

FROM EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS  
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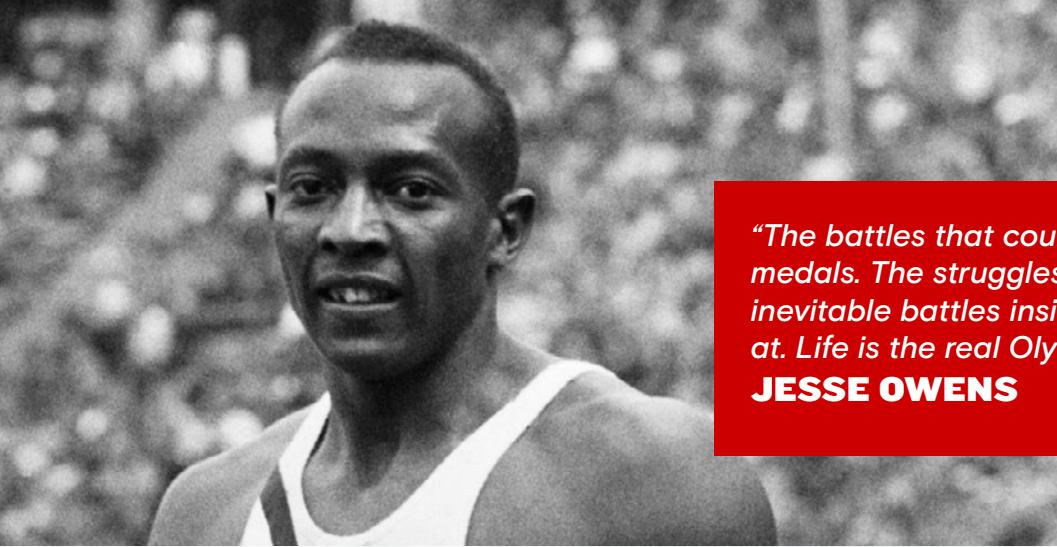
# TRIUMPH

**JESSE OWENS AND THE BERLIN OLYMPICS**

## **EDUCATION GUIDE**

PREMIERES  
**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19**  
**8/7c**





*"The battles that count aren't the ones for gold medals. The struggles within yourself—the invisible, inevitable battles inside all of us—that's where it's at. Life is the real Olympics."*

**JESSE OWENS**

## ABOUT THE SHOW

During the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, Germany, just three years before the start of World War II, African American track and field athlete Jesse Owens took the world stage and made Olympic history by winning four gold medals in the 100-meter dash, long jump, 200-meter dash and 4x100-meter dash. This feat made him one of the greatest and most impactful athletes of all time. ***Triumph: Jesse Owens and the Berlin Olympics*** explores the dramatic tale of Owen's athletic dedication, perseverance, and triumph, as well as his resilience against racism both abroad and at home in the United States. The documentary features archival Olympic footage and interviews with Owens, original animation and first-hand interviews with family members, journalists, historians, and athletes including nine-time Olympic Gold Medalist Carl Lewis and Owens's daughters Marlene and Beverly Owens.

## CURRICULUM LINKS

***Triumph: Jesse Owens and the Berlin Olympics*** is useful for students in History, American History, and Social Studies courses. The content is appropriate for high school and college students.

