

## The Voices of Sanity: American Diplomatic Reports from the 1936 Berlin Olympiad

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The 1936 Olympiad in Berlin and the accompanying boycott movement has long been recognized as one of the most controversial and intriguing episodes of sport history. That this event transcended the conventional confines and spheres of sport can hardly be denied. It has often been said that the Second World War was the last "just" war when good and evil could be lucidly defined and conscience still played a decisive role. The Berlin Olympiad, by the same token, has been regarded by some European political observers as a prelude to and an ominous milestone in the march to the Second World War. The Games represented a paradox in sport and world history. To the Olympic leadership the whole boycott movement seemed to be a nuisance, annoying as it may be, which could only interfere with their quadrennial extravaganza. To others, the Olympic rings nullified political and social realities, creating a dream world, if just for a few moments, an illusion of peace, goodwill, and harmony in a turbulent world. Thus the Olympics remained to many Americans, as a diplomat observed, "a purely non-political matter." Still to others who initially believed that sport and politics are antithesis, these Games signaled a rude awakening—a kind of "loss of innocence"—to the fact that they became "a political instrument" in the hands of "National Socialist Germany."<sup>1</sup>

Mirroring an enduring fascination with the Berlin Olympics, the Games attracted serious attention by a variety of social commentators and historians. The former's analysis of the Games and the surrounding political conflict was hampered by the contemporaneity of their observations and, in some degree, their own emotional involvement in the chain of events. Historians, who have dealt with this subject, were in a more advantageous position. They could always utilize hindsight, which often eluded contemporaries, providing them with some form of analytical restraint. Either way, both historians and social observers placed emphasis, for the most part, on Nazi policies and their repercussions on the international sport scene, and the reaction to these developments by the public. The political hesitation on various levels of the Roosevelt

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1. "Report by George S. Messersmith, November 15, 1935," 862.4063 Olympic Games/57, National Archives, Washington D.C.

administration—more explicitly the State Department—and its conspicuous silence in Olympic matters has most often been ignored or constituted a mere appendix.<sup>2</sup>

Judging by highly confidential diplomatic reports from Berlin and Vienna relating to the subject of the Berlin Olympics, the political developments in general and the Olympic controversy in particular could have escaped neither the probing eyes of American diplomats stationed in Germany nor the notice of the State Department, nor, on the final account, the attention of the President. These highly classified diplomatic dispatches, which were largely unnoticed by scholars, shed canny light on the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of three eminent officers of the diplomatic corps who had the opportunity to gain first-hand experiences on Nazi measures against Jews, Catholics, and progressive elements in Germany as well as the political motives behind the Olympic Games. The three diplomats, William E. Dodd (ambassador), George S. Messersmith (consul general), and Raymond H. Geist (consul), were not Jewish, and judging by their writings, harbored no leftist sentiments. Perceived by their superiors as men of principle, a rare commodity in international diplomacy, these officers often went beyond diplomatic niceties. André François-Poncet's (French envoy to Germany), description of ambassador Dodd well exemplified all three of them: "Rugged and uncompromising liberal, [who] entertained an aversion for national socialism, which he made no effort to conceal."<sup>3</sup> As well acquainted observers, they not only perceived the underlying German rationale for organizing the Games in Berlin, but were also unanimously vocal in their belief that the holding of the festival on German soil would constitute a disaster for the free-world. Their reports exhibit a sharp and frighteningly accurate assessment of contemporary German and international trends in an "Olympic" context. Moreover, compared with an almost complete neglect of the Olympic Games and their international ramifications by Sir Eric Phipps, the British envoy, and his French colleague, André François-Poncet ("the Fuehrer's favorite ambassador"), the American ambassador's and his assistants' judgment of the events in Berlin proved to be an important footnote to history.<sup>4</sup>

The history of the Berlin Games commenced thousands of miles away from Germany. The International Olympic Committee accepted a German bid May 13, 1931, at a time when only the most pessimistic observers had any fears about Nazi takeover. Dr. Theodor von Lewald and Dr. Carl Diem, who were

2. A bibliography of works dealing with the 1936 Olympic Games is rather extensive. The most encompassing study, however, belongs to Richard D. Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics* (New York, 1971) and Arnd Krueger, *Die Olympischen Spiele 1936 und die Weltmeinung. Ihre aussenpolitische Bedeutung unter besonderer Beruecksichtigung der USA* (Berlin, 1972); a somewhat shallower rendition of this subject was provided by Judith Holmes, *Olympiad 1936* (New York: 1971).

3. André François-Poncet, *The Fateful Years* (New York, 1949): p. 212; an excellent source of information is Robert Dallek's "Beyond Tradition; The Diplomatic Career of William E. Dodd and George Messersmith, 1933-1938." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* LXVI (1967): 233-244. See also Robert Dallek, *Democrat and Diplomat* (New York, 1968).

4. André François-Poncet's memoirs *The Fateful Years* reveals little about the controversy of the Games. Similarly, there is no mention of the Games in the *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (London, 1950).

also instrumental in securing the organizational rights of the 1916 games for Berlin—which were never held due to the war—succeeded again in convincing the International Olympic Committee to hold the Fourth Winter Olympiad in Garmisch Partenkirchen and the Eleventh Summer Games in Berlin.<sup>5</sup> Within less than a year Hitler came to power, and, with the consolidation of his power, anti-Semitic policies became a permanent feature of German life, commencing in full force with the state-wide boycott of Jewish shops and businesses on April 1, 1933. In addition to stringent economic sanctions against Jews, the new Nazi era introduced a cultural purge on a scale never experienced before. By the end of 1933, fine art, music, theatre, literature, the press, radio, and the film industry were declared by the Reich Chamber of Culture as “Judenrein” (free of Jews).<sup>6</sup>

This scenario soon overtook German sport as well; discriminatory practices against Jewish athletes also began in the early phase of Nazi rule. Within a matter of months, the Aryanization (exclusion of Jews) of German boxing, swimming, lifesaving, gymnastics, soccer, track and field, chess, fencing, tennis, horse racing, and other federations became a *fait-accomplis*. On the organizational level, independent Jewish sport clubs and federations, especially in Berlin but later elsewhere, were excluded from competition with Aryan counterparts altogether.<sup>7</sup> By December 1933, newspaper dispatches reported that all Jewish sport organizations in Germany with the exception of Maccabi and Schild (the sport branch of the Federation of Jewish Ex-Soldiers in Germany) had been disbanded. These two federations had been recognized by the “Reich Commissioner for Sport as the only Jewish sport associations permitted to function in Germany.”<sup>8</sup> Compounding social restriction, Nazi authorities also set the stage for political pressures aimed at isolating Jewish sport clubs from contacts with sister societies abroad. Maccabi Germany was, for example, not permitted to send an official delegation to the annual Maccabi Congress and Sport Festival held at Prague in 1933. The Gestapo rejected the delegates’ visa applications under the pretext that Maccabi representatives first should provide assurance that they would be permitted to return to Germany.<sup>9</sup> One should recognize also, that alongside Jews, who bore the major brunt of Nazi decrees, as the American Consul General in Berlin remarked.

