

# Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's Childhood (1999)

## Abstract

Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's (1926–2013) account of his experience as a biracial child in Nazi Germany was published in the original English and in German translation in 1999. In this series of excerpts, Massaquoi reflects on his school years, the Hitler Youth, Jesse Owens, and the 1936 Olympics, among other subjects.

## Source

### Brief Encounter

One beautiful summer morning in 1934, I arrived at school to hear our third-grade teacher, Herr Grimmelshäuser, inform the class that Herr Wriede, our *Schulleiter* (principal), had ordered the entire student body and faculty to assemble in the schoolyard. There, dressed as he often was on special occasions in his brown Nazi uniform, Herr Wriede announced that “the biggest moment of [our] young lives” was imminent, that fate had chosen us to be among the lucky ones privileged to behold “our beloved Führer Adolf Hitler” with our own eyes. It was a privilege for which, he assured us, our yet-to-be-born children and children’s children would one day envy us. At the time I was eight years old and it had not yet dawned on me that of the nearly six hundred boys assembled in the schoolyard, the only pupil Herr Wriede was not addressing was me.

Taking Wriede at his word, the entire school soon buzzed with anticipation of this rare, totally unexpected treat of a virtually school-free day. We had all been thoroughly indoctrinated in the Führer’s heroic rise to power and his superhuman efforts to free Germany from the enslavement endured since its defeat in World War I and to restore its old glory and preeminence. Already we had come to feel the Führer’s omnipresence. His likenesses appeared everywhere—throughout the school, in public buildings of the city, on posters and postage stamps, in newspapers and magazines. Even more vivid were his by now familiar voice on radio and his compelling appearances in the weekly newsreels at the neighborhood cinema. Now we would get a chance to see with our own eyes this legendary savior and benefactor of the *Vaterland*. To most of the students, myself included, the thrills in store for us seemed beyond our ability to comprehend.

Buoyed by our enthusiasm and flanked by our teachers, we marched for nearly an hour to a point along Alsterkrugchaussee, a major thoroughfare leading to Hamburg’s airport in suburban Fuhlsbüttel. The entire route from the airport to Hamburg’s venerable *Rathaus* downtown, which the Führer’s fleet of cars was scheduled to travel, was lined with thousands of nearly hysterical people. They were kept from spilling into the street by stern brownshirts who, with clasped hands, formed an endless human chain. Seated along the curb behind the SS and SA troopers, we children endured an agonizing wait that dragged on for several hours. But just as our strained patience was reaching the breaking point, the roar of the crowds began to swell to a deafening crescendo. A nearby SS marching band intoned the opening fanfares of the *Badenweiler Marsch*, a Hitler favorite designated as the official signal of the Führer’s arrival. The moment everyone had been waiting for was here. Standing erect beside the driver of his black Mercedes convertible, his right arm outstretched in the familiar Nazi salute, the Führer rolled past at a brisk walking pace, his eyes staring expressionlessly ahead.

The “biggest moment in our lives” for which Principal Wriede had prepared us had lasted only a few seconds, but to me they seemed like an eternity. There I was, a kinky-haired, brown-skinned eight-year-old boy amid a sea of blond and blue-eyed kids, filled with childlike patriotism, still shielded by blissful ignorance. Like everyone around

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me, I cheered the man whose every waking hour was dedicated to the destruction of “inferior non-Aryan people” like myself, the same man who only a few years later would lead his own nation to the greatest catastrophe in its long history and bring the world to the brink of destruction.

## MOMOLU MASSAQUOI

The story of how I became part of that fanatically cheering crowd did not begin on January 19, 1926, the day of my birth. Neither did it begin, as one might suspect, in Hamburg, the city of my birth. Instead, it began five years earlier, more than three thousand miles away in the West African capital city of Monrovia, Liberia, with the shrewd decision of a president to rid himself of a potential political rival, Momolu Massaquoi, my paternal grandfather-to-be.

Charles Dunbar King, the fourteenth president of Liberia, had for some time considered the rising popularity of the ambitious Massaquoi as potentially dangerous. The American-educated Massaquoi had been the hereditary ruler of the indigenous Vai nation, which straddled Liberia and the adjacent British colony of Sierra Leone. [...]

Aided by his political savvy, charm, and rugged good looks Massaquoi quickly advanced with a number of appointments to important government posts, including Secretary of the Interior. [...] He also became the subject of whispers in high political circles that touted him as the next occupant of the Executive Mansion. Some of these whispers reached President King, who decided that it was high time to put an end to them. The question was how? Before long, he would have his answer.

