during the 1936 Olympics. These oral histories will give a unique perspective into the event because they tell the lesser-known narratives that have been overlooked countless times. It is also important to note that athletes provided their own experiences, which they have had much time to reflect over, given many of these interviews took place thirty or more years after the 1936 Olympics had ended. The following athletes, whose interviews will be analyzed, come from an array of different backgrounds and each give their own unique perspective on the events that occurred. John Woodruff was an African American participant on the team and the gold medalist in the 800 meters. Marty Glickman was a Jewish athlete competing in the 400-meter relay, who was pulled from the 4x400 meter team at the last minute. Margarette

Lambert was a Jewish woman of German nationality, who was pulled from Germany's Olympic team. Louis Zamperini was an Italian American who competed in the 5000 meters. Lastly, James Luvalle was an African American who won the bronze medal in the 400 meters.²

The topic discussed in this paper is of significance for a number of reasons, one being it shines light on the sport of track and field itself, and how it has particularly shaped the study of race and gender equality in athletics. The topic indicated is a unique perspective that has not been studied often in the subfield of race and gender within athletics. In addition, it will provide new evidence and give attention to athletes whose stories have not been included in the overall master narrative of the historical field before. History from below will be used as a major historical method throughout the paper in order to provide a sense of what life was really like for African Americans and women athletes in the United States during the 1930s.

In order to provide greater background, the overall development of women in sport and racial equality will be examined by a number of scholars within the field. Furthermore, works on the 1936 Olympics and 1937 Pan American Games as well

¹ Douglas Booth, "Sport History: Modern and Postmodern Approaches," in *Making Sport History: Disciplines, Identities and the Historiography of Sport*, ed. Pascal Delheye (London: Routledge, 2015), 71.

² "An Olympian's Oral History: Louis S. Zamperini, 1936 Olympic Games, Track & Field."

Interviewed by George A. Hodak, June, 1988 in Hollywood, California (LA 84 Foundation)
<https://digital.la84.org/digital/collection/p17103coll11/id/302>

"An Olympian's Oral History : Dr. James E. Luvalle, 1936 Olympic Games, Track & Field."

Interviewed by George A. Hodak, June, 1988 in Palo Alto, California (LA 84 Foundation)
<https://digital.la84.org/digital/collection/p17103coll11/id/218/>

"Oral History Interview With John Woodruff" Interview by Randy M. Goldman, May 15, 1996,

United States Holocaust Museum, 3 videocassettes (Betacam SP) : sound, color ; 1/2 in. Available online at <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504460>
Accession Number: 1996.A.0456.2

"Oral History Interview with Margaret Lambert." Interviewed by Randy M. Goldman, May 20,

1996, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 3 videocassettes (Betacam SP) : sound, color ; 1/2 in. Available online <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504456>
Accession Number: 1996.A.0456.5

"Oral History Interview with Marty Glickman." Interviewed by Randy M. Goldman, May 20, 1996, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 3 videocassettes (Betacam SP) : sound, color ; 1/2 in. Available online at <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504463>
Accession Number: 1996.A.0456.4

as other secondary sources will provide an understanding of the events that will be discussed. Oral histories from track athletes in the 1930s will provide the bulk of the analysis in order to create a new understanding of the existing narrative. These oral histories provide some key information that help shape and add light to the current understanding of track and field's impact on society. For one, there was a sense of inclusivity among athletes competing together, but also a shared common goal that further bonded their relationships. Oral histories are important in discussing this topic because they provide a first-hand look into the minds of the participating athletes of the time. There are no lenses or filters that exist in many newspaper articles where a personal agenda may have been involved. There are, however, circumstances in which an interviewees' perspective may have changed over time, and this is likely the case for many of the 1936 Olympic team members, as they would end up witnessing World War II, the Civil Rights Movement, and many other major events from the 20th century in the decades between the Games and their interviews. Sue Armitage, in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, argues that oral histories provide a unique angle for women in particular, because they are able to help fill the gaps often experienced by women throughout written history.³ Due to the lack of recorded perspectives from many women, oral histories have become increasingly important in not only shedding additional light about a given subject, but also in making the understanding of an event more accurate as well. Armitage brings up a quote from a feminist journal titled *Frontiers* that states, "Refusing to be rendered historically voiceless any longer, women are creating new history using our own voices and experiences."⁴ The female oral histories that will be analyzed throughout this

³ Sue Armitage, "The Stages of Women's Oral History." In *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 236.

⁴ Armitage, *Stages of Women*, 237.

paper do just that, and help fill the voids present in history and especially in the history of women's sports. In addition to women's oral histories, race is also an important factor in the importance of these particular primary sources.

Albert S. Broussard discusses the importance and history of race in oral history in his chapter of *The Oxford handbook of Oral History*. Oral history has played a major role in African American history taking root and becoming part of the master narrative of American history, something that really did not start to occur until the 1960s, and 1970s.⁵ Broussard's research reveals that oral histories in the African American community show the existence of civil rights action before World War II and continuing so after. These interviews helped change the field by giving a voice to the African American minority, who had been silenced out of much of the written history books.⁶

However, in the oral histories reviewed for this paper, the athletes' experiences seemed to contradict the norms of the time period. Athletes of all races, genders, and backgrounds came together over a common goal within athletics. Track athletes spoke very highly of each other, stood up for one another, and created a social environment that was certainly ahead of its time. This does not mean that race and gender issues were never a problem, but simply that there was a significantly noticeable difference in the social construct of the sport of track and field from the heavily segregated society of 1930s America. Therefore, track and field in the 1930s, including the 1936 Olympics, played an important role in shaping views on race and gender by supplying an opportunity to compete, building momentum for minorities in the sport, and changing overall viewpoints within the structure of society.

⁵ Albert S. Broussard, "Race and Oral History," In *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 260.

⁶ Broussard, "Race and Oral History," 276.