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5. Mandell, *Nazi Olympics*, pp. 43-44.

6. *Juedische Rundschau* (April 4, 1933); pp. 131-132; See for a general overview Nora Levin, *The Holocaust* (New York, 1968), pp. 59-73.

7. *Jewish Chronicle*. (June 16, 1933); p. 15. Other discriminatory practices in this state were perhaps further expedited by the little noticed nomination of Hermann Goering first to be Minister of the Interior and later to be Prime Minister of Prussia. During August of 1933, signifying the official changes, Jewish organizations in Prussia were denied use of all facilities by the Minister of Education and Culture. Dr. Bernard Rust. *New York Times*. (August 6, 1933), p. 4, and (August 27, 1933); p. 2; D. A. Kass. “The Issue of Racism at the 1936 Olympics,” *Journal of Sport History* 3 (Winter 1976); 223-235. *Juedische Rundschau*. (April 28, 1933); pp. 168, 171; and (May 9, 1933); p. 188; *Jewish Chronicle* (April 21, 1933); pp. 12-13; and (June 16, 1933); p. 15; *Der Gelbe Fleck Die Ausrottung von 500,000 Deutschen Juden* (Paris, 1936); pp. 188 ff; *New York Times*. (April 24, 1933); p. 19; A. Morse. *White Six Million Died* (New York 1968); pp. 172-186; Mandell, *Nazi Olympics*, pp. 62-63.

8. *Jewish Chronicle*, (December 1, 1933); p. 13; Holmes. *Olympiad 1936* p. 17.

9. *Juedische Rundschau* (August 11, 1933), p. 414; Robert Atlasz, *Bar Kochba Berlin* (Tel Aviv, 1977); p. 113.

“the record shows how clearly the action [persecution] has been directed also against the Protestant and Catholic churches and against professors, artists, industrialists, and persons in every category of political and social activity.”<sup>10</sup>

It is customarily assumed that anti-Jewish measures in sport were the results of the deliberate policies instituted by Reich authorities. However, references in both the news media and in the archives tend to indicate that discrimination against Jews in sport was as much the consequence of actions initiated by over-zealous sport functionaries in various federations as of governmental orders and directives.<sup>11</sup> The central Nazi sport leadership gave virtual freedom to expel Jews from clubs and federations. “The Reichskommissar for Sport, von Tschammer und Osten,” an American diplomatic dispatch noted, “issued an instruction to all sport associations in Germany, giving them a free hand to decide for themselves whether or not non-Aryans may be accepted as members.”<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, this philosophical line was eagerly followed by practical measures, in harmony with general anti-Semitic tendencies, on the club and federation levels. The exclusion of Jews from sport bodies was, thus, carried out with the approval, if not at the direction, of the Reich authorities.

This rather contradictory and cautious approach of Nazi authorities signaled no sympathy to individual Jewish athletes or Jewish sport organizations. The German leaders were acutely aware of the adverse public opinion aroused by the mounting anti-Semitism throughout the Reich. In a unique juncture of events, the Eleventh Olympiad was to be held in Berlin in 1936. Thus, any restraint in Nazi policies concerning Jewish sport, “Was due to the force of opinion outside of Germany and to the fear of the Nazis that they might lose the Olympic games.”<sup>13</sup> So the relatively cautious approach of the German authorities was understandable in light of a real threat of an international boycott against the Olympic festival, and it reflected a simple expediency where the Olympic Games of 1936 constituted the final goal. An example of this double standard was revealed by a strictly confidential directive issued by the Reichssportfuehrer’s office. “Not to stop the frictionless wind-up of the preparations for the Olympics,” the document stated, “and to gag the Jewish agitation from abroad, the Maccabi-organizations and the Reichs association for Jewish Front-line Soldiers in Bavaria are allowed to practice until the Olympics of 1936.” A veiled threat, or rather an ill-omened warning concluded the

10. “Report by George S. Masersmith, November 15, 1935,” 862.4063 Olympic Games 57, National Archives, Washington D. C. *New York Times*, August 12, 1937.

11. In a letter to Avery Brundage, appearing in the *New York Times*. Hans von Tschammer und Osten emphatically reassured the American public that “Neither the Reich Government nor I have yet issued any statement regarding the barring of Jewish athletes from Turn and Sport organizations.” In the same passage he also declared that “the participation of Jews in athletic events has not been prohibited by proclamations issued either by the Reich Government or by myself.” *New York Times*, (December 15, 1933), p. 31; D. Steinhoefer, *Hans von Tschammer und Osten, Reichssport-fuehrer im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: 1973); p. 94; *Preserve the Olympic Ideal* (New York: The Committee on Fair Play in Sports, 1935); pp. 14-15.

12. “Report to the Secretary of The State by Raymon H. Geist, American Consul, December 15, 1933.” 862.4016/1336, National Archives, Washington D.C.

13. *Preserve the Olympic Ideals*, p. 18. It was not until July 18, 1934, when a comprehensive Reich policy concerning “the sports of Jews and other non-Aryans” was formulated.

directive: "A general regulation for Jewish sports will come out after the end of the Olympics."<sup>14</sup> The design was diabolical in its nature and simplicity. The persecution of Jews in sports became more discreet, covert and selective while outwardly the Nazi leadership was to exhibit a certain degree of flexibility closing its eyes to anti-Jewish excesses on the club and federation levels beyond the discernment of international sports bodies.

Hitler himself took a personal interest in the 1936 Olympiad. As early as March 1933, he declared emphatically: "I will do everything possible to advance the games as well as all sports interests."<sup>15</sup> History proved that the Fuehrer possessed a sharp and penetrating intelligence, which was best observed in his understanding and utilizing of propaganda. His perception of the Olympic Games proved that propaganda was, indeed, a subject on which he could claim to be an outstanding authority. More than any other statesman, he understood the political values and benefits of the Games for domestic as well as international consumption. His direct order that the "Olympic Games had to take place in Berlin by all means," reflected his belief that the Games could serve as a showcase for German achievements and an opportunity for respectability among the family of nations. Goebbels, Goering, and other members of the upper echelon of the Party hierarchy shared Hitler's penchant for publicity and it is not surprising that the American Consul General could report to the State Department that to the "Party (Nazi) and to the youth of Germany the holding of the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936 has become the symbol of the conquest of the world by National Socialist Doctrine."<sup>16</sup> It appears, in retrospect, that Nazi Germany, and more explicitly Goebbels' well-orchestrated misinformation campaign was successful in many quarters. American diplomats in Berlin, career and appointed alike, however, revealed an obstinate resistance to the Nazi Olympic subterfuge. A combination of sound judgment in reading German policies and assiduous cooperation of some Germans, who never could reconcile themselves to Hitler or rapidly became disenchanted with the regime, provided the embassy with a steady stream of information on every facet of German life. Thus, Geist, Messersmith and Dodd, were well acquainted with the Nazi designs for the Olympic Games and provided reliable information about the tragic events taking place in Germany not only for the State Department but, indirectly, to the American Olympic Committee as well.