It came in the form of a visit from a representative of Germany's first postwar government, which was headed by President Friedrich Ebert. The German envoy, a Dr. Busing, met with President King in the Executive Mansion to discuss closer cooperation between Liberia and Germany. Also present at the meeting was Secretary of the Interior Momolu Massaquoi. [...]

After the three had lighted their cigars and sat down, the German came to the point of his visit.

[...]

His government, he continued, felt that the time had come for Germany and Liberia to establish diplomatic relations through an exchange of consul generals. Such an exchange, Dr. Busing explained, would be mutually beneficial in that it could facilitate the opening of a much-needed market for Liberian raw materials and products such as rubber, cocoa, and palm oil, while giving Germany unencumbered access to these vital commodities, access it had forfeited when it lost the war and was stripped by the Allies of its African colonies.

President King not only expressed interest in the proposal but urged that the plan be put into action as soon as possible. Much of the success of such a plan, the envoy cautioned, would depend on choosing the right man for the job. [...]

Six months after the visit of the German emissary, on June 12, 1922, Momolu Massaquoi, newly appointed Liberian consul general to Germany, arrived in Hamburg with his wife, Rachel, sons Nathaniel, seventeen, and Arthur, one, and daughter Fatima, ten, on the German Woermann Line's S.S. *Wigbert* to assume his new post. [...]

## QUEST FOR CONVERTS

Not long after his rise to power, Hitler let it be known that those diehards who refused to embrace his Nazi ideology were part of the old order that was on the way out. Regardless of the parents' political persuasion, he

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boasted, he would make sure to have the undying devotion and loyalty of their sons and daughters. “Germany’s youth,” he bragged, “will belong to me.”

To make good on his boast, schools throughout Germany were ordered to mount elaborate drives aimed at recruiting pupils for the *Hitlerjugend* (HJ)—the Hitler Youth movement. The schools were aided in their efforts by a formidable arsenal of visual aids—charts, slides, documentary and feature films—churned out by Goebbels’s propaganda ministry, which spared no effort when it came to winning converts among the young. [...]

With arch-Nazi Wriede at the helm, Kätnerkampschule aggressively pursued the indoctrination and recruitment of young souls for the *Jungvolk*, the HJ’s junior league for ten- to thirteen-year-olds, whose members were known as *Pimpfe* (cubs). Hardly a day went by without our being reminded by our teachers or Wriede himself that for a German boy, life outside the movement was no life at all. Pursuing his objective with characteristic single-mindedness, Wriede was tireless in thinking up new gimmicks to further his goal. One day, he announced his latest brainchild, a schoolwide contest in which the first class to reach 100 percent *Jungvolk* membership would be rewarded with a holiday.

The immediate effect of the announcement was that my new homeroom teacher, Herr Schürmann, became obsessed with the idea of winning the coveted prize for our class and some brownie points for himself. Toward that end, he became a veritable pitchman, who spent much of his—and our—time trying to persuade, cajole, or otherwise induce our class to join the Nazi fold. The centerpiece of his recruitment drive was a large chart he had carefully drawn on the blackboard with white chalk. It consisted of a large box divided into as many squares as there were boys in the class. Each morning, Herr Schürmann would inquire who had joined the Hitler Youth. After a show of hands, he would count them, then gleefully add the new enlistees’ names to his chart. Gradually the squares with names increased until they outnumbered the blank ones.

[...]

One morning, when the empty squares had dwindled to just a few, Herr Schürmann started querying the holdouts as to the reasons for their “lack of love for Führer and *Vaterland*. Some explained that they had nothing against Führer and *Vaterland* but weren’t particularly interested in the kinds of things the *Jungvolk* were doing, such as camping, marching, blowing bugles and fanfares, and beating on medieval-style drums. Others said they didn’t have their parents’ permission, whereupon Herr Schürmann instructed them to bring their parents in for a conference. When it came to what I thought was my turn to explain, I opened my mouth, but Herr Schürmann cut me off. “That’s all right; you are exempted from the contest since you are ineligible to join the *Jungvolk*.”

The teacher’s words struck me like a bolt of lightning. Not eligible to join? What was he talking about? [...]

Until the bell rang, I remained in a state of shock, unable to follow anything that was said. I felt betrayed and abandoned by my friends and terrified at the prospect of being the only person in class whose name would not appear on the chart. At age ten, I was as tough as any of my peers, able to take just about anything they dished out in the course of rough-and-tumble schoolboy play. What I couldn’t take, however, was feeling that I didn’t belong—being treated like an outcast, being told, in effect, that I was not only different but inferior.