To understand track and field's particular influence on race and gender, athletics must be looked at more broadly during the 1930s in order to establish what the societal norms were at the time. The harsh reality was, being a minority and competing in sports during the 1930s was far from a perfect experience. Racial and gender history in sport is still a very contemporary topic among scholars, but most tend to follow the narrative of bringing light to the injustices experienced and to the progress made toward equal opportunity in athletics. Two of the main issues within this topic that historians have looked at are what led to the racial tensions within sports, and why were women in many circumstances either barred from competition, lacked opportunity to compete or simply frowned upon for doing so?

As time has gone on, the overall narrative of gender and race within sport has changed significantly. Despite being a current topic to historians, there have been major shifts within its scope, especially as society's viewpoints have changed. In the early 1900s, race was not a common topic that was discussed in athletics, as most African Americans were barred from competing in athletic competition versus white Americans. Instead, in many cases, they were assigned to their own separate leagues. The first President of the International Olympic Committee, Baron Pierre De Coubertin, wrote a piece on the first Olympic games in modern history that took place in 1900. He discusses the overall importance of the games to society but fails to make mention of race within his writing. De Coubertin also neglects to point out the discrimination faced by many different ethnic groups surrounding the games. This document, which was written in 1900, represents, in many ways, the common views at the time.⁷ Several of these viewpoints are simply displayed from the gaps that are present within the overall work. De Coubertin's work illustrated this because it

⁷ Baron Pierre De Coubertin, "The Meeting of the Olympian Games." *The North American Review* 170, no. 523 (1900): 803.

showed what the main focus remained for the time period, on top of what was deemed important when discussing the Olympic Committee. The text makes specific mention of men additionally, but not any of women, given that they were not allowed to compete in the Olympics until the late 1920s. De Coubertin added to the trend, expressing that, "young men are active and in good health, they will be fond of manly games and competitions in which they display their strength and agility, and, incited by the instinct of emulation, they will desire to contend, in the name of their country, against young men of other lands." This statement illustrates the overall narrative of the time period not only showing the expectations of men in society, but also the absence of women within athletics. This particular societal norm has a lasting presence throughout the early to mid-20th century and proved to be a major obstacle for women competing in athletics. Even as progress was attained, these issues were a lasting weight on women athletes' shoulders.

Other historians such as Vincent Harding, an African American professor whose focus included religion and society in America, focused on the racial divides within the country. Harding would argue that black history needs to shake the very foundation of American history as considerable details of our history is built around a narrative that does not give an accurate depiction of the true events that unfolded.⁸ While he doesn't specialize in sport history, Harding's contributions to the racial historical field are important to mention because many black histories have been left out of the historical narrative. The traditional "Negro history" that had been in place prior to the civil rights movement sought to bring African Americans into the picture but only as they fit in and assimilated to the white culture within the

⁸ Vincent Harding, "Beyond Chaos: Black History and the Search for the New Land," In *Historians on History: Readings*, ed. John Tosh (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 120.

United States.⁹ This traditional way of thinking praised African American heroes such as baseball star Jackie Robinson and 4-time gold medalist, Jesse Owens but leaves out the majority of African Americans and fails to mention the true discrimination that they were subjected to. History from below along with black history aims to change this story and not only focus on the societal elites. While Vincent Harding's works were not specifically related to race and gender within sport, his pieces on bringing African American history into the master narrative, and changing it all together for that matter, is something that brought forth a major impact on the field of race within American history and is, therefore, important to note.

African Americans are not the only minority to struggle to find their identity within the pages of history books. Various feminist historians including Bonnie Smith have made the argument that other historians, males in particular, have failed to portray women competing in athletics in an accurate lighting due to simply leaving them out of the big picture by "prioritizing men's history over women's, white history over non-white, and the political history of Western governments over others."¹⁰ Bonnie Smith is not the only historian that holds these views; in fact, many of her colleagues in the field are of the same opinion that the history of sport has primarily been focused around men and their involvement within the sport.

Susan Cahn, who wrote the book *Coming on Strong Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport*, looks at the development of gender within sport and how it changed over time.¹¹ Physical education, for instance, is a subject that is analyzed. During the 1920s and 1930s, there

were major shifts in social thinking, and suddenly, while it was still against the cultural norm, women were beginning to compete further in athletic competition and participate in physical education. A number of committees were formed in order to try and give women more of a say in competition including The Committee on Women's Athletics (CWA) and the Women's Division of National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF). While these groups both agreed on the notion that women deserve the right to compete in athletics, they differed on how they went about the process. The main disagreement was the types of sports women should compete in and the "degree of competition suitable for women." Track and field for instance, was a sport that was seen as "manly" because it highlights the most physical qualities within athletics, speed, jumping, power, etc.

Despite the fact that women had recently been allowed to compete in the Olympic Games and were starting to at least gain somewhat of a foothold in the athletic world, there were still many challenges that presented themselves for women competing in the track world. During the 1930s there were assumed gender roles that women were supposed to take, and breaking those resulted in society looking down on a woman. Helen Stephens was a prime example of this. Stephens was the Olympic champion in the 1936 Games in the 100 and 200-meters events. During the games she stated that she had the opportunity to meet with Hitler, although it was a quite traumatic experience. She said that "He gets hold of my fanny and begins to squeeze and pinch and hug me up. And he said: 'You're a true Aryan type. You should be running for Germany.'" Hitler then invited her to spend the weekend in Berchtesgaden which Stephens refused.¹² This

⁹ Harding, "Beyond Chaos," 121.

¹⁰ Patricia Vertinsky, "Mixed Fortunes in an Academic Environment: The Institutional Gendering of Sport History," In *Making Sport History: Disciplines, Identities and the Historiography of Sport*, ed. Pascal Delheye (Abingdon, Oxon: 2015), 153.

¹¹ Susan Kathleen Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Womens Sport, 1900-1960*.

(Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 143.