William E. Dodd, American Ambassador to Berlin has received the most biographical attention among the three. To the surprise of many he was ap-

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14. Hans Mommsen, "Der Nationalsozialistische Polizeistaat und die Judenverfolgung von 1938." *Vierteljahrhefte Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1962); p. 81.

15. *New York Times*, (March 17, 1933), p. 25; Hitler's ominous comment to Albert Speer exemplified his obsession with the Games as well as the future state of affairs in a Nazi dominated Europe. After discussing with Speer the rebuilding of the Olympic Stadium he remarked "In 1940 the Olympic Games will take place in Tokyo. But thereafter they will take place in Germany for all time to come..." Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York, 1970); p. 70. See also Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Adolph Hitler* (New York, 1973); pp. 198-199.

16. "Report by George S. Messersmith, November 15, 1935," 862.4063 Olympic Games/57. National Archives, Washington D.C.

pointed by President Roosevelt to the Berlin post in 1933. Far from being a career officer, Dodd possessed a distinguished career as a professor of American history, carrying an aura of "Ivy League" and a touch of Wilsonian idealism.<sup>17</sup> He harbored, a contemporary remarked, a "brilliant mind sharp gift of observation and trenchantly sarcastic tongue." Owing perhaps to his background, Dodd always remained an outsider within the elite circles of the State Department, though, it is assumable, his opinions carried considerable weight in the back rooms of the White House. Geist and Messersmith, on the other hand, were both seasoned diplomats. While the former Consul and Charge d'Affaires in Berlin, spent over nine years in Germany, George E. Messersmith, the American Consul General, was more knowledgeable on internal German affairs and on the Olympic controversy. Messersmith who was transferred in 1934 to Vienna, "was," in the words of an astute observer of the Berlin scene, Bella Fromm, "one of the most uncompromising and upright diplomats in Berlin and Vienna."<sup>18</sup>

Although Messersmith was cognizant of the social and political nature of the Games, he always approached them from a moral vantage point. Apparently he conveyed some cursory comments in earlier dispatches on this subject though the first lengthy report from him reached the State Department in December of 1933. On the matter of Jewish participation in the upcoming Festival the Consul General was succinct and to the point: "All persons of Jewish race or ancestry are being excluded from athletic organizations in Germany and from training for participation in the Olympic Games in 1936." This assessment differed very little from contemporary newspaper dispatches. However, a most astute observation on German intentions, yet to reach America, was also made by Messersmith. "It is not impossible," he soberly noted, "that in order to put up a screen a few Jews may be allowed to train and to figure on teams; but I think that it should be understood that this will be merely a screen for the real discrimination which is taking place." His reading of German strategies was frighteningly correct. Moreover, through his close acquaintance with Dr. Theodor Lewald, the controversial head of the German Olympic Committee and later the organizing Committee, Messersmith was able to gain valuable glimpses into Nazi policies as had no previous American diplomat or journalist. Lewald, who moved with equal ease in diplomatic or athletic circles and who made a point of carefully nurturing his foreign ties, approached Messersmith in the Fall of 1933 voicing his concern

over a meeting of the American Olympic Committee which he said was shortly to take place in Washington and where complaints would be heard from sporting groups in the United States against the holding of the Games in Berlin and the participation of American athletes until the German Government changed its attitude towards German Jews. Dr. von Lewald then said that there was every assurance from the highest German authorities that the Jewish athletes who might participate in the teams of other countries would have every protection

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<sup>17</sup> William Dodd was chosen president of the American Historical Association in December 27, 1934. Wm. E. Dodd and Martha Dodd, *Ambassador Doss's Diary*, (New York, 1941); p. 207.

<sup>18</sup> Bella Fromm, *Blood and Banquets a Berlin Social Diary* (New York, 1942); pp. 126, 215, 309, 319.



William E. Dodd, American Ambassador to Berlin during the Hitler years. (Courtesy of the National Archives, Washington, D.C).

accorded to them by the German authorities and would not suffer any inconvenience.

The Consul General's observation alluded to the hasty exchange of telegrams between the German and American Olympic Committees in which the former had gone to great length to persuade the Americans to refrain from boycotting the Games. By his own phrase, however, the American envoy was not "so naive that the wool can be pulled over [his] eyes," and he countered Lewald's assertion by pointing out that the boycott movement

was not based on the fact that the Jewish athletes of other countries might have difficulties during the Games. but on the fact that they knew that Jewish athletes in Germany were being discriminated against in a wholesale and absolutely definite manner and were not given an opportunity to train nor to participate and

that this extended not only to preparations for the Olympic Games in Berlin, but also for sport competitions within the country with no reference to the Games. To this Dr. von Lewald could make no answer because he knew that he could not deny to me that this was the situation.



Theodor von Lewald. The controversial head of the German Olympic Organizing Committee. (Courtesy of George Eisen).

The intriguing and enigmatic figure of Dr. Theodor Lewald, one of the most pivotal characters of the Berlin Olympic drama, was a respected figure in the international Olympic scene for decades. A distinguished army officer, he has been involved with the Olympic movement since the early decades of the century. Lewald was, in the words of one historian, “one of many distinguished looking paladins of international muscularity.”<sup>19</sup> Conversely, only a

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19. Mandell, *Nazi Olympics*, p. 61.

few perceived behind the facade of the aggressive white mustache and firm handshake an opportunistic and frightened individual who serviently promoted Nazi aspirations. Messersmith was one of those few. Unfortunately for Lewald, the Nazi authorities discovered in 1933, a Jewish father. It quickly became a topic of conversation in the gossip circles of Berlin that he held onto "his post as head of the German Olympic Committee because his international connections are too valuable for the Nazis to drop him. The 1936 Olympiad is going to be quite dependent on whether Lewald stays on or not."<sup>20</sup> Indeed following vigorous protests from various National Olympic Committees and the International Olympic Committee, the Reich leadership permitted him to retain his position. In a diplomatic term, Lewald became compromised, and in alluding to this state of affairs, the Consul General warned both the State Department and the American Olympic Committee that Dr. Lewald should not be trusted:

It must be remembered that he has been permitted to retain his place for specific reasons and he is no longer a free agent. He is compelled under the existing circumstances in Germany to become a willing instrument of the authorities. I may inform the Department that those who know Dr. von Lewald and who respect him as I do, have recently criticized him most severely for lending himself to this exchange of telegrams. They feel that it would have been better for him to resign rather than to give an impression to foreign countries that certain things are so which he knows not to be so.