Schürmann invited me to take a seat beside his desk. “I always thought you knew that you could not join the *Jungvolk* because you are non-Aryan,” he began. “You know your father is an African. Under the Nuremberg Laws, non-Aryans are not allowed to become members of the Hitler Youth movement.” Charitably, perhaps to spare at least some of my feelings, he omitted the much maligned and despised Jews from his roster of ineligible.

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“But I am a German,” I sobbed, my eyes filling with tears. “My mother says I’m German just like anybody else.”

“You *are* a German boy,” Herr Schürmann conceded with unusual compassion, “but unfortunately not quite like anybody else.”

Having gotten his point only too well, I made no further plea.

“I’m very sorry, my boy,” Schürmann concluded the conference. “I wish I could help you, but there’s nothing I can do; it’s the law.”

[...]

Two days later, the moment I had dreaded with ever-mounting anguish arrived. Herr Schürmann, with a joyfulness bordering on ecstasy, chalked in the final two names on his chart. He then took a wet sponge and carefully erased the last remaining empty square, the one that represented me, thereby graphically emphasizing my non-person status. “Congratulations, class! We have just reached our goal of one hundred percent HJ membership,” he rejoiced. “I am extremely proud of you and grateful that you have brought honor to your class and to me. I think we should let the principal in on the good news.” [...]

## THE MORELLS

The fact that all of my classmates had become card-carrying members of the *Hitlerjugend* had in no way affected our relationship. Those who were close to me before they joined the *Jungvolk* remained so afterward. We continued to play and have fun together and visit each other’s homes as if nothing had changed. Since we were too young and naive to see the big picture, we remained totally oblivious to the visual irony we created—a boy with an obviously generous amount of African genes playing in brotherly harmony with a bunch of blond boys in Nazi uniforms. Although my classmates were bona fide *Jungvolk Pimpfe*, few were true converts to Nazi ideology. Some had joined merely to get Schürmann and Wriede off their backs, while others had been pressured by their fathers, who feared that not having their sons join could hurt them on their jobs. The rest had merely jumped on the bandwagon in order not to be left out, a feeling I understood only too well. Whatever their reasons for joining, most of them stopped being active members after just a few short months when the novelty of going to meetings, on hikes, and to demonstrations had worn off, and dropped out altogether within a year or two. It became quite obvious to me that to most of my classmates, the *Jungvolk* was no more than a fad whose time had run out.

[...]

This relatively quick disillusionment with the HJ—which, as a matter of sour grapes, I welcomed from the bottom of my heart—did not occur in my class alone but was manifest throughout my school and, I suspect, throughout the city and beyond. [...]

I suspect that the vast majority of the men in my neighborhood became involved with the Nazis for reasons that had little to do with ideology. Like most German men, they were better craftsmen, mechanics, tailors, and butchers than students of politics. The German school system, which had reserved secondary and higher education for an intellectual elite, simply didn’t prepare them for political and philosophical thinking. [...]

Typical of the men in my neighborhood whom the Nazi Party had given an entirely new lifestyle and identity was Herr Wilhelm Morell, a bald blue-collar type. [...]

Before my very eyes, Herr Morell underwent a most amazing transformation that, to some extent, explains the

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curious attraction the Nazi Party held for the average German man. Within only a few short months of joining the party, Herr Morell acquired an entirely new persona. From a drab, quiet, and unassuming working stiff whose idea of a rip-roaring time was an occasional couple of beers with the boys from the shop at the neighborhood pub, he turned into a dashing uniformed small-time official who, with the single-mindedness of a beaver building a dam, strutted purposefully about the neighborhood in the never-ending pursuit of his new duties. The fact that his new position as a bottom-level *Blockleiter* (block warden) was part time and unsalaried did nothing to diminish his zeal. [...]

As his party's loyal lookout man, it hadn't escaped Herr Morell's notice that we didn't fly a Nazi swastika flag from our window on national holidays, as had become the unwritten law. When he asked my mother the reason for this serious nonfeasance, she told him that she simply couldn't afford to buy a flag, which I knew was only half of the truth. He told her not to worry and the next day presented us with a brand-new swastika flag, replete with mast, compliments of his Nazi Party chapter. Herr Morell even came to our apartment and personally installed a mast base outside one of our windows. Thus deprived of any excuse, my mother decided to fly a Nazi flag on every national holiday henceforth to avoid unnecessary trouble. [...]