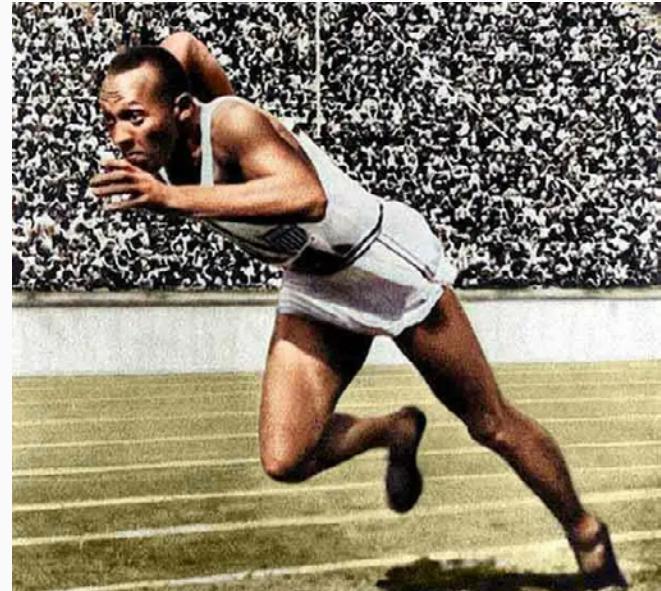
## FOR THE EDUCATOR

***Triumph: Jesse Owens and the Berlin Olympics*** tells the story of track star and Olympic hero Jesse Owens and his historic performance at the 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. The 1936 Summer Olympics took place under the watchful eye of Adolf Hitler, who had recently risen to power in Germany and installed himself as its dictator. Hitler believed in the racial superiority of white people of European descent and saw the Berlin Olympics as an opportunity for white German athletes to prove his theories. Owens's historic performance, in which he became the first American track and field athlete ever to win four Olympic gold medals, instead served as a sharp rebuke to Hitler's racist ideology. This documentary follows Owens's childhood in Alabama and his early track career through his Olympic triumph and the difficulties he faced upon returning to the United States. The story is told through interviews with historians and family members; primary source photographs and footage; and narration sourced from excerpts of Jesse Owens's own words and writings. We encourage educators to use this guide as a resource and to develop their own lesson plans and activities to best suit their students and their specific educational needs and benchmarks..

## TERMS TO DEFINE

Students can define some or all of these terms during or after watching *Triumph: Jesse Owens and the Berlin Olympics* to enhance their understanding of the documentary and the time period it covers.

- Civil War
- Sharecropper
- World War I
- Treaty of Versailles
- Red Summer
- Great Migration
- Track and field
- Nazi Party
- Dachau
- Anti-Semitism
- Nuremberg Laws
- Olympic Games
- Boycott
- Propaganda
- Uncle Tom



## PEOPLE TO KNOW

Students can write short descriptions of these individuals and the part they played in Jesse Owens's life and/or in his experience at the Berlin Olympics.

- Jesse Owens
- Charles Riley
- Adolf Hitler
- Joseph Goebbels
- Ralph Metcalfe
- Leni Riefenstahl
- Avery Brundage
- Luz Long
- Marty Glickman
- Sam Stoller

## DID YOU KNOW?

Jesse Owens was born in 1913 in Alabama and was the youngest of 10 children. He was the son of a sharecropper and the grandson of enslaved people. When he was 9, his family moved to Ohio.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask students to explore these questions in group conversation. These questions can also be used as essay prompts.

- Describe Jesse Owens's childhood. How did his parents provide for the family? What was his early life like? What was happening in the United States during Owens's childhood?
- What impact did the Great Migration have on Owens's life?
- How did Owens become interested in track and field?
- What are some of the reasons Owens chose to attend Ohio State University? What was his life like there?
- Who was Adolf Hitler and what did he do in the years just before the 1936 Olympics?
- What did the Nazi Party stand for? How would you describe its ideology?
- Describe the debate over boycotting the 1936 Olympics. Why did some people think the United States should boycott the Games? Why did other people view the idea of boycotting the Games as hypocritical? Why do you think Owens ultimately decided to participate?
- In what ways did Joseph Goebbels and Adolf Hitler see the 1936 Olympic Games as an opportunity? What ideas did they hope to get across to the people around the world who would watch the Olympics?
- In the documentary, Owens is described as both being a "target" and having a "spotlight" at the Olympics. What do you think that means?
- Why was the 100 meter track and field event so important? How did the world react to Owens's victory in this event?
- What happened between Luz Long and Jesse Owens during the broad jump event at the 1936 Olympics? Did anything about this story surprise you?
- How did the Nazi Party's messaging about America's Black athletes change after the Americans began to have Olympic success?
- Why were Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller replaced on the U.S. 400-meter relay team? Do you think this decision was fair? Why or why not?
- What did Jesse Owens experience when he returned home to the U.S. after the Olympic Games? What are some of the challenges he faced?
- Why was Jesse Owens criticized by Black civil rights activists later in his life? Do you think this criticism was valid?
- How would you describe Jesse Owens as a person? How would you describe his accomplishments? In what ways did they extend beyond his achievements in track and field?
- How would you describe Jesse Owens's legacy? How do you think Jesse Owens should be remembered?

