



Christopher Hilton. *Hitler's Olympics: The 1936 Berlin Olympic Games.* Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2006. x + 244 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7509-4292-8.

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Published on H-German (June, 2007)

The Continuing Fascination of the 1936 Berlin Olympics

The seventieth anniversary of the 1936 Berlin Olympics last summer has prompted the recent publication of a number of treatments of the games. The combination of athletic competition, international political controversy, and legends that emerged from the games, especially the supposed "snub" of Jesse Owens by Adolf Hitler, continue to intrigue readers despite the time that has passed since the final medal tallies were counted and the fading glory of many of the participants.

Among the most important issues that the games gave rise to were the various boycott movements that emerged in nations throughout the western world in response to the National Socialist regime's policies of exclusion, which were advanced through the Nuremberg laws, and the ways in which those laws were applied systematically to exclude Germany's Olympic-caliber Jewish athletes from participating in Olympic training, trials, and competition. Also significant was the role of the National Socialist state in preparing for, and then hosting, both the winter and summer games of 1936. Were the games a celebration of international camaraderie and comity through peaceful international sport? Or were they merely an opportunity for the National Socialists to capture world attention and propagandize to the hilt in an effort to reshape international opinion of the regime and its leadership?

In the first three brief chapters of his book, Hilton considers the awarding of the games to Germany, the role of Hitler and the National Socialists in their organization, planning, and execution, and the impediments the regime

placed in the way of German Jewish athletes, which resulted in global boycott movements and often fractious negotiations between national Olympic committees and the National Socialist leadership.

The following three chapters focus on continued preparations for the games in Germany, the progress of the various national teams to the continent, the torch run, and the pomp surrounding the opening ceremonies. The succeeding three chapters treat the competitions themselves, highlighting Owens and his record-breaking feats, as well as the travails and triumphs of lesser-known athletes. The final chapter offers a casual stroll through the lives of a number of the better-known athletes after their Olympic careers had come to an end and an elegiac description of the Olympic stadium as it stands today.

Unfortunately, the volume under consideration offers nothing new regarding any of these events or the interesting historical questions that the games have raised and continue to foster. Instead, the author offers a largely derivative account that aims for a popular audience probably unaware of the extant scholarly literature in English, German, and other languages. It appears that the author is as well, for very little of past or recent scholarly work appears in the very thin bibliography of thirty-two items. Scholars would be far better served to consult Arnd KrÄ¼ger and William Murray's *The Nazi Olympics: Sport, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s*. These authors offer a more thorough discussion of the boycott movement and the role of Goebbels's propaganda machine in the games, along with a more complete and scholarly bibli-

ography.[1] In addition to its shortcomings regarding the existing scholarship of the games, Hilton's book is purely descriptive and he makes no attempt to analyze any of the questions that his treatment of the subject raises. Even the interviews that the author conducted with surviving athletes from the games offer nothing new. Instead they amount to uninspiring reportage.

Finally, the organization of the book, its paragraph structure, and narrative line is flawed. Hilton takes a largely chronological trajectory, but uses short and single sentence paragraphs to inject snippets of information (for example, the time when a particular team arrived in the

Olympic village) that serve to break up the narrative for no useful purpose. It appears that this tactic is intended to heighten the suspense of the run-up to the games, but it does nothing of the sort. Thus, Hilton's book fails to intrigue, inspire, or interest. It seeks a popular audience that it probably will not find; scholars should definitely look elsewhere.

Note

[1]. Arnd KrÄ¼ger and William Murray, eds., *The Nazi Olympics: Sport, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

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Citation: Chris Mack. Review of Hilton, Christopher, *Hitler's Olympics: The 1936 Berlin Olympic Games*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. June, 2007.

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