## HERR DUTKE

I would be hard pressed to decide which of the two biggest bigots among my teachers was the meanest, Herr Wriede or horn-rimmed Herr Dutke. Dutke used to delight in wearing his Nazi uniform in the classroom to lend an especially festive note to his courses of *Volkskunde* (folklore), which he used mainly to vent his racist hostility. "Stop that *negerhatfte Grinsen* (negrified grinning)," he once hissed at me when he caught me joining the class in innocent laughter. "Negroes don't have a thing to grin about in National Socialist Germany." To drive home his point, he frequently picked pupils who came closest to what he and his fellow Nazis considered the ideal Aryan type by having them stand in front of the class and pointing out their blond hair, blue eyes, "nobly formed skull," and other "desirable" physical features. [...]

When a pupil [once] referred to my scholastic and athletic abilities to refute Dutke's contention that people of other than "Aryan blood" were both intellectually and physically inferior, Dutke dressed down the pupil for daring to disagree with him. He then lectured the class that my case was merely the exception that proved the rule, and suggested that whatever "normal characteristics" I displayed I had definitely inherited from my Aryan parent. Without the slightest consideration of my feelings, he suggested that in my case the last word had not yet been spoken, and that there was still a very good chance that my inferior blood would surface in one form or another. "There are many ways of being racially inferior," he argued. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if your *Klassenkamerad* one day winds up as an antisocial element, such as a criminal or an alcoholic, or if he isn't already susceptible to a host of debilitating diseases."

After passing on that piece of information, Dutke ordered me not to leave the room when the bell signaled the end of class. "What I have to tell you won't take long," he announced after making sure that all the children had left the room. Looking at me with undisguised loathing through his thick horn-rimmed glasses, Dutke chided me for trying to turn the class against him and for showing my disrespect of him with my constant *negerhaftes Grinsen*. "Let me tell you something, young man. Don't feel so smug, because after we have finished with the Jews, people like you will be next. That's all I have to say. *Heil Hitler.*"

[...]

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## THE SHAME OF THE RHINELAND

One morning in early March 1936 when I arrived at school, the entire building was abuzz with excitement that emanated from the teachers and soon spilled over to us pupils. We were told that the Führer had just scored a major coup. In defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, which Germany signed at the end of World War I, he had ordered his troops to march into the demilitarized Rhineland, on Germany's border with France. For the moment, the whole country was holding its collective breath in anticipation of a hostile response from the Western powers, a response that never came.

After summoning the entire school to the auditorium, Herr Wriede, his chest stuck out in a visible display of pride, announced that, thanks to the courage of our beloved Führer, "one of the most shameful chapters in Germany's history has come to a close." He then went on to tell us about the terrible humiliation Germany had suffered at the hands of the victorious Western allies when it was forced to permanently withdraw its military forces from the Rhineland to lessen the likelihood of German military aggression. "Thanks to our Führer," Wriede declared, "you German boys can again walk with your heads held high."

Just as I was about to share in the pride and hold my head a little higher, Wriede put a damper on my lifted spirits by explaining that the forced withdrawal of German troops after World War I had paved the way for the "ultimate insult" to the German people—the illegal occupation of the coal-rich Ruhr area by some forty thousand "uncivilized French *Neger*" troops. These savages out of the African jungle, he explained with an expression of utter disgust, were permitted by their French officers to freely mingle and fraternize with the German people, with the catastrophic result that the Rhineland was being saddled with thousands of physically and mentally inferior bastard children. Today's courageous action by our Führer, Wriede continued, would forever prevent a recurrence of such humiliating infringement on Germany's sovereignty.

[...]

## JOE, JESSE, AND MY NEW HEROES

In the summer of 1936, my frequently bruised ego received a huge boost from a totally unexpected source. It came in the persons of two young black American athletes, one a professional boxer and the other an amateur track-and-field man. Their names were Joe Louis and Jesse Owens. Although I was not to meet either of them in person until I was well into adulthood, both men had a profound and lasting effect on my life, since they instilled me with genuine pride in my African heritage at a time when such pride was extremely difficult to come by.

By spring 1936, word reached Germany that a young black American was to fight Max Schmeling, the Nazis' version of the Great White Hope. Joe Louis, we learned, was a twenty-two-year-old fighting machine from the cotton fields of Alabama and the auto factories of Detroit whose uninterrupted string of knockouts had earned him the nickname "The Brown Bomber" and made him the top contender for the world heavyweight title, held at the time by James J. Braddock, his white countryman.