## PRIMARY SOURCE

### Jesse Owens's Olympic Diary

Jesse Owens kept a diary during his journey to the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The diary has been digitized and [can be viewed here](#), courtesy of Ohio State University Libraries. A transcription of the diary is [available here](#).

### Primary Source Analysis

1. What time period does the diary cover?
2. Which events depicted in *Triumph: Jesse Owens and the Berlin Olympics* does Owens write about in his diary? Which events are not mentioned?
3. Who do you think was the intended audience for this diary?
4. Why might Owens have started this diary? Why might he not have completed it?
5. How do you think Owens was feeling while writing the diary? What evidence from his writing supports your ideas?
6. What other primary sources might you consult to more fully understand Owens's Olympic experience?

### Related Activity

Ask each student or group of students to research aspects of Owens's Olympic experience not covered by his diary. Potential sources might include: Jesse Owens's memoirs, contemporaneous newspaper accounts, and photographs. (Note: Ohio State's [Jesse Owens Collection](#), the Library of Congress [American Folklore Project Life Histories](#) and Newseum's [collection of newspapers covering Owens's Olympic victories](#) are potential sources to consult.) Students can then prepare a project that utilizes these sources to tell the story of Owens's Olympic experience. This project might take the form of an illustrated timeline, a graphic novel, or a slide deck presentation.