Then, with a surprising twist, Messersmith recommended that the State Department communicate the content of his dispatch, confidentially, to the American Olympic Committee, which, in the words of the Consul, "should send a really worthwhile and trustworthy representative to Germany who would here on the spot determine whether discrimination against Jews... is being practiced still or whether it has been abandoned."<sup>21</sup> These were carefully chosen words of a diplomat though betraying, perhaps, a hint of reservation about some members of the American Olympic establishment. The diplomat's scepticism was, it appears, well founded. As it turned out, this "trustworthy" representative, sent to Berlin, was none other than Avery Brundage, the flamboyant president of the American Olympic Association and the American Olympic Committee, who "personified much of the frigidity and false cleanliness of American amateurism."<sup>22</sup> A hastily arranged fact-finding tour by Brundage took place in 1934. As to how much this trip was the consequence of Messersmith's intervention or other political forces remains a mystery (Ambassador Dodd's meticulously kept diary makes no mention of Brundage's visit). But, if the report came indeed to the attention of the Committee, or Brundage himself, it prompted no changes in the Olympic official's mind. In fact, Brundage's visit entered into the annals of Olympic history as one of the most controversial episodes of the 1936 Games. In care-

20. Fromm, *Blood and Banquets*, p. 116.

21. "Report by Gorge s. Messersmith, November 25, 1935," 862.4063 Olympic Games/57, National Archives, Washington D. C.

22. Mandell, *Nazi Olympics*, p. 72.

fully orchestrated interviews with Jewish sport leaders who were escorted by the secret police, he revealed himself to be one more important personage dazzled by the Germans, closing his eyes to obvious, documented facts.<sup>23</sup> It seems especially unfortunate that the Consul General's concluding warning was ignored: "unless the American Committee," he wrote, "can definitely satisfy itself by first-hand knowledge and observation that this discrimination no longer takes place, I do not believe that it would remain a representative of American sport tradition if American athletes participate in the Olympic Games in 1936."<sup>24</sup>

Coinciding with this report, another diplomatic dispatch had reached the desk of Cordell Hull. The communication, "The Reorganization of German Sport and its Part in the Political Scheme of the Hitler Government," exemplified a typical intelligence report in terms of its thoroughness and analytical insight. Its exceptional length revealed the avid interest of and the significance attached by the State Department to the political as well as military use of sport by Nazi Germany. Submitted by the American Consul, Raymond Geist, at the end of 1933. The Consul's description of the Gleichschaltung, or forced coordination of German sport, was quite a new matter for America. It painted an interesting and frightening picture of the drastic social and political changes taking place in German sport and society within a year of Hitler's rule. "The inward transformation of the sport movement," was the opinion of the Consul,

is to vitally affect the life of the nation. All forms of physical culture and sport will be made a part of the general political scheme of the Hitler Government. Sport will make him physically fit to endure the hardships of military life. In fact new forms of sport have been introduced which differ but little from actual military training. In order to fully accomplish this aim German sport must be centralized to a degree unknown in all other Western European nations.

As a followup to his argument, Geist perceptively added that.

It may be mentioned that since Hitler's late peace overtures all statements regarding a connection between sport and militarism (Wehraftigkeit) have disappeared from the daily press: but it is doubtful that the men behind this movement have in any way changed their original intentions.

In the context of this reorganization, the 1936 Olympic Games were to assume a central theme. They were to play—as they always do in a totalitarian regime—a well defined and most significant role within the constellation of German political plans. Geist provided an interesting though ominous assess-

23. The personality and racial views of Avery Brundage which have received serious attention by two scholars with opposing results, is perhaps beyond the scope of this study. [See Allen Guttmann, *The Games Must Go On* (New York, 1984), and Arnd Krueger, "Fair Play for American Athletes: A Study in Anti-Semitism," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, (May 1978): 42-57.] An accurate description of one of the pivotal meetings of Brundage in Germany was provided by Dr. Robert Atlasz, a German Maccabi: "Dr. Robert Atlasz File," 603/38A. The Central Archives, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. However, the view that Brundage was not anti-Semitic prior to the Olympic controversy is an over-simplification of a complex issue. One must examine Brundage's racial attitudes more in terms of a degree. It appears that his views on Jews rapidly evolved from social into racial anti-Semitism during these years.

24. "Report by Gerge S. Messermith, November 15, 1935," 862.4063 Olympic Games/57, National Archives, Washington D. C.

ment of the Olympic problems facing Germany. For Hitler, "even the enlarged stadium was too small, the German sport idea must be represented by something truly colossal, the whole district surrounding the stadium and the university for physical culture must be transformed into one gigantic athletic plant." On the ideological level, Geist added,

much of a Nation's honor and glory is dependent on its success in the field of sport. In fact international athletic activities are considered a part, and not an insignificant part, of foreign policy. The Government must, therefore, do everything within its power to increase the athletic strength of the nation.

The plight of Jewish athletes in Germany could hardly escape Geist's expert eye and transcending diplomatic niceties, he warned, "it does not appear likely that they [Jewish athletes] can represent Germany in international competition." The resolution of the AAU in 1933 of boycotting the Games and especially the subsequent German pledge of non-discrimination did not impress Geist. With a keen sense of a seasoned diplomat he perceived the hollow German promises,

It may, however, be that in view of foreign pressure and the outlook of losing the money and prestige which the Olympic Games will bring to Germany, the German sport authorities will drop certain restrictive measures taken against Jews. But it appears unlikely that this will be anything but a meaningless gesture.<sup>25</sup>

Geist's evaluation of the Olympic Games in general and the Jewish plight in particular accurately underscored Consul General Messersmith's initial predictions. In fact, Messersmith, who had been transferred meanwhile to Vienna, followed the chain of events unfolding in Berlin with avid interest and utmost alarm. Since his last communication in 1933, the pace of events in Berlin accelerated to a point of no return, which by the end of 1935 convinced the American envoy that "everything that has happened has been in the direction of showing that American participation is undesirable." The eminent diplomat abandoned by now all illusions about the American Olympic Committee and the moral stance taken by its members. The already noted trip of Avery Brundage and that of Brigadier General Charles E. Sherrill (a member of both the American and International Olympic Committees) exemplified everything Messersmith loathed. Both officials openly boasted not only their pro-Olympic stance, but made no effort in concealing their anti-Jewish and pro-Nazi sentiments.