¹² Doug Gillon, "Hitler pinched my bottom," *The Herald (Online Version)*. October 7, 2008. 2.

was something that women competing in track and field have to deal with often, even today, as they were many times sexualized and not taken seriously as athletes.



“Helen Stephens with Adolf Hitler, Olympic Games 1936 Berlin” (William Woods University) Image featured at “Helen Stephens Historic Missourians” <https://historicmissourians.shsmo.org/helen-stephens>.

In addition to these struggles, women also struggled with being labeled as “mannish” for competing in athletics to begin with.¹³ In fact, Stephens was accused at the 1936 Olympics along with Stanislaw Walasiewicz of being a male. This was determined to be false given that “the Olympic Committee performed a physical check on Stephens and concluded that she was a woman”¹⁴ It was acts like this that made it difficult

¹³ Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 116.

¹⁴ “Helen Stevens Is Real Girl,” *Warsaw*, August 6, 1936, 4.

¹⁵ Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 116.

for women to compete and pursue their athletic aspirations without being scrutinized or examined by society. Susan Cahn speaks about this issue in her book *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport*, claiming that sports at the time were attributed with a general sense of masculinity, but that track and field had a particularly strong masculine image. Cahn articulates that “it featured power and speed unmediated by equipment, teamwork, or complicated rules.”¹⁵ This individualized aspect of track and field in numerous ways made it harder for women to own their participation as all eyes were on them, plus, track and field highlighted the most basic forms of physical strength, speed, and agility. Despite these hardships, however, it was athletes like Helen Stephens who paved the way for countless other women in the sports by continuing to follow her competitive dreams and not giving into the discrimination she faced by choosing to compete.

Gender and racial tensions within sport were not the only matter in question during the 1930s. An issue that surrounded the 1936 Olympics in particular was the movement in the United States to boycott the Berlin Games. This was due to the games being controversial for several reasons. First, the Nazi Party that came to power in Germany had many questionable policies such as its discrimination toward Jewish and non-white peoples.¹⁶ Nationalism was on the rise during this time, which blinded many Germans from seeing the realities of what was taking place. Propaganda was also largely employed throughout the Games to influence the German people, and to put on a facade for the rest of the world.¹⁷ Despite their own controversy surrounding race, the United States sent many African American athletes to the 1936 Games, and Germany agreed to let them all compete. Of

¹⁶ Guttman, “The ‘Nazi Olympics’ and American boycott controversy,” *Sport and International Politics*, 33.

¹⁷ Guttman, “The ‘Nazi Olympics’ and American boycott controversy,” *Sport and International Politics*, 45.

these athletes, Jesse Owens, a young African American from Ohio State University, stood out as the star of the 1936 Games. He went on to win four gold medals in four different events, the 100-meters, 200-meters, long jump, and the triple jump. Owens was the first American to ever win four gold medals in one Olympic Games.¹⁸

During this time, Hitler had risen to power in Germany and elements of anti-semitism and racist views began to trickle down into German society. Despite these racial undertones, a majority of the German crowds during the 1936 games were actually quite supportive when African Americans from the United States won medals. This included Jesse Owens' iconic gold medal sweep. However, as Arndt Kruger points out in his chapter in *Sport and International Politics*, "The unexpected display of apparently unbiased treatment was actually part of a concentrated effort at shaping a favorable image of the new regime."¹⁹ So in other words, the reason the Nazi party accepted having African Americans in the games was to try and make their regime look good on the world stage.

Germany's propaganda department may have succeeded in Germany in coming off as "accepting" during the games, but Adolf Hitler himself did not follow this example. In fact, Hitler made it a clear point not to congratulate any African American athletes who won medals in their respective events.²⁰ He did give his attention to the successful white athletes of the games who "better fit his racial ideal."²¹ Hitler's attitude toward people of color participating in the Olympics got a lot of attention from the press

back home in America; however, the papers' criticism of Germany in the states exposed the irony of America's own racial struggles.

The irony of Germany putting on a good appearance for political reasons was in America's reaction in certain regions at home, especially in the South. "Jesse Owens was the darling of the German crowd, but readers of the *Atlanta Constitution*, and other newspapers in the white American South, did not see any pictures of him, and while most of Germany celebrated him as much as warranted a four-time gold medal winner and hero of the games"²² America's own racial views blinded them to what was really going on in Germany.

Robert Drake's article "Jesse Who?: Race, the Southern Press, and the 1936 Olympic Games" dives into this very topic with his interpretation of America's racial tendencies during that time.²³ Drake makes some very interesting points about Jesse Owens and the race issues he dealt with back in the United States. In particular, the article focuses on the racism seen in the Southern press. This is a subject that is not well known because many newspapers of the day omitted events that did not exhibit their own racial biases. An in-depth analysis of the articles that does exist reveals several forms of racism, and those in the deep South were particularly aggressive in their anti-African American message.²⁴ This was accomplished by "minimizing and censoring news of Jesse Owens and other successful African American athletes, and by depicting African Americans as Coons, Mammies, and Bucks—minstrel character roles that had been used for

¹⁸ "Famous Olympic Star Enroute from England To United States," *Detroit Tribune*. August 22, 1936, 2.

¹⁹ Guttman, "The 'Nazi Olympics' and American boycott controversy," *Sport and International Politics*, 45.

²⁰ Robert Drake, 2011. "Jesse Who?: Race, the Southern Press, and the 1936 Olympic Games." *American Journalism*, 84.

²¹ Drake, "Jesse Who", 84.

²² Arnd Krüger, "United States of America: The Crucial Battle," In *The Nazi Olympics: Sport, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s*, ed. Kruger Arnd and Murry William, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 47.

²³ Drake, "Jesse Who", 84.

