

# Movie Kit



American  
Spaces

## *Race*



**Year of Release:** 2016

**Rating:** PG-13

**Length:** 2h 14min

**English level:** Medium

**Director:** Stephen Hopkins

**Starring:** Stephan James, Jason Sudeikis, Eli Goree

**Themes:** Sports Diplomacy/ Olympic Games, African-American Heritage, Civil Rights

### Warning/General Advisory

Some profanity, including derogatory terms for African Americans. This movie also shows racial discrimination and segregation of African Americans in the United States, as well as discrimination towards the Jewish population in Nazi Germany.

### Context (adapted from Wikipedia and imdb.com)

*Race* is a biographical sports drama film about African-American athlete Jesse Owens, and his journey to eventually winning four gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

In the 1930s, Owens is the first in his family to go to college, and he attends Ohio State University, despite facing considerable racial discrimination. Owens trains under track and field coach Larry Snyder, who believes that Owens is talented enough to compete in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. While Owens is interested, he is also hesitant because of racial propaganda in Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler.

The U.S. Olympic Committee is already considering boycotting the Olympics over Germany's discriminatory policies, and ultimately agrees to participate after Nazi official Joseph Goebbels gives assurances that Germany will allow foreign athletes of any race to compete, and that they will pull back their racial propaganda. A representative from the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) tries to talk Owens into not going to Berlin, as a way to protest Nazi racial discrimination. Ultimately, Owens decides to go to Germany, in part because he believes a person's race does not matter when people are on the track – there is "only fast or slow," and in this, there is freedom.

At the conclusion of the movie, after winning four gold medals in Germany, Owens returns to the United States where he continues to be subject to U.S. segregation laws.

## Important Vocabulary

- **boycott** - to refuse to deal with (a person, organization, etc) or refuse to buy (a product) as a protest or punishment
- **broad jump** – a track and field event, also known as the long jump
- **International Olympic Committee** – responsible for all Olympic-related decisions, and main authority of the worldwide Olympic Movement
- **NAACP** – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an organization that advocates for the civil rights of African Americans
- **U.S. Olympic Committee** – responsible for all decisions regarding the United States' Olympic athletes and, most notably, their participation in the 1936 Berlin Olympics

## Other Key Characters

- **Joseph Goebbels** – German Nazi politician and Minister of Propaganda of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945
- **Larry Snyder** – Jesse's coach at Ohio State University
- **Leni Riefenstahl** – a woman who was appointed by the Nazis to make a movie of the Olympic events, which she called *Olympia*
- **Luz Long** – German athlete in the broad jump and friend to Jessie Owens

## World Context in 1930s

In the 1930s, the United States faced the decade-long Great Depression, a severe worldwide economic depression that started from 1929 and originated in the United States. Industrial production, prices of crops and goods, and foreign trade decreased significantly, while unemployment skyrocketed. All Americans suffered, but African Americans faced the most significant challenges in finding work.

African Americans faced racial discrimination and segregation in the United States. Segregation is the practice of requiring separate public and private facilities for whites and African Americans. While this was pervasive in the American South after the U.S. Civil War, African Americans still had much to overcome in the North as well. Similarly, even though discrimination was more prevalent in the South, it also existed in Northern states. In Ohio, where Jesse Owens went to college, some people refused to treat African Americans equally. Some school districts in Ohio refused to admit African American students to schools with white pupils. Many businesses had separate areas for whites and African Americans. It was not until the 1950s, when the Civil Rights Movement became an important part of life in the United States, that African Americans started gaining equal rights under the law.

In Germany, Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor in 1933 by German President Paul von Hindenburg. The Nazi Party's rise to power brought an end to the previous Weimar Republic, the German parliamentary democracy established after World War I. In 1933, the Nazi regime established the first concentration camps, where political opponents and others classified as "dangerous" were imprisoned. German Jews and other minorities were persecuted and killed during the Nazi regime. On September 1, 1939, Hitler's regime invaded Poland, setting off World War II. Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later.

The 1936 Summer Olympics was held in Berlin, Nazi Germany. Berlin won the bid to host the Olympics over Barcelona, Spain in April 1931, two years before the Nazi Party came to power. Adolf Hitler saw the Olympic Games as an opportunity to promote his government and ideals of racial supremacy. The official Nazi Party newspaper initially wrote that Jewish people should not be allowed to participate in the Olympic Games, but when threatened with a boycott of the

### World Context in 1930s (continued)

Games by other nations, Hitler appeared to allow athletes of other ethnicities from other countries to participate. However, German Jewish athletes were unable to participate, and ultimately Jewish athletes from other countries (including the United States, as depicted in the movie) were also prevented from participating.

### Brief Facts about the Olympic Games

- The Olympic Games are held every four years, with the Summer and Winter Games, each occurring every four years, and where Summer and Winter Games are held two years apart from each other.
- Ancient Olympic Games were first held in Olympia, Greece in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC.
- The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece in 1896. The founder of the modern Olympic Games is Pierre de Coubertin.
- Changes to the Olympic Games in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century include:
  - o Creation of the Winter Olympic Games for ice and winter sports
  - o Paralympic Games for athletes with a disability
  - o Youth Olympic Games for teenage athletes
  - o Deaflympics for deaf athletes
  - o Special Olympics for children and adults with intellectual disabilities
- The Olympic Creed reads: ***"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well."***
- The Olympic Games and ideals have brought people together from all around the world, and have allowed people to build bridges, despite differences and divisions (such as cultural, economic, political, etc).

### Discussion Questions

- How did the white athletes treat Jesse Owens at Ohio State? How did Owens handle that? What other instances of African-American discrimination did you see in the movie?
- Why did the NAACP request that Owens not compete in the Olympics? How did Owens react to this request? Why did he ultimately decide to compete in the Olympics?
- Why did the International Olympic Committee request that the Nazis take down certain posters and scale back their propaganda?
- Why do you think the filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl was prohibited from filming certain events? What did she do in response?
- What do you think about Jesse and Luz Long's friendship? (Luz is the German athlete)
- This film shows different oppressed minority groups – in both the United States and Germany. Even though the movie is showing events from the 1930s, what instances of minority discrimination do we see in the world or in our communities today? How are we, as a society, addressing these issues?
- What other aspects of this film are still relevant today? Are there people in our communities who are playing similar roles as Jesse Owens, Luz Long, Leni Riefenstahl, Larry Snyder or other historical characters from the movie?
- At the time the U.S. Olympic Committee was debating whether or not to boycott the 1936 Olympics, one representative said "politics have no place in sports." Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?
- Many say the positive values and ideals embodied in the Olympic Games have the capacity to reshape international relations. What are your thoughts?