If ever history were decided by human will and prejudice, the case of these two sports leaders could be made an instructive example. While Brundage was diplomatic enough to disguise his anti-Semitism in a spasm of self-righteous statements, Sherrill felt no such a constraint. Between the two, Sherrill was the more outspoken, outright blunt, in his views; his controversial diatribes against "Jews and Communists" often making headlines.<sup>26</sup> The mes-

25. "Report to the Secretary of The State by Raymon H. Geist. American Consul. December 15, 1933." 862.4016/1336. National Archives. *Washington D.C.*

26. Krueger, "Fair Play for American Athletes."



Three leaders of the International Olympic Committee in 1936 (From left to right): Henri de Baillet-Latour, Avery Brundage, and Sigfrid Edstrom. (Courtesy of First Interstate Bank Athletic Foundation, Los Angeles, California)

sage was clear: the American Olympic Committee was overwhelmingly in favor of participation. A scathing remark in his report revealed why it was so difficult for Messersmith to maintain a modicum of faith in the leaders of the American Olympic movement: "In face of all the information which is available and which is so notoriously clear, the American Committee could not, without seriously stultifying itself and without betraying its obligations toward American athletic organizations and American youth, maintain its present attitude." Thus, Messersmith's lengthy report was primarily directed toward the National Convention of the A.A.U. in December of 1935 when the final decision on the question of participation was to be made. This meeting was crucial. At the time of his dispatch, American vacillation had dragged on for more than two years and both sides, pro- and anti-boycott forces, gathered rhetorical ammunition for a great debate. In recognizing the pivotal role of the A.A.U., whose athletes comprised the American contingent, "it would appear of primary importance," Messersmith wrote to Cordell Hull, "that this organization have accurate information with regard to the actual situation in Germany and the conditions under which the American athletes would participate." The primary reason for his unequivocal opposition to participation, among other things, was the political exploitation of the Games: "as the party bases its appeal very largely to the youth of the country, it was recognized at the outset what an instrument the Olympic Games could become in consolidating the position of the party..." Further, he minced no words for his disdain of German policies, and, in this context, the conduct of Lewald in misleading world opinion. The dispatch contained one of the most tragic elements of this drama. "For the Department's information," he wrote,

I may say that I have known Dr. von Lewald well and held him in very high regard. When I asked him what reply he had made to the American Committee, he told me, with tears in his eyes, that he had replied that there was no discrimination. When, as a friend, I reproached him for in this way misusing the confidence which his American friends put in him, he replied that I must know what the consequences would be to him if he had made any other reply. To this, I merely remarked that there were times, when, in order to maintain one's self-respect and the confidence of one's friends, one must accept the consequences which come from doing right.

Seeing the approach of danger, Messersmith's critical analysis did not end here. The escalation of Nazi excesses hinted for darker trends to come, including such episodes as the Kurfuerstendamm riots when hundreds of Nazi storm-troopers raided theaters and restaurants, assaulting men and women who looked Jewish, smashed windows and left a trail of bleeding victims on the streets, and continuous detention and torture of Christian church leaders.<sup>27</sup> A logical consequence of this state of affairs, and perhaps the most grievous one, by far, was the passage of the Nuremberg Laws on September 15, 1935, which effectually deprived the Jews of German citizenship—relegating them to the status of “subjects of the state.” It also forbade marriage between Jews and Aryans, extramarital relations between them, and prohibited Jews from employing female Aryan servants under thirty-five years of age. In practical terms, Jews were excluded by law from public and private employment. Beyond its social and political consequences, the Nuremberg Laws had far-reaching ramifications as Jewish participation in the Olympics were concerned. With first-hand knowledge of the implications of the Nuremberg Laws, Messersmith stated that, “as the Jews under the Nuremberg Laws are not first class German citizens, there is no longer any doubt that all persons with any strain of Jewish blood, no matter how attenuated, will not be permitted to compete for Germany.”

Given the prevailing conditions, the idea of a boycott rested on interrelating social, political and moral considerations. For Messersmith, an expert on German affairs, political rationale emerged most clearly from the power-balance within Germany. By 1935, some of the glittering of the Nazi hierarchy faded into rhetorical promises and European observers' opinions pointed to a developing schism in German itself; the base of power of the party shifting and becoming narrower. While the older generation has never really subscribed to Hitler's ideological course, the regime's three years in power, and its political, social, and financial policies, largely alienated the middle-age segment of society. In retrospect, it seems that Messersmith's assumption about German reasonableness has not necessarily coincided with realities in Berlin and that intellectual elements in German society were not as responsive to the truth as those in America. In the view of political commentators, the Nazi party concentrated principally on the youth. “Should the Games not be held in Berlin,” was the opinion of Messersmith. “it would be one of the most serious

27. Moshe Gottlieb, “The Berlin Riots of 1935 and their Repercussions in America,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (March 1970); 302-328.

blows which National Socialist prestige could suffer within an awakening Germany and one of the most effective ways which the world outside has of showing to the youth of Germany its opinion of National Socialist doctrine.”

The international ramifications of the American Olympic Committee’s gravitation toward participation greatly troubled Messersmith for American influence on other countries’ policy-making was not negligible. “It was recognized,” he wrote, “...that the decision of the American Olympic Committee would play a predominant part in determining to what degree there would be foreign participation in the games.”<sup>28</sup> At the time, it should be noted, Americans possessed neither monopoly on moral outrage, nor were they alone in their boycott-sentiments. Transcending political and religious lines, many European groups and statesmen voiced their unequivocal support of not only boycotting, but transferring the Games to another country.<sup>29</sup> However, American hesitation had a latent and most disheartening effect on several national Olympic committees, which waiting for America’s action first, “refrained from taking an attitude against participation.” Messersmith could cable from Vienna that

I am informed reliably that there is a wide hope in other national committees that the American committee may take a more realistic position with respect to the situation in Germany and change its present attitude, which is so strongly for participation. The probabilities are that if the American Committee frankly recognizes the situation which prevails in Germany, American athletic organizations will not participate and that this lead will be followed immediately in many countries.

The heavy responsibility resting on the American Olympic Committee’s shoulders was compounded by gloomy predictions for the post-Olympic period. Part of the clue as to what proportion the Olympic Games might change Europe can be deduced by the concern of European commentators, who came to a growing realization that the Berlin Olympiad may portend darker things to come. Messersmith needed no convincing: “the holding or the non-holding of the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936 will play an important part in determining political developments in Europe.” Augmenting this reasoning, Messersmith believed that “this view of the importance of the Olympic Games being held in Berlin is not exaggerated.” Though this rationale was logical from a political point of view, in history there is no moral partiality and the most impassioned plea for a boycott of the Games could not have been based on cold reasoning alone.