²⁴ Drake, "Jesse Who," 84.

decades to marginalize and humiliate blacks.”²⁵ So essentially, many of these newspapers participated in racist acts not only by publishing asinine remarks, but also by omitting anything about the hard-earned achievements of African Americans in the Olympic Games. This likely hurt much worse for African Americans because they did not get credit for their accomplishments, even after bringing home their so-called “country’s” medals. Jesse Owens later stated, “I wasn’t invited to shake hands with Hitler, but I wasn’t invited to the White House to shake hands with the President either.” This revealed the vast irony that was present within America during this period as there were still many racial issues at home.²⁶

A newspaper article from the *Detroit Tribune* published shortly after the 1936 Olympic Games, says this about African American athletes Jesse Owens, Ralph Metcalfe, and Cornelius Johnson:²⁷ “Every tape broken by Owens is an answer to Hitler that the burning of a thousand books cannot wipe out.” This statement shows that America was happy about gaining a “victory” over Germany, even though it was only in athletics. The Olympics play an important role in the world of politics because countries must put down their weapons and compete in the most primal human way. Due to this, not all newspapers portrayed Owens’s accomplishments in a negative light, and in fact many gave him the credit he well deserved. However, African Americans overall were still far from having an equal opportunity in athletics.

An article written about Wichita University’s track and field program (now named Wichita State University) showed the distinction between whites and African Americans when displaying the

results of an event. “Above are the Shockers who placed in the Drake Relays yesterday, with their coach Harry Goerger... Dinty Moore is in the lower left and alongside him is King, the negro sprint sensation.”²⁸ This article does not take aim at King, and in fact compliments him. It is the point that his race needed to be mentioned at all that reveals the racial norms in American society. Despite athletes being allowed to compete with each other from different races, it did not change how the sport would be perceived and written about in the media. There was always distinction made between races as if it was something obligated to be mentioned. As in the previous example, King’s name could not be brought up without pointing out the color of his skin, yet Dinty Moore’s skin color was not revealed at all because he was white. Everything was segregated, and even track meet events where African Americans were allowed to compete denied them the respect of speaking their names without bringing up the color of their skin.

Not only did Jesse Owens have to deal with the racial divide in America, but he also dealt with pressure from his African American brothers and sisters as well. Many believed that Jesse should not compete in the Olympic Games and represent a country that did not treat their own African Americans as equal citizens. A letter written to Jesse Owens from Walter White, who was the secretary of the NAACP, encouraged Owens to boycott competing in the 1936 Olympics.²⁹ In his argument, White admits that he understands Owens’s desire to compete in the games and says that he “realizes the sacrifice that it will be for you to give up the trip to Europe... I realize equally well how hypocritical it is for certain Americans to point the finger of scorn at any other

²⁵ Drake, “Jesse Who,” 84.

²⁶ Schaap, Jeremy. *Triumph: The Untold Story of Jesse Owens and Hitler’s Olympics*. (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 42.

²⁷ “Famous Olympic” *Detroit Tribune*, Aug 22, 1936, 2.

²⁸ “Wichita University Places In Drake Relays,” Clipping with no citation, ca. 1930 Harry Goerger, in possession of author.

²⁹ Walter White, “NAACP Secretary Walter White to Jesse Owens concerning the 1936 Olympic games”, letter. From Library of Congress, *NAACP Collection, Manuscript Division*, December 4, 1935. 1 <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/the-great-depression.html>

country for racial or any other kind of bigotry.”³⁰ This is quite a profound statement and illustrates that he understood Owens's own frustrations. This letter is important because it provides context from inside the African American community and confirms that Owens was being pressured from all sides.

The 1936 Olympics are referenced most often when talking about race and sport during the 1930s. However, there were other important events that have received less credit throughout history. One of those includes the 1937 Pan American Olympics which were hosted in Dallas, Texas.³¹ This was not the actual Olympics, and only consisted of teams competing from both continents of North and South America which is why the event is not as well known. However, while not being on the scale of the Olympics, the Pan American Games were a major event that brought in hundreds of athletes from many countries to compete.³²

Due to this event having taken place in the South, the United States' prejudices were clearly on display for the rest of the world to see. Many African Americans who competed and were top finishers for the United States in Berlin were not invited to the games in Dallas and segregated seating was assigned for the few African Americans who were allowed to compete. The meet was put on by George Marshall, who was the commissioner of the NFL during the 1930s and heavily involved in sports management. His overall stance on interracial athletics however, had changed dramatically over his career, and his view seemed to alter following 1936. His prior stance barred many African Americans from competition and discouraged interracial athletics from taking place.³³ It is unclear whether this was

done for political reasons, but it is apparent that even during the 1937 Games, Marshall's beliefs on the issue were mixed. He was quoted as saying, “sports could promote harmonious interactions between racial and ethnic groups. ‘Athletics have created in our college system an inter-racial spirit of friendliness which exists nowhere else in the world.’”³⁴ Given this, Marshall understood the power that athletics allowed in bridging the gaps of racial divide, but even so, Marshall still found ways in which to keep the meet segregated. This was likely due to massive political pressure from holding the Games in the South. He went on to say, “We find representatives of these many races competing in athletics on common ground, and in a happy and friendly frame of mind’, Marshall testified. ‘In our grandstands and in our arenas, we find hundreds of thousands of persons of these races cheering without racial partisanship these same athletes who comprised inheritances which are still bitter, even in the United States’”³⁵ This further cements track and field's positive contribution to bringing athletes together regardless of racial differences. While events like these possibly did not get the credit that they deserved, they were powerful examples that helped change people's thinking. If athletes could get along and compete as teammates and competitors, then why couldn't the rest of America?

When organizing the meet Marshall made sure that all of the “Black Auxiliaries” (which is what Hitler called the African American competitors at the Berlin Olympics a year earlier) were invited to compete at the 1937 Pan American Games. However, the same invitation was not given to the local African American participants from the Dallas area. “George Marshall and his staff dipped below the top three finishers at the

³⁰ White, “NAACP,” 1

³¹ Mark Dyreson, “The Original Pan-American Games? The 1937 Dallas Pan-American Olympics,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 1/2 (January 2016): 6.