From the moment the news hit the neighborhood, all eyes were again on me. Confirming that the tendency to insist that "all blacks look alike" is not confined to American whites, most of my buddies insisted, "You look exactly like Joe Louis." Never mind that there was at least a 150-pound difference between the American fighter and me, everybody on the block agreed that I came as close to being the *Braune Bomber* as anyone in the neighborhood had ever come. I could hardly disagree with that.

It occurred to my pals that I and the man who had been predicted to defeat the best fighter on the European



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continent were veritable brothers under the skin, that we shared not only the same complexion, the same hair, and the same white teeth, but, more important, that in our veins ran the same mysterious, all-powerful African blood. The more the German press touted the Brown Bomber's phenomenal punching power, the higher rose my stock among my peers. I never let on that, like any dyed-in-the-wool Hamburger *Junge*, I had rooted for Schmeling, our hometown hero, for as long as I had followed his career. But since my peers hailed me as the Brown Bomber's successor, I became obliged to forgo my local patriotism and come out for my black brother from the States. This took a great deal of psychological wrestling with myself, since my loyalty to Schmeling was as deep as any ten-year-old boy was capable of feeling. Then something happened that made it quite easy for me to decide. Reading a prefight interview with Schmeling in a local newspaper, I came across an alleged quote by my hero in which he promised to "turn the *Neger* boxer from a Brown Bomber into a green-and-blue bomber." This remark (which, along with more racist remarks attributed to him, Schmeling was to emphatically deny after the collapse of the Third Reich) hurt me to the quick. I felt betrayed by the man who had been an idol to me, and decided then and there that henceforth, my loyalty would belong to Joe Louis, the man everybody said looked exactly like me.

[...]

On June 19, the day of the fight, men and boys in my neighborhood talked about nothing else but the upcoming match. While most were rooting for Schmeling, many had grave doubts that their man would be able to withstand the awesome punching power of the black American. [...] It felt wonderful to note the respect accorded to a black man by people who normally felt superior to blacks, and have some of that respect rub off on me. I hadn't enjoyed that feeling of pride in my African ancestry since my grandfather left Germany six years earlier. To me, that seemed like a lifetime away.

I could hardly wait for the day to end so that the fight, which was scheduled for around 9 P.M. (U.S. EST) in New York City's Yankee Stadium, could get under way. Since that would make it about 3 A.M. in Germany, I asked my mother to set the alarm clock for 2 A.M. (just to be on the safe side) [...] For the first three rounds I was buoyed by the superior performance of the Brown Bomber, whose hooks and jabs had already closed Schmeling's left eye. Then, in the fourth round, the totally unexpected—no, the impossible—happened. Two successive crashing rights by my countryman to the chin of Joe Louis put my hero on the canvas for the count of four. [...]

Until that point, the possibility of Joe Louis's losing the fight had never entered my mind. [...]

In the twelfth round of the fifteen-round match, my worst nightmare became reality when Schmeling ended the fight by landing a solid right to Louis's jaw that sent him to the canvas for the count of ten. The man I believed was invincible, who had been my ticket to prestige and respect among my peers, had been destroyed.

[...]

Shortly after the memorable fight in Yankee Stadium, a full-length documentary film, entitled *Max Schmeling's Sieg—Ein Deutscher Sieg (Max Schmeling's Victory—A German Victory)* ran in all of Hamburg's movie theaters. Everybody in the neighborhood rushed to see this Goebbels-inspired propaganda film—everybody, that is, but me. I simply couldn't bring myself to relive my agony by watching my hero get beaten. [...]

While German sports fans were still debating the pros and cons of the first Louis-Schmeling fight, the approach of another sports spectacular, the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, was making headline news. Weeks before the opening of the games, the press reported that the U.S. Olympic team would include an appreciable number of black athletes. To avoid offending any of the fifty-one visitor nations, especially those that were fielding black and

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other non-Aryan athletes, the Goebbels-controlled press had refrained from the usual racist innuendoes and treated the news involving black athletes with uncharacteristic objectivity. Even the signs proclaiming JUDEN UNERWÜNSCHT (Jews Not Wanted) that had proliferated throughout Hamburg in restaurants and other establishments of public accommodation disappeared for the duration of the festival to avoid stepping on sensitive foreign toes. The rather transparent idea behind this new modification of established racist practices was obviously to compound Hitler's coup of bringing the Olympics to Germany by casting the dictator in the image of a gracious and benign international host.