I am of the opinion that the American Olympic Committee in taking the stand which it has, has failed in its duty towards the young people of our country. I believe that our dignity and prestige and our adherence to the ideals of fair-play

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28. “Report by George S. Messersmith. November 15, 1935,” 862.4063 Olympic Games/57, National Archives, Washington D. C.

29. For pertinent literature see Bruce Kidd, “Canadian Opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, Vol. IX, 2 (December, 1978); 20-40; Bruce Kidd, “The Popular Front and the 1936 Olympics,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*. Vol. XI I (May 1980) 1-18; Ian Jobling, “Australia at the 1936 Olympics: Issues and Attitudes,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, Vol. XIII I (May 1982); 18-27.

and the non-political character of sport make it necessary and imperative that the American Olympic Committee revise its attitude...<sup>30</sup>

Messersmith was not the only one who attempted to change the course of the 1935 A.A.U. Congress from far away Europe. Lewald, who by then had almost outlived his usefulness for the Nazis, attached equal importance to the outcome of this convention. His relations with the Americans reduced to a polite, but decidedly chilly reserve, Lewald utilized an intermediary in an attempt to approach the Berlin Embassy. In Messersmith's absence, Ambassador William E. Dodd, who made no effort to hide his contempt for National Socialism, rather amusedly cabled these overtures to Cordell Hull. The indomitable head of the German organizing committee (he was relieved of his duties in the Olympic Committee) wanted to convey "an explanation of the status of the Jewish candidates for the German team."<sup>31</sup> His quest referred to the preoccupation of the American Olympic Committee to ensure that some Jews would be selected to the German Olympic contingent. The plan was a brilliant propaganda maneuver. With a masterful stroke, the pro-Olympic forces in America side-stepped the major issue of persecution in Germany as a whole and focused public attention on the fact that some Jews would represent Germany in the Games.<sup>32</sup>

The selection of two half-Jews, Helen Mayer (fencer) and Rudi Ball (ice-hockey player) was thus hailed by the American Olympic establishment as a fulfillment of German obligations. Miss Mayer, a gold medalist in the 1928 Games, lived comfortably in Los Angeles at the time of her invitation to Berlin. Although her father was Jewish, the blond fencer looked like an advertisement for German womanhood and often expressed eagerness to return and compete for Germany. Rudi Ball, living in France since the advent of Hitler, was less famous though some considered him the best ice-skater on the German hockey team. In addition, a group of twenty-one athletes from Makkabi and Schild was also invited to and participated in perfunctory Olympic training camps during 1934-35. But none of them were selected. Lewald's task of explaining this fact to the A.A.U. Convention through diplomatic channels was not an easy one. As far as William Dodd was concerned, he remained markedly unmoved by the German official's overtures. His perception of Lewald differed but little from that of Messersmith. Thus the American envoy had refused to allow himself to be used in Lewald's little ploy, declining to meet him personally; a low-level embassy official was dispatched to an informal discussion with Lewald, in which the opinion was advanced that "their [Jews] achievements did not qualify them for positions on the team." In corroboration of this information Lewald provided a copy of a letter written by

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30. "Report by George S. Messersmith, November 15, 1935," 862.4063 Olympic Games/57, National Archives, Washington D. C.

31. "William E. Dodd, Report to the Secretary of State, October 11, 1935," 862.4063 Olympic Games: 49, National Archives Washington D.C.

32. *New York Times*, October 22, 1935. In forefront of this drive stood General Sherrill who openly proclaimed in an interview: "I went to Germany for the purpose of getting at least one Jew on the German Olympic team, and I feel that my job is finished."

Dr. Karl Ritter von Halt, a member of the International Olympic Committee since 1929, and a high ranking Nazi sport official who was also entrusted with the preparations of the German contingent. His letter concluded: "The sole reason for this was always the fact that no Jew was able to qualify by his ability for participation in the Olympic team. Heil Hitler."



Helen Mayer. The half-Jewish fencer who was invited to represent Germany in 1926.  
(Courtesy of George Eisen).

It has often been assumed that the lack of Jews on the German team was a result of deliberate discrimination. This was only partly true. There were also instances when, quoting a Jewish participant of a training camp, "it was clear to us . . . that [in] no way would we be willing to take part in the Olympic

Games.”<sup>33</sup> In either case, Ambassador Dodd, not being content with von Lewald’s version of the story, decided to obtain first-hand information from the Jewish federations. The informal inquiry in the Jewish Front Fighters Sport Association (Schild) which was recommended by Lewald himself, ran into a wall of silence; “they had absolutely nothing to communicate.” A secret interview through clandestine channels with an unnamed spokesman from another sport organization proved more fruitful. The picture that emerged was not flattering either to Lewald or to the German Olympic establishment. The source revealed that “flagrant discrimination was being exercised, in the first place in barring Jewish athletes generally from open competition.” Sports facilities were invariably denied, “...in direct contradiction to the Olympic code and regulations.” “He had some time ago,” the witness continued, “addressed letters of protest to the Reich sport leader and to the German Olympic Committee, but so far he had received no answer or acknowledgment.” One must, perhaps, marvel at the courage exhibited by this functionary for, in the same breath, he emphatically urged the diplomat to be aware of the fact that “a Jew who gave expression, [of defiance] would immediately be placed in a concentration camp.”<sup>34</sup> The experience of another Jewish sport leader, a subsequent dispatch by Dodd revealed, left no doubt as to the truth of this report. Two weeks before the opening ceremonies, the head of a Jewish athletic organization in Berlin dared to register a vigorous protest with the German Olympic Committee. It was an unheard of act of courage and defiance but perhaps ill-timed. As a result of his complaint of blatant discrimination against the high-jumper Gretel Bergmann, he was forced to report twice daily to the political police.<sup>35</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most heated controversy revolved around the exclusion of Gretel Bergmann who, being a world class high jumper, seemed certain to represent Germany in Berlin. She however was dismissed summarily, which reverberated on the pages of the world press as well as in Dodd’s correspondence with the State Department. The Bergmann affair had all the trappings of a spy-thriller. The most obvious sign of deception came when the Germans announced the selection of only two representatives [instead of the allowable three] in the high jump. Gretel Bergmann, who had equaled the German record prior to the training camp, was not among them. The rationale for his decision, the Reichssportfuehrer Hans von Tschammer und Osten wrote to the athlete, was based on Bergmann’s performance which was, in his words, “not good enough.”<sup>36</sup> The story harbored, however, darker secrets of which

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33. Paul Yogi Mayer, “Equality-Egality Jews and Sport in Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook XXV* (1980); pp. 236-237. In corroboration of Mayer’s account, one of the Jewish officials at the time, interviews were also conducted with Mrs. Gretel Lambert (Bergmann) and Julius Bendorf, both participants at these training camps.