³² Dyreson, “Pan-American,” 6.

³³ Dyreson, “Pan-American,” 7.

³⁴ Dyreson, “Pan-American,” 14.

³⁵ Dyreson, “Pan American,” 15.

Milwaukee Nationals to add a dozen white Texans to the roster. No black veterans of the 1936 Centennial Olympics in Dallas received an invitation.”³⁶ This was done intentionally in order to try and get a better turnout for the event due to there being more white competitors. Even the spectators were segregated by their race in the grandstands. Dyreson also points out that, “the Dallas Morning News announced that ‘due to the fact there are several nationally-known negro performers who will compete in the Pan-American track meet, a special section of the Cotton Bowl will be reserved for negro fans.”³⁷ By segregating the stadium, white meet promoters intended to provide an environment more well suited for many “white Americans’s tastes.”³⁸

Segregated seating was not the only racial discrimination experienced by African Americans during the 1937 games. In fact, housing accommodations provided by the meet directors to American and foreign athletes were only reserved for white Americans and foreign visitors. A “Pan American Olympic village” was constructed at the local college, Southern Methodist University.³⁹ “However, the only blacks allowed in SMU’s fraternity houses were the cooks, waiters, and custodians whom the frat boys had lent to serve their guests, the white athletes from North and South America.” It is quite shocking to see that African Americans who had competed in the 1936 Olympic Games, and many who had brought home medals for the United States were not allowed to stay in America’s own Olympic village only a year later.

Unfortunately, while the 1937 Pan American Games provided an opportunity for many peoples from different ethnicities and racial backgrounds to compete, the realities of American racism at the time were still unavoidable. In some ways, they were a step in the right direction for changing

racial discrimination in athletics, but also resembled the segregated Southern culture at that stage in time. This was a great example of how track and field provided a more equal playing field. The event as a preparation of “racial integration” in the rest of society has been labeled by historians as “muscular assimilation.”⁴⁰ In a way, it was a play on words because it symbolized a literal muscular assimilation through athletics, but also showed how athletics was a route in which strides could be made toward equality.

While scholars have looked at the discrimination in athletics and how race and gender norms shifted throughout the 1930s, they have neglected to look at the specific significance that track and field athletes’ experiences had on bonding together athletes of all different backgrounds. Track and field brought together people of all races, genders, and ethnicities in order to compete for a common goal. Track and field is unique in the fact that it is one of the few individualized sports in which the goal is to test oneself, rather than winning a game. There is still winning and losing in track; however, the main focus is bettering one’s mark and pushing oneself to a higher standard. In order to make these goals become a reality, one must endure a lot of pain and struggles through training in order to strengthen oneself. This process of training really connects athletes because they can all relate to how challenging training can be.

Another attribute to the sport is that athletes take full ownership of their performance. There is no blaming a poor race on the officials or a teammate making a bad throw; it all comes down to an individualized performance, that in the end, contributes to a team’s performance. In many ways, this is also what creates a strong

³⁶ Dyreson, “Pan-American,” 13.

³⁷ Dyreson, “Pan-American,” 13.

³⁸ Dyreson, “Pan-American,” 13.

³⁹ Dyreson, “Pan-American,” 13.

⁴⁰ Dyreson, “Pan-American,” 17.

relationship among athletes because they do not want to let their other teammates down.

In all of the following athlete oral interviews, they all had nothing but respect and appreciation for their teammates who were from all different races, genders, and ethnicities. Despite the minority struggles of the 1930s, when these athletes competed with each other, the only objective was to win. Race and politics simply did not matter.⁴¹

The first oral interview that will be analyzed is of John Woodruff, who was born on July 15, 1915, in Connellsville, Pennsylvania. Woodruff grew up in a poor family and had a tough childhood. Two of his brothers died, one in a hunting accident at the age of sixteen.⁴² Despite these hardships, Woodruff got involved in sports at a young age because it enabled him to get a college scholarship. He later claimed that college would not have been an option for him if it was not for athletics.⁴³ He attended and competed in track and field at the University of Pittsburgh before going on to participate in the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin, Germany, only as a freshman.⁴⁴

The second oral history looked at will be of James Luvall, who was the bronze medalist in the 400m. Luvall talked about his fond memories competing with his African American teammates including Archie Williams, who won the gold medal in the 1936 Games. Luvall was born on November 12, 1912, in San Antonio, Texas. Luvall attended LA Polytechnic High School, where he discovered his talent in the sport of track and field. He went on to run at Caltech and was not only an incredible athlete, but also an academic. Luvall was the first African American to graduate from Caltech.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Woodruff, "Oral History," 7.

⁴² Woodruff, "Oral History," 1.

⁴³ Woodruff, "Oral History," 3.

⁴⁴ Woodruff, "Oral History," 2.

Next, Marty Glickman's oral interview will be discussed. Glickman was a Jewish 400-meter athlete on the United States Olympic team and was involved in one of the biggest controversies of the Games. Glickman grew up in New York and expressed that he never felt any different in being a Jew or that it was something that he had to overcome. Glickman recounts that he was brought up in a number of different neighborhoods that were Jewish and mixed, including living among Irish and Italians.⁴⁶ Apart from an occasional fight he would see between a Jewish boy and another non-Jewish kid, he claimed that it was only during his freshman year at Syracuse that he would be treated differently and made fun of sometimes.⁴⁷ Glickman loved sports and quickly realized at a young age that he was always the fasted kid on the block. Sports became the center of Glickman's life and would propel him on to run in college at Syracuse University where he realized his potential in track and field and his opportunity to compete in the 1936 Olympic Games.