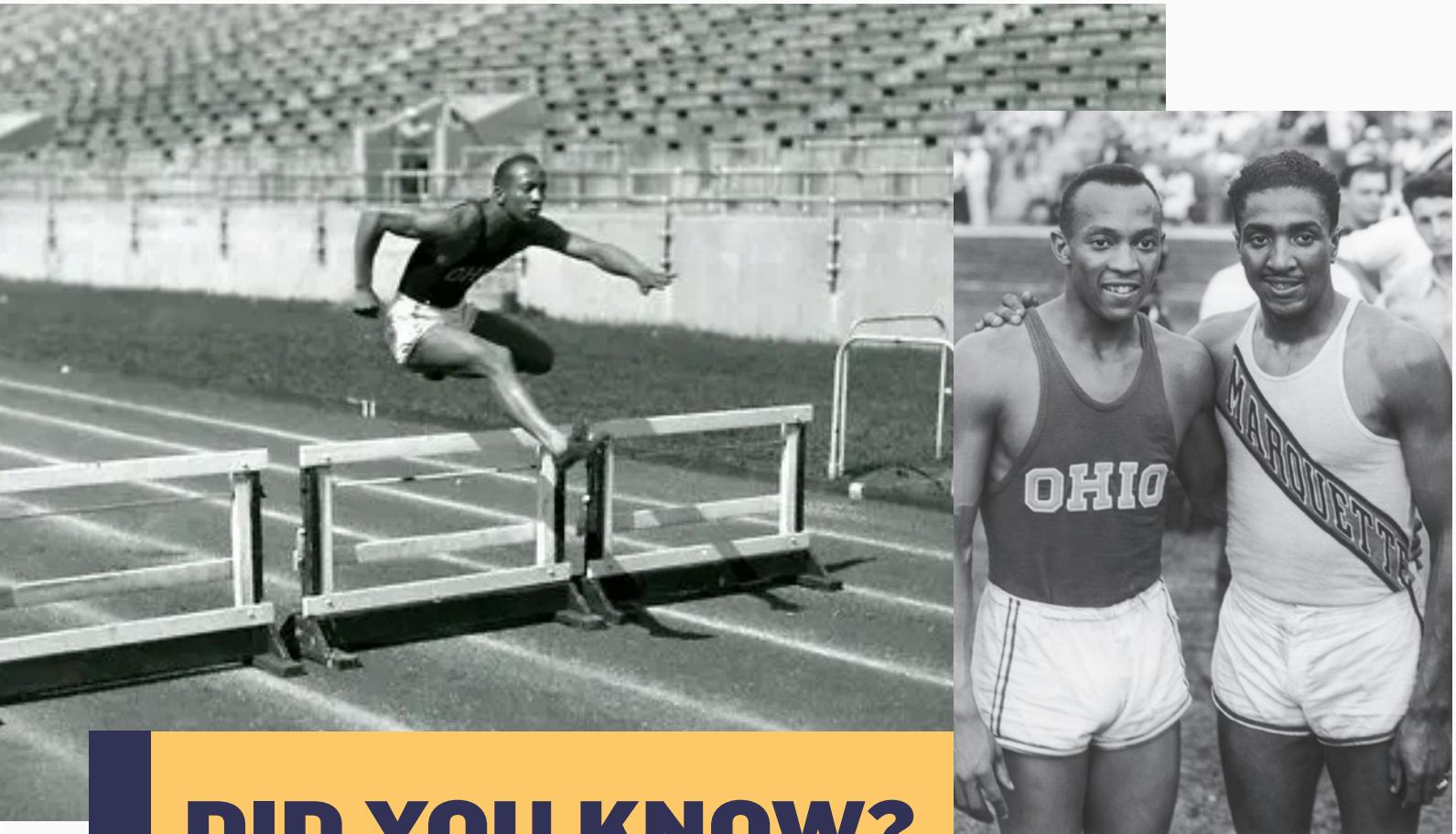


### DID YOU KNOW?

At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Jesse Owens became the first American track and field athlete to win four gold medals in a single Olympics. No one did it again until Carl Lewis in 1984, 48 years later.

## ESSAY PROMPTS

- Did Jesse Owens's victory at the 1936 Olympics affect the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s? To what extent did Jesse Owens pave a path for athletes of color who came after him or the Black community as a whole?
- Discuss the challenges Jesse Owens faced throughout his life. To what extent was Owens able to overcome these obstacles? What was the impact on his professional and personal life?
- Describe the significance of Jesse Owens's performance at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. How did his victories challenge Nazi ideology and influence American and international perceptions of race and sportsmanship?



## DID YOU KNOW?

Upon his death in 1980, President Jimmy Carter said of Owens, "Perhaps no athlete better symbolized the human struggle against tyranny, poverty and racial bigotry. His personal triumphs as a world-class athlete and record holder were the prelude to a career devoted to helping others. His work with young athletes, as an unofficial ambassador overseas, and a spokesman for freedom are a rich legacy to his fellow Americans."

## RELATED RESOURCES FROM HISTORY.COM

Article: How Jesse Owens Foiled Hitler's Plans for the 1936 Olympics

<https://www.history.com/news/jesse-owens-adolf-hitler-1936-olympics>

Article: 10 Things You May Not Know About Jesse Owens

<https://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-jesse-owens>

Article: Adolf Hitler: Rise to Power, Impact, and Death

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/adolf-hitler-1>

Article: The Nazi Party

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/nazi-party>

Video: Rise of the Nazis

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEk6zGYwyhc&ab\\_channel=HISTORY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEk6zGYwyhc&ab_channel=HISTORY)

## MORE RELATED RESOURCES

Olympics.com: Jesse Owens immortalized by his fourth gold medal

<https://olympics.com/en/news/jesse-owens-immortalized-by-his-forth-gold-medal>

Ohio State University: Jesse Owens: A Lasting Legend

<https://library.osu.edu/site/jesseowens/>

White House Historical Association: Running Against the World:

Jesse Owens and the 1936 Olympics

<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/running-against-the-world>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: The Nazi Olympics Berlin 1936

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nazi-olympics-berlin-1936>

Time.com: What Happened When Hitler Hosted the Olympics 80 Years Ago

<https://time.com/4432857/hitler-hosted-olympics-1936/>

JesseOwens.com: Official Biography

<https://jesseowens.com/biography/>

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