[...]

A few days before the opening of the games, [my friend] Karl Morell startled me with sensational news. His father was taking him, his older brother, Hans, and several neighborhood boys on a one-week trip to Berlin, and if my mother would give her permission—and come up with the train fare and a few extra marks spending money—I was welcome to come along. [...]

On the morning of our departure, our group of about ten boys from the neighborhood, some in Hitler Youth uniforms, each loaded down with heavy backpacks and canteens, journeyed by *Hochbahn* to Hamburg's Central Station. Before boarding a *D-Zug* (express train) for Berlin, Herr Morell had us fall in and stand at attention like an SS honor guard for a snappy military briefing on what to do and what not to do on the trip. [...]

When we arrived late at night at Berlin's famous *Anhalter Bahnhof*, we were hoarse from singing and dead tired. [...] But before we were allowed to go to sleep on the inviting mattresses that lined the walls of an attic dormitory, Herr Morell reminded us that we were breathing the same Berlin air as our beloved Führer, and made us render the Nazi salute. The very idea of the Führer's proximity gave me goose pimples that didn't go away until I was soundly asleep.

Unlike my original feelings toward Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, I never was torn by conflicting loyalties between the black Olympic athletes and the athletes of my motherland. From the very beginning of the games it was clear to me that the black athletes' victories were my victories, that their defeats were my defeats. I immediately felt a surge of pride over the very special kinship that linked me with these men from America [...] While all were accorded bona fide star treatment, none of the accolades showered on the black Americans compared with the ones the German fans reserved for their newly discovered Olympic darling—and my newest hero—Jesse Owens. Alabama-born, like Joe Louis, Owens was widely touted as the United States' leading prospect for track-and-field Olympic gold. But his actual performance surpassed even the most optimistic expectations of his newly won German fans. After an exhausting four days during which he made fourteen consecutive appearances, running four heats each in the 100 and 200 meters and jumping six times, Owens raced to victory in the 100- and 200-meter sprints in 10.3 and 20.7 seconds, respectively, led off the winning 400-meter relay, and set an Olympic broad jump record. [...]

An alleged snub of the black quadruple gold-medal winner by Hitler, which was widely reported at the time in the United States, was predictably overlooked by the Nazi-controlled German press. Whether the dictator deviated from his earlier practice of congratulating the winners personally in order to avoid shaking hands with a *Neger* is largely a matter of conjecture, since no gold-medal winner after Owens was "honored" in this way. [...]

As in the case of the Schmeling victory, the Nazis did not let the opportunity go by to give the widest possible publicity to another major sports coup (Germany had won the lion's share of gold medals) and prepared a full-length documentary propaganda film of the Olympic Games, *Olympia*. Divided in two parts entitled *Fest der Völker*



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(*Festival of the People*) and *Fest der Schönheit* (*Festival of Beauty*), the film was directed by Germany's cinematographic genius (and rumored Hitler mistress) Leni Riefenstahl, who produced a masterpiece that still draws raves from movie buffs.

This time, I eagerly went to see the film. Only too aware of the prevailing racist attitudes, I had resigned myself to seeing Jesse relegated to a few cameo appearances, but was pleasantly surprised to find that the film focused more on Jesse than on any other Olympic star. I didn't believe my eyes when time and again the Riefenstahl cameras zeroed in on Jesse with close-up after close-up that left little doubt about the director's profound preoccupation with her subject. There were numerous shots taken from various angles of Jesse's well-muscled, ebony-hued body, glistening with perspiration, each capturing the grace and power of his movements. At other times, the cameras focused on his expressive face as he concentrated in preparation for action, and on his guileless, open smile following each victory. There also was plenty of footage that recorded the outbreak of pandemonium as the Berlin stadium erupted with deafening chants of "Jesse! Jesse! Jesse!" aimed at spurring the black American to victory. The film, obviously intended to bolster the Nazi concept of Aryan supremacy, ironically turned out to be a monument to the superiority of one non-Aryan superstar.

When at the end of the film the lights went on in the movie theater, people who spotted me were looking at me not with the usual ill-disguised expressions of ridicule, condescension, or contempt, but with obvious admiration and approval. "There's Jesse's little brother," I heard one man point me out to his children. I felt a surge of pride that I found extremely difficult to conceal. That feeling of pride recurred whenever someone mentioned the names Jesse Owens or Joe Louis and sustained me throughout my childhood years.

[...]

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