The fourth oral history to be considered is of Louis S. Zamperini, a long- distance runner, who competed in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. Zamperini was an Italian American and born January 26, 1917, in Orleans, New York, which is located in upstate New York.⁴⁸ As a kid, Zamperini was always a troublemaker. It was not uncommon for him to get in fights at school or steal things from local markets. Eventually he learned to channel his energy into running where he realized he had a special ability. Zamperini was able to run farther and faster than almost anyone he met. This led him to go to school and run track and field at University of Southern California.

⁴⁵ Luvall, "Oral History," 1.

⁴⁶ Glickman, "Oral History," 1.

⁴⁷ Glickman, "Oral History," 23.

⁴⁸ Zamperini, "Oral History," 5.

Lastly, Margaret Lambert's oral history will be looked at. Lambert was a Jewish German athlete, and she talks about her experience in her oral interview that was conducted in 1996. Margaret Lambert was born on April 12, 1914, in Laupheim, Germany. Her oral interview gives a unique and intimate look into the anti-Semitism that existed in Germany following the rise of the Nazi party in 1933.

Throughout his interview John Woodruff speaks very highly of his teammates regardless of race and treated everyone with respect. You can tell that he holds himself to a high moral standard. In an oral interview in 1996 from the Holocaust Museum, Woodruff discussed his experience on the U.S. Olympic team, winning a gold medal and how he was treated upon returning home. Woodruff's experience in track and field, like many others, was a positive one. When it came to the racial divisions within America, it was almost like a bubble in which the lens of race would pause for a brief moment as men and women of all races competed to win. When asked about whether the United States Olympic teams' boat to Germany was segregated, Woodruff responded firmly "No, that was the way everything was set up. There shouldn't have been any segregation because we were all a part of the same team representing America. There shouldn't have been any segregation, and there wasn't any segregation."⁴⁹ What makes this so interesting was that segregation was still the norm in the United States during the 1930s; however, as soon as the athletes got on the boat, that all changed. Woodruff reiterated throughout his interview that the athletes did not get caught up in the politics of the time and that their main objective when they toed the line was to win the race.⁵⁰ This was an objective shared across all races on the team and

Woodruff shared that there was a lot of comradery amongst the team, and many would talk about hopes and goals for the meet.⁵¹

After returning home from the Olympics, Woodruff was welcomed by a parade in his hometown. However, the celebrations only lasted for a brief period of time before the realities of segregated America set in again. Woodruff recalled returning to classes at University of Pittsburg only to be denied entry into the English class because he arrived a month late due to his competition in the Olympics.⁵² Another example of the racial realities in America was that Woodruff was denied service at a local diner only a month after his return home.⁵³ When asked if being an Olympic Gold medalist had opened any doors for him, he replied that, "I'm sure that it opened many doors for the white athletes, but I can't recall any African Americans having a lot of doors opened."⁵⁴ Woodruff even recalled that opportunities for Jesse Owens were even very scarce for a long period of time. He said that Owens partook in doing events such as racing horses in order to provide income for his family. It was not until later in his life when he got involved in doing a lot of speaking engagements that he gained more success.⁵⁵

Despite track and field athletes bonding and breaking social norms on the United States Olympic team, it did not mean that things back home in the United States had changed. In fact, many of the African Americans' efforts at the 1936 Games that helped lead the United States to victory, were soon forgotten upon the return home when the celebration parades in New York faded into the past. The country was still very segregated and opportunity even for many of the Gold medalist athletes was scarce. John Woodruff was asked about his experience at the

⁴⁹ Woodruff, "Oral History," 9.

⁵⁰ Woodruff, "Oral History," 5.

⁵¹ Woodruff, "Oral History," 6.

⁵² Woodruff, "Oral History," 20.

⁵³ Woodruff, "Oral History," 20.

⁵⁴ Woodruff, "Oral History," 21.

⁵⁵ Woodruff, "Oral History," 22.

Olympics and whether he felt a sense of irony from winning a gold medal for a country in which he was discriminated against back home. Woodruff's reply was that "We had experienced a lot of discrimination, and we didn't like it, we don't like it and never will."⁵⁶ When up on the podium to receive his medal, Woodruff was unsure whether he should give the Nazi salute or the American salute because they were not instructed beforehand. He ended up giving the American, but it provides an interesting picture of how Woodruff must have felt representing a country fueled by oppression of his people. He claimed later in the interview, which was conducted in 1996, that there still is racism in America as far as a black man is concerned. He felt things, however, were a lot better, much better, but there is still a long way to go.⁵⁷

One example that Woodruff pointed out was a track meet run at the Naval Academy. He was the reigning Olympic champion and was barred from competing due to discrimination. The irony was that Hitler's comment about the "Black Auxiliaries" being the reason why America won the Olympics was really true, and it was sad that it had to be pointed out by someone such as Hitler.

One of the more surprising aspects of Woodruff's interview was his answer to the question, in retrospect, should America have competed in the 1936 Olympics given the full context of World War II that would soon unfold afterward? He said that he felt even with what time revealed, that the athletes should have still competed in the games because of the training and preparation that they "put in," "That's my own personal feeling, the Olympics and politics should stay separate."⁵⁸

This opinion is one widely shared by many and one of the qualities that the Olympics has always had, bringing together the world and putting aside

cultural differences as well as celebrating them, too.

John Woodruff, fresh out of becoming the Olympic champion in the 800 meters a year earlier, was invited to the Pan American Games. He ended up winning the event and in world record fashion. Woodruff beat Elroy Robinson, a white American athlete who had just broken the world record a week earlier. After the race, it was noted in *The Dallas Morning News* that "the Berlin gold medalist as 'a gent of color'" who so dominated Robinson and the rest of the field that "Woodruff was pursued by nothing but ten yards of empty darkness as he crossed the finish line'." The paper also, "commended the enthusiasm with which white as well as black fans recognized the Pittsburgh star's feat."⁵⁹ Despite the stellar performance and the seeming cooperation between races, John Woodruff's 800m world record did not stand. In fact, the architect of the track stated that the dimensions of the track were measured incorrectly and therefore the distance was actually a few feet short, therefore the record could not be ratified. Woodruff was not happy about the decision, and there were concerns about whether it was racially motivated.⁶⁰ Events like these showed the harsh realities that African American athletes had to encounter. The frustrating part for many African American athletes was in scenarios such as this one, they were left wondering whether these circumstances were due to the color of their skin or whether it was just fate. Sadly, due to the reoccurring oppression experienced in 1930s America, the notion of racial roots being the issue cannot be ruled out.

