

Inspector Rex's History Snippet #20

Did Hitler snub Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics



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What are some history lessons taught wrong/inaccurately in schools?

During one class in college, my professor told us the story about **Jesse Owens and how he was treated disrespectfully in Nazi Germany and that Adolf Hitler snubbed him**. It was really awkward when I pointed out that it wasn't true and that Jesse Owens was treated better in Nazi Germany than in the United States.

Sorry but Jesse Owens being snubbed by Hitler was a hoax.



- In the **1936 Summer Olympics** in Berlin, Jesse Owens won four gold medals.

There's a popular belief in the USA that Adolf Hitler snubbed Jesse Owens during the Olympics because he was black. Sorry to disappoint you Americans but it was *really* your favourite President Franklin Roosevelt who snubbed Owens.

Jesse Owens said, "**Hitler didn't snub me; it was our president who snubbed me.** The president didn't even send me a telegram." This was quoted in *Triumph*, a book about the 1936 Olympics by Jeremy Schaap.

After the 1936 Berlin Olympics, only the white athletes were invited to see and meet Roosevelt. This was very unfair to Owens who was the most successful athlete at the games. He lamented that he "wasn't invited to the White House to shake hands with the President."

On the other hand, Owens goes on to say that Hitler waved at him and gave him an autographed photo. It's funny how an oppressive dictator showed more respect to an American athlete than the democratically-elected American president.

In Nazi Germany, black athletes weren't segregated and shared the same hotels as white athletes. Generally speaking, black athletes were shown a lot of respect and admiration in Nazi Germany. Although it's important to note that the Nazi Party wanted to appear welcoming and used propaganda methods to appear indiscriminatory.

Nonetheless, Jesse Owens became very popular in Berlin and was treated like a celebrity. In the stadium, the German spectators in the Olympic stadium would cheer "Yesseh Oh-vens" or "Oh-vens" from the crowd. Many would ask him for his autograph on the streets. Then he returned home and was treated coldly.

It must've been strange to be treated like a famous celebrity in Germany and then like dirt in the United States. The VERY country you represented and won gold medals for.

Obviously, I'm not defending Nazi Germany because at least the United States did not have an organized program to eliminate the African American race like the Holocaust under the Nazis.

Still, it's very important to give legitimate facts and not spread misinformation. Yes, Hitler was racist but what does that make Roosevelt?

Wasn't he a racist too by not showing Jesse Owens the respect he deserved?

Footnotes

"Hitler Didn't Snub Me — It Was Our President" | Lawrence W. Reed

Other accounts exist, particularly one at:

<https://www.britannica.com/story/was-jesse-owens-snubbed-by-adolf-hitler-at-the-berlin-olympics>