34. “William E. Dodd, Report to the Secretary of State, October 11, 1935,” 862.4063 Olympic Games/49, National Archives, Washington D.C.

35. “William E. Dodd, Report to the Secretary of State, August 19, 1936,” 862.00 P. R./204, National Archives, Washington D.C.; Arnd Krueger, *Die Olympischen Spiele*, p. 128.

36. “Letter from Hans von Tschammer und Osten to Gretel Bergmann, July 16, 1936,” in Margaret Lambert (Gretel Bergmann) Private Collection.

neither the foreign press nor the American embassy had an inkling. Bergmann happened to share a room in the training camp with Dora Ratjen, who later became the second choice for the Olympic team. At the time, the Jewish jumper conveyed her impression to some of her close associates that “this girl was a boy.” Her suspicion was not investigated then, but two years later Ratjen was barred from women’s sport when it was found that she was a man. The final solution to this puzzle fell into place only thirty years later when Dora Ratjen herself admitted to being planted on the team, probably to stop Bergmann from qualifying for the German team.<sup>37</sup>



Gretel Bergmann. She was excluded from the German Team because of her Jewishness. (Courtesy of Margaret Lambert (Bergmann)).

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37. Erich Kamper, *Encyclopedia of The Olympic Games* (New York, 1972), p. 329. Mayer, “Equality-Equality,” p. 237; *Life Magazine* October 7, 1966. Kamper considered her a hermaphrodite.

In spite of the relative isolation of the American Embassy—monitoring visitors was a routine Nazi procedure—a steady flow of intelligence on various facets of German life, some prominently featuring the Games, proceeded uninterrupted. In fact, anti-Nazi circles in Berlin conveyed their hope, the Ambassador cabled to the Secretary of State on December 10, 1935, “that we [America] would not participate in the Olympic Games.”<sup>38</sup> This information came too late, and as far as the American Olympic Committee was concerned, it hardly brought about any changes of minds. The Winter Olympiad was scheduled for February 6, 1936, and the A.A.U. Convention, by an unconvincing margin, endorsed American participation. With the clear knowledge of this fact Dodd, writing to Secretary of State Cordell Hull prior to the opening of the Winter Games in Garmisch Partenkirchen, left no illusions about the real state of Olympic affairs in Germany. He entertained grave misgivings as to how Nazi propaganda methods would impress Olympic visitors. He noted that a campaign aimed at the foreign visitors might provide a completely misleading picture on the situation in Berlin and larger provincial towns. The authorities spared no effort. Food was transported from the provinces, 2,000 interpreters—all Weltanschaulich—were entrusted with the eminent task of providing a positive image of National Socialism, and even the owners of several large Jewish stores in Berlin, who otherwise were prohibited from exhibiting the German flag and emblem, were instructed by the propaganda ministry to “participate in the ordered general display of flags.” Behind this facade of peace, cleanness, and friendly reception, Dodd perceived the dark shadows: “It is no exaggeration to say” he wrote, “that the Jewish population awaits with fear and trembling the termination of the Olympic period which has vouchsafed them a certain respite against molestation . . .”<sup>39</sup>

The concerns expressed by Geist, Messersmith, and Dodd in regard to the Olympics were, it would appear, justified. Their ability to read Nazi intentions, motives, and objectives provide proof of their professionalism and astute judgment. Their motives, needless to say, were not wholly idealistic—after all, they represented political realities—though they infused in their work a degree of morality which often escaped some of their Berlin colleagues. In a post-Olympic dispatch, Dodd personally summed up the political and moral lessons of the 1936 Olympiad: “It may be stated at the outset that from a German point of view the Games were an almost unqualified success.”<sup>40</sup> They positively influenced, just as he had anticipated, world opinion in general and the American visitors’ perception of Germany in particular. William Shirer, a news correspondent at the time, candidly noted that “the

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38. “William E. Dodd, Telegram to the Secretary of State, December 10, 1935,” 765.84/3007. National Archives, Washington D.C.: See also Fromm, *Blood and Banquets*, pp. 209-227.

39. “William E. Dodd, Report to the Secretary of State.” Undated. 862.00 P. R. /204. National Archives, Washington D.C.: see also *Foreign Relations of The United States, 1936* vol. II: Europe, (Washington D.C. 1954), pp. 198-199.

40. “William E. Dodd, Report to The Secretary of State, September 2, 1936,” 862.40631/Olympic Games/123, National Archives, Washington D.C.

visitors, especially those from England and America, were greatly impressed by what they saw. . . a far different picture, they said, than they had got from reading newspaper dispatches from Berlin."<sup>41</sup>

Nazi Germany succeeded in fooling the world. "The casual visitor," Dodd observed with some resignation, "owing usually to his ignorance of the language, fails to perceive the hatred and venom which characterizes the Nazi press, as well as to discern certain undercurrents which form as important a part of the ensemble as the more ostentatious Nazi successes." Simultaneously, the Game's psychological impact altered the constellation of power in Germany itself on several levels. First, they provided a focal point for the society as a whole, doing "Germany a good turn in canalizing Nazi energy, which during the summer months of past years, at least, has been accustomed to break out in drives against the Jews, Catholics as well as enemies within the ranks." Dodd instinctively recognized, a second, equally significant, factor which was instrumental in changing the national self-perception. Victories on the athletic fields provided Germans a sorely needed moral and psychological uplift and were "as conducive to self-esteem as a 98% favorable plebiscite—and [were] perhaps more convincing."<sup>42</sup>

In the final account, the boycott movement in America, and consequently, elsewhere failed. Although this failure often has been attributed to the diligent work of Avery Brundage and like-minded Olympic leaders, the conspicuous silence emanating from Washington also must have played, in some degree, a role in the collapse of the boycott movement. It seems almost certain that President Roosevelt and Cordell Hull, both thriving on accurate inside information originating from within the Third Reich, were cognizant of the true nature of the Nazi design for the Berlin Olympiad and discriminatory practices aiming to exclude Jewish athletes from German sporting life. It is not even certain if information on this subject was solicited by the American government or, as it seems now, was the fruit of individual initiative of several astute and conscientious diplomats. Either way, in spite of this wealth of information on the moral and political ramifications of the 1936 Games, no American statesman of stature voiced any opposition to American participation. The reasons as to why the administration opted to keep silent are complex and constitute only a part in the larger scheme of relationship between the United States and Germany.

