

In 1942, the Nazis instituted the concentration camps, where prisoners were worked to death, shot, or gassed. The vast majority of German and Polish Jews ended up in these camps; relatively few survived Hitler's Final Solution. The Allies liberated the camps in 1945, with the defeat of the Axis Powers. Hitler would not live to face trial for the genocide he had orchestrated. He committed suicide in April, 1945, when the Red Army invaded Germany.

Jesse Owens

James Cleveland Owens was born in Lawrence County, Alabama in 1913 and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. Owens, the grandson of a slave, was often sick as a child. He was given the name Jesse by a teacher in Cleveland who did not understand his country accent.

Jesse grew up in poverty, taking odd jobs delivering groceries, loading freight cars, and working in a shoe repair shop as a young teenager. During this time, he realized that he had a passion for running, encouraged by his junior-high track coach.

Owens first came to national attention when he was a high school student and equaled the record of 9.4 seconds in the 100-yard dash and long-jumped 24 feet 9 1/2 inches at the 1933 National High School Championship of Chicago.

Owens attended Ohio State University where he won a record of eight individual NCAA championships. Although Owens enjoyed athletic success, he had to live off campus with other African-American athletes. When he traveled with the team, he had to eat at "black-only" restaurants, and sleep in "black-only" hotels.

In 1936 Owens was selected to compete for the United States in the Summer Olympics in Berlin. Adolf Hitler was using the games to show the world a resurgent Nazi Germany and the superiority of the Aryan race. Owens, however, won four gold medals. Hitler publicly snubbed Owens, shaking hands only with German victors.

When Owens returned to the United States, he was given a hero's welcome, but it was short-lived. As an African-American before the Civil Rights movement in America, Owens suffered the injustices of his race and eventually filed for bankruptcy. It wasn't until 1966 that his rehabilitation began and he lived out the rest of his life as a U.S. goodwill ambassador. Owens died of lung cancer at the age of 66.

(BookTies)