Berlin's Two Stories

Propaganda and athletic achievement at the 1936 Olympics

SS24.HOS.5b "Evaluate the Nazis' propaganda efforts regarding the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and describe how the performance of Jesse Owens contradicted the Nazis' position."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ideas Nazi leaders wanted audiences to believe, circle two ways they shaped the Games' public image, and number the four events in which Jesse Owens won gold. Use your marks to compare the Nazi message with what happened at the Games.

What the Crowds Saw

1. In August 1936, visitors arriving for the Berlin Olympics saw a city prepared to impress. Nazi leaders had spent heavily on stadiums and ceremonies. They wanted foreign guests to admire Germany as orderly, welcoming, and strong. Officials temporarily removed many public signs that attacked Jewish people from Berlin streets, while the government's persecution continued. Nazi newspapers and displays also promoted the idea that so-called "Aryan" people were superior to other groups. These choices made the Games more than a sports event: the government used what visitors saw to shape opinion and hide the violence behind its image.

2. The message did not stay inside Germany. Radio broadcasts and news coverage brought the competitions to audiences abroad. Grand ceremonies and a packed stadium offered striking scenes for reporters to describe. Yet the picture of a peaceful host was selective. Jewish Germans still faced discrimination under Nazi laws, and the removal of hostile signs did not change those laws. Germany won more medals than any other country, a result Nazi propagandists could celebrate as proof of national power. But a medal count could not prove that a race was superior, and the government's polished presentation could not erase its treatment of people.

3. Jesse Owens, a Black American runner and jumper, complicated the racial message at the heart of Nazi ideology. He won four gold medals: the 100-meter sprint, the 200-meter sprint, the long jump, and the 4-by-100-meter relay. His victories took place before huge crowds and reached people far beyond the stadium through news reports. A Black athlete's success on this stage directly contradicted the Nazi claim that "Aryan" athletes were naturally superior. Owens's medals did not end Nazi persecution or racism in the United States. They did, however, expose a sharp mismatch between the regime's claim and what spectators witnessed.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did removing signs that attacked Jewish people help Nazi officials shape visitors' impressions? What did this action hide?

2. Why might Nazi propagandists have pointed to Germany's medal lead? Explain why that result did not prove their racial claim.

3. How did Owens's four gold medals contradict the Nazi claim about "Aryan" athletes?

4. What could audiences learn from Owens's victories, and what did those victories not change?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 65 to 85 word caption for a museum display titled "Two Stories from Berlin." Explain the image Nazi officials wanted visitors to see, compare it with what their policies concealed, and use Owens's performance to judge their racial claim. End with one limit of what his victories changed.

ANSWER KEY

Berlin's Two Stories

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HOS.5b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ideas Nazi leaders wanted audiences to believe, circle two ways they shaped the Games' public image, and number the four events in which Jesse Owens won gold. Use your marks to compare the Nazi message with what happened at the Games. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did removing signs that attacked Jewish people help Nazi officials shape visitors' impressions? What did this action hide?	**It made Berlin appear more welcoming while hiding the continued persecution and legal discrimination of Jewish Germans.**
2	Why might Nazi propagandists have pointed to Germany's medal lead? Explain why that result did not prove their racial claim.	**They could use the medal lead to suggest national power, but a country's medal count cannot prove that one race is naturally superior.**
3	How did Owens's four gold medals contradict the Nazi claim about "Aryan" athletes?	**Owens was a Black athlete who won four events before large audiences, contradicting the claim that "Aryan" athletes were naturally superior.**
4	What could audiences learn from Owens's victories, and what did those victories not change?	**His victories exposed a mismatch between Nazi racial claims and events at the Games, but they did not end Nazi persecution or racism in the United States.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Nazi officials staged ceremonies and cleared many signs that attacked Jewish people from city streets to present Germany as welcoming and strong. That display concealed continuing discrimination against Jewish Germans. Propagandists celebrated Germany's medal lead, but Jesse Owens, a Black American, won four gold medals. His victories challenged the claim that "Aryan" athletes were naturally superior. They did not end Nazi persecution or racism in the United States, so the Games exposed a false claim without fixing the injustice behind it.

Accept captions that explain the staged public image, identify continuing persecution, and connect Owens's results to the Nazi racial claim. Responses should also distinguish exposing a false claim from ending discrimination.