In reflecting on the Olympic controversy, the boycott movement harbored three interrelated issues that were in danger of being confused. On the one hand, there was the quite specific question of Jewish participation on the German team—and the trouble here lies in the fact that the State Department had no power in intervening in an entirely internal German matter. The overall view of the Department was well summed up by Hull who considered the

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41. William I. Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960), p. 233.

42. "William E. Dodd, Report to The Secretary of State, September 2, 1936," 862.4063/Olympic Games 123, National Archives, Washington D. C.

treatment of German Jews to be "an internal problem within Germany."<sup>43</sup> Also, the questionable record of the American Olympic Committee is rather instructive in this point. "I would have no more business," General Sherrill proclaimed, "discussing that [Jews] in Germany than if the Germans attempted to discuss the Negro situation in the American south. . ."<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the persecution of Jews and Christians in a wider sense assumed a dimension in which the Olympic Games became only a side-show. It is doubtful, in this scenario, that a State Department sanctioned boycott would have forced Nazi Germany to rescind or eliminate political or religious persecution. Traditionally, Hitler resisted interference with substantial issues while generously yielding in matters of little consequence. It is instructive that at the time of the Olympics, Germany had already defied the Versailles and Locarno treaties by marching into the Rhineland in 1936, which from a global-political perspective was far graver than any Olympic problem. In retrospect, it seems that nothing short of sheer force would have changed Hitler's mind. As for the third factor, the possibility that the Olympics were going to be used as a huge propaganda exercise to glorify and whitewash a hypocritical and totalitarian regime, which might also utilize it for the consolidation of its power and international acceptance, had been valid since 1933. A boycott under this pretext would hardly bring a permanent change in racial or religious persecution. At best then, one would hope that a boycott would strengthen the internal opposition of the regime that disappeared practically after the Games and which might alter the course of events in Berlin.<sup>45</sup> In hindsight, it is easy to see that the tacit endorsement of Olympic participation was only one episode on the long road of appeasement which led inevitably, to Munich and later to war.

Given the complexity of these issues and the clarity with which the American diplomatic personnel handled and conveyed them to Washington, the question still persists as to why no official response ever came. Historical perspectives are not always able to provide objectivity, but often distort images of troubled times and definitive answers are not easily available to this question. The published governmental documents of this era and personal diaries of the major policy leaders in Washington are devoid of any remark, comment or policy statement on the Olympic controversy.<sup>46</sup> One is forced then to rely on an intuitive assessment of the overall sociopolitical trends and their ramifications on the Olympic issue. One possible explanation lies in the fact that the political leadership in America piously subscribed to a belief in the non-political nature of the American Olympic movement and the private status of the American Olympic Committee. President Roosevelt accepted, in fact, the

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43. See Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of 3 vols.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953); Joy P. Moffat, *The Moffat Papers*, ed. Nancy H. Hooker, (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1956); Cordell Hull, *Diaries of Cordell Hull*, 2 vols. (New York, 1948)

44. *New York Times*, (October 22, 1935).

45. The resistance movement in German) during the Hitler years was well chronicled by several scholarly works. See Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich* and more recently, *The Nightmare Years, 1930-1940*, (New York, 1983).

46. Julius W. Pratt ed. *Cordell Hull in The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, vol. XII (New York, 1964) p. 180.

honorary chairmanship of the Olympic Committee, which gave further credence to the pro-Olympic forces. One must also contend with the political liability facing Roosevelt in adopting an allegedly "Jewish cause" such as the Berlin-boycott. Insinuations on the part of the pro-Olympic leadership of a mythical "Jewish influence" in Washington was undoubtedly troubling to the Roosevelt administration. General Sherrill's utterances that "the disproportionate representation [Jews] in Washington is raising hell" and that some members of the Cabinet were Jews represented a clear example of the political dilemmas facing the President. As a consequence the President often encountered political pressures from the extreme right. It left little room for political maneuvering and Roosevelt opted to remain, perhaps deliberately, silent in the Olympic controversy. He was an astute politician, and so was Cordell Hull, whose role in the whole Olympic affair appeared to reflect the "silent" policy line of the Roosevelt administration. His involvement in the Olympic matter, if there was any, left no traces in official documents or his own private papers. The Secretary could muster little affection for Dodd, appointed directly by the President, whose Wilsonian views on Germany were often in direct opposition to the Department's, Hull's marriage to a Jewess made him personally immune to charges of anti-Semitism, but the State Department remained, during his years, steadfastly unsympathetic to issues which they perceived to be Jewish "inspired" or "oriented" such as the Olympic-boycott. On the final account one cannot escape the impression that reluctance of the administration to involve itself in Olympic issues had, it seems, dire consequences on the international political scene. Several governments (as Messersmith predicted) reluctant to take an independent stance, finally followed the American example by sending delegations to Berlin.

Again, the boycott movement failed; but, it is noteworthy that in the cynical world of diplomacy there were also officers who were not immune to feelings and morality. It is also significant that the voices of sanity and decency were still heard, when other branches of the Roosevelt Administration chose to stay silent. Here also lies the difference between Ambassador Dodd, Consul General Messersmith, Consul Geist and the French and British envoys. "In the history of the Nazi regime," André François-Poncet, the French diplomat recalled in awe, "the celebration of the Olympic Games in Berlin in August 1936 illustrated a great moment, a climax of sorts, if not the apotheosis of Hitler and his Third Reich. Hitler had impressed himself upon the consciousness of Europe as an extraordinary personage. . ."<sup>47</sup> William Dodd saw it differently: he could not come away from a magnificent Goebbels' reception for Olympic dignitaries without remembering that the host was a man "who had helped . . . to murder Germans."<sup>48</sup> Based on this comment, one might ponder, as some officials in the State Department did at the time, that Geist, Messersmith and Dodd might have been more effective in changing German minds by employing more flexible and diplomatic approaches. in-

47. André François-Poncet, *Fateful Years*, pp. 203.

48. Dallek, *Democrat and Diplomat*, p. 288.

stead of their uncompromisingly anti-Nazi views and attitudes. But then, both the French and British diplomatic delegations opted all through these years for accommodation and compromise. yet their records in changing Nazi policies were just as dismal and barren as the Americans'. The difference, then, was that of diplomacy vs. morality—the American diplomat represented a genre which, though not alien to André François-Poncet, was not particularly useful in German affairs. Dodd was, as Andre François-Poncet himself admitted so eloquently, “a singularly honorable example of that American idealism.”<sup>49</sup>

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49. André François-Poncet, *Fateful Years* p. 212.