Like Woodruff, his other teammates on the U.S. team were in agreement about the team atmosphere and comradery. In fact, the biggest divide among the team was not between their

⁵⁶ Woodruff, "Oral History," 18.

⁵⁷ Woodruff, "Oral History," 18.

⁵⁸ Woodruff, "Oral History," 24.

⁵⁹ Dryeson, "Pan American," 17.

⁶⁰ Dryeson, "Pan American," 18.

race, but among their event groups. Luvalle had the feeling that the color of his teammates' skin did not matter to him; he looked up to and respected teammates like Archie Williams and Jesse Owens as if they were his brothers.⁶¹ The same feelings were shared by Archie Williams, an African American on the team who was the gold medalist in the 400m. Even with regards to how the Germans treated the African American athletes, surprisingly in his oral history, Luvalle did not notice any intolerance coming from the German people themselves during the Olympic games. He says that he did not have much contact with the Nazis themselves, but it's interesting to think about whether this was part of a charade or how the people genuinely acted.

Much like his teammate, John Woodruff, Luvalle believed that politics did not have a place in athletics. He stated in his oral interview that, "I think the Olympics can be a fine thing if it doesn't get into too much politics."⁶² This cemented in the notion that the athletes were there to compete and chase down their dreams literally and figuratively. Luvalle also recounts his experience with one of his white teammates who was from the South. "Spec was determined that nobody was going to say that a Southerner on that team was prejudiced in any way toward a black on that team. Spec did all sorts of things to make sure that people realized that. But, Spec was a great character. He was a real gentleman."⁶³ The relationships that were kept among the athletes on the U.S. track team really broke norms and stereotypes of the 1930s.

One of the most memorable moments that repeatedly showed up throughout all of the athletes' oral interviews was Marty Glickman and Sam Stollers' incident at the 1936 Games. Marty Glickman was scheduled to be on the 4x400-meter team on which the United States was

heavily favored to win the gold medal. Just before the race however, Glickman as well as Sam Stoller were removed from the 400-meter relay and replaced with Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalf, who had already had numerous opportunities to compete in the Games. This decision was controversial for a number of reasons. One, from a practical standpoint, being that despite Jesse Owens being the fastest on the team, the United States was still favored to win the race with Glickman and Stoller taking the spots. Secondly, Glickman had not been given a chance to participate in any other events, so this was his one shot at competing at the Olympics, plus, he was fresh. Lastly, the only explanation for this last-minute decision must have revolved around Glickman and Stoller being Jewish. Even Jesse Owens wanted to give up his position on the team to give Glickman a chance. There was speculation among the athletes that Glickman and Stoller were barred from competing to keep Hitler from being further embarrassed because of all of the black athletes that had been winning in the meet.⁶⁴ In the end, no one knows who made the final decision or what the real reason behind it was, but it is clear that it was likely motivated to some degree by antisemitism.

Glickman claimed that "There was antisemitism in Germany, there was antisemitism in America."⁶⁵ This appeasement by the United States to Hitler's ideology is one that did not age well as the events of World War II unfolded, but showed that America had many divides within that were rooted further than in race alone. Regardless of Glickman not being allowed to run in the 4x400-meter relay, he still was happy to be a part of the Olympics and made many lifelong friends. His testimony amplifies the connection that the athletes felt between one another, and Glickman felt that his teammates were like brothers, and the whole point of the Games and athletic competition

⁶¹ Luvalle, "Oral History," 9.

⁶² Luvalle, "Oral History," 28.

⁶³ Luvalle, "Oral History," 17.

⁶⁴ Glickman, "Oral History," 23.

⁶⁵ Glickman, "Oral History," 23.

was to “learn to respect each other, to like each other, to love each other, to get to really know each other.”⁶⁶ That was exactly what the athletes of the 1936 games did and many stayed close friends for their entire lives.

Glickman had many African American teammates and friends throughout his career and believed that they deserved an equal chance in the athletic world. When competing at Syracuse, Glickman recalls one of his biggest regrets: not standing up for his African American teammate because he was afraid of getting in trouble.

And I said to myself sitting there, stand up Marty and say if Will doesn't play, I don't play. And I'm one of the leaders of the team. I'm the star of the team... and I say stand up and say that. And I think to myself, but if I do stand up and say that and the game is canceled and there's ruckus or this furor develops as a result of the game being canceled, if that happens, they'll point to me and say there's that Jewish guy getting in trouble again. Because just the year before I'd been involved in the anti-Semitic incident in Berlin. And so, I didn't say a word. And Will didn't play. And I played. And we got beat. We got beat twelve nothing. A couple of years after that, Will was killed in World War II and to this day I still feel very strongly about it. That I should have gotten up and said and he was good enough to die for our country, but he wasn't good enough to play against Maryland.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Glickman, “Oral History,” 23.

⁶⁷ Glickman, “Oral History,” 25.

⁶⁸ Zamperini, “Oral History,” 13.

Glickman's final statement was powerful because it highlighted the hypocrisy in 1930s America. Will was not allowed to play against Maryland, yet the country had no problem sending him off to war to die for a country that treated him unequally. Sadly, this was the reality in America, and many people like Glickman, who sympathized with their African American teammates, were scared to stand up due to societal pressures at the time.

Louis Zamperini's area of competition differed greatly from Glickman. In particular, his main event was the 5000-meter run. He recalls his experience competing on the team very positively and had great respect for his teammates. Zamperini was one of the few American athletes that were invited to meet with Hitler at the games. Because Zamperini was white, he had the opportunity, whereas the African American and Jewish athletes were not invited.⁶⁸

An interesting take that Zamperini illuminated from his time in Germany was an experience that he had while exploring the city of Berlin. He saw a small Nazi flag as he was walking about and decided to take it, as it would be a cool souvenir from his time in Germany. To his surprise however, Zamperini was immediately met by shouting from a number of German guards who had come around the corner and seen his action. The guards took the flag from Zamperini's hands and threw him to the ground, Zamperini got up and started to run but quickly stopped when he heard a gunshot fire. Glickman recounted, “I think the one guard, who spoke very poor English, probably thought I was one of the Jewish athletes that was getting even with the anti-Semitic movement or something.”⁶⁹ When asked by the guards why Zamperini took the swastika flag, Zamperini replied, “Well, I just wanted to take the flag home to America to remind me of the wonderful time I had here in your country.”⁷⁰ This

⁶⁹ Zamperini, “Oral History,” 16-17.

⁷⁰ Zamperini, “Oral History,” 16-17.

ended up being the right choice of words as Zamperini was sent on his way. The reason this story stood out in particular was that it was one of the very few instances in which athletes spoke of a negative experience during their time in Germany. However, Zamperini's experience in the streets of Berlin was a dark foreshadow of the realities ahead.

Margarete Lambert, a Jewish German high jumper, was a prime example of what was happening behind the scenes in Germany. She explains her involvement in the games, which included her winning the Olympic trials and therefore qualifying to be on Germany's team. However, despite earning a spot and being promised by German officials that she would be able to participate, Lambert was notified that she was dismissed from participating in the Games. This highlighted Germany's true sense of anti-Semitism as she likely would have been a contender for the gold medal in the 1936 Games. Lambert claimed that the anger she felt toward the Nazi party actually fueled her running and jumping career.⁷¹ She first noticed the discrimination after Hitler came to power in 1933. Soon after she was banned from athletic competition in Germany, she moved to England to pursue her goals. However, soon after as Hitler was gearing to host the Olympics, Lambert was ordered to return back to Germany where she would train for the Games. While she did not know at the time, Hitler really had no intentions of letting Lambert compete in the Games, but he wanted to appease the Americans who were already threatening to boycott the Olympics due to Germany's anti-semitism. Lambert stated, "The only reason I was supposed to be on that Olympic team was because the Americans, and the English and the French and a lot of the other nations threatened not to come to the 1936 Olympics due to the discrimination of the Jews."⁷²

⁷¹ Lambert, "Oral History," 14.

⁷² Lambert, "Oral History," 11.

⁷³ Lambert, "Oral History," 11.

Essentially, she was the pigeon that Hitler used in order to make sure that the Olympics would take place in Berlin.⁷³ One of Lambert's major concerns was standing up and saying "heil Hitler" if she won her jumping event. This was her main worry, considering she was favored to win the gold medal. However, when the plug was pulled on her from competing at the last minute, she did not have to face that reality. She claimed that "had I won the Olympics, or had I been allowed to compete in the Olympics I would have been a loser either way."⁷⁴ What she meant by this, was that if she won then it would have begged the question in Germany of how a Jew could be superior athletically, and if she lost then she would have been the laughingstock that fit Hitler's narrative of Jewish people being inferior.

Lambert also dealt with issues not only being a Jew in athletics but a woman as well. She said she was not always treated well by her coaches and at one point said her "male teacher beat me in jumping which was really my specialty, he was so proud of himself, and I mean as a man he should have been doing much better than I did. But if he just beat me by an inch, he was very happy."⁷⁵ However, when it came to her teammates, it was a different story. In fact, Lambert was treated very well and had great relationships with all her teammates, claiming that she was fully accepted.⁷⁶ They were all athletes and race, religion and gender did not get in the way. In a letter that she wrote to one of her teammates in 1980 she said:

I can't understand why you were so nice to me. Did you really know I was Jewish? And she wrote back to me, sure we knew you were Jewish, but you were an, a good athlete like we were good athletes and that was all that counted to us and politics

⁷⁴ Lambert, "Oral History," 19.

⁷⁵ Lambert, "Oral History," 20.

⁷⁶ Lambert, "Oral History," 12.

didn't mean anything to us, she said in the letter. But I'm sure that she as well as many of the other girls were members of the Nazi party. I mean there is this conflict again. You know they're Nazis and still they, they accept me the Jewish girl, doesn't make any sense, it didn't make any sense.⁷⁷

This further illustrates the theme of how strong the bond of these track athletes was. This bond cut through societal norms, tore down political lies, and exposed the athletes to their human traits in which they all shared.

It is without question that society in 1930s America was very unequal. Women struggled to gain a foothold in the athletic world, athletes faced racial discrimination, and many were barred from competition due to their religious affiliation. These harsh realities were amplified by the segregation and social norms that existed within the United States, and despite the African American athletes winning medals for the United States in the Olympic Games in Germany, they did not receive the respect that they deserved. As pointed out in the oral histories analyzed, life was not easy for minorities in the 1930s; however, there was an overarching theme present in which track and field seemed to stretch beyond these boundaries and create a more equal space for people to put their differences aside.

The overall implications that the sport of track and field has had in bridging racial and gender divides still needs further research from historians, but the trends throughout oral and written histories point in the same direction confirming the assumption of track and field's impact on social divisions. While discriminatory issues kept athletes from participating fully in a white-oriented society, many found refuge in track and field as it provided a unique opportunity to connect to other athletes, break down social barriers, and see

other athletes for their strengths as human beings and not by the color of their skin. It was still not a perfect situation, but track and field provided an opportunity to bridge the gap between gender, heal the divide between races, and encourage acceptance of all nationalities and religious affiliations.

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⁷⁷ Lambert, "Oral History," 12-13.

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