

August 2023



"It's your New York!"

The Rondout Reader



American

By Kevin Ahearn

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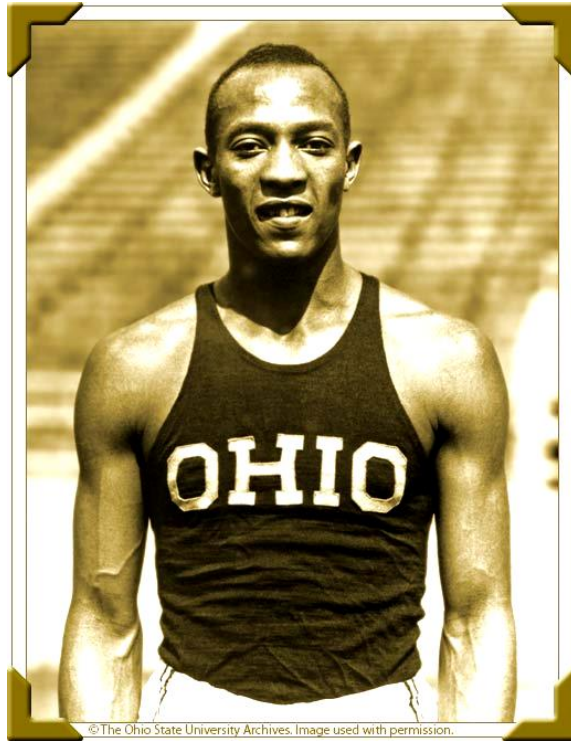
For my sister Eileen



"James Cleveland Owens is a Jewish nigger-man!"



"Jesse Owens is a bootlickin' Uncle Tom!"



My skin is dark, not black. I was born in Alabama, not Africa.

I am *American*.



In *my* country, anybody can be somebody.

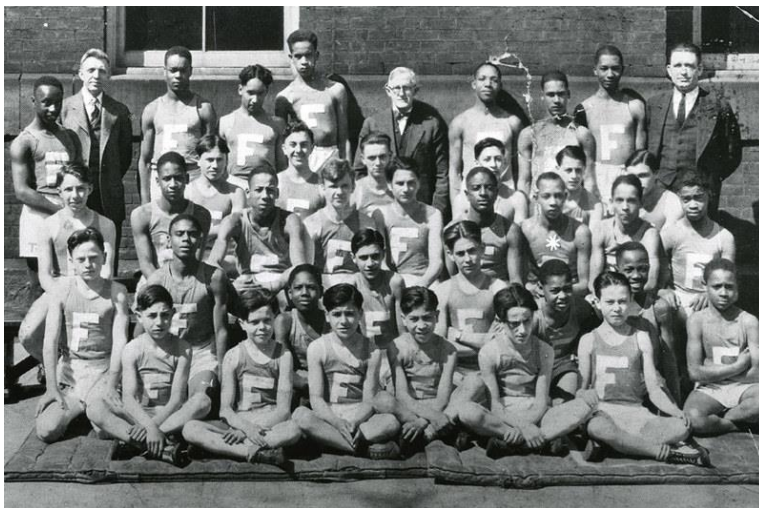


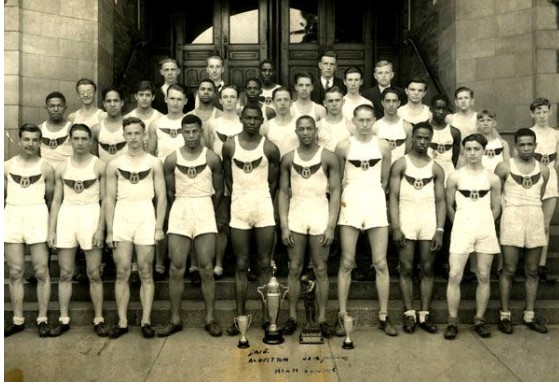
My grandparents were slaves. Daddy was a sharecropper. Mama cleaned houses. I was one of ten children. Three never got the chance to grow up.



We lived in a 'dogtrot cabin' until farming got so bad, that we moved to Cleveland where the factories were.

One man changed my whole life. If not for Charles Riley, the track and field coach at Fairmount Junior High School, I'd have never been anybody...





Coach Riley encouraged me to run, but I worked *after* school delivering groceries, loading freight cars or in the shoe repair shop. He allowed me to practice *before* school.

As a student of **East Technical High School**, I made my mark at the 1933 National High School Championship in Chicago, equaling the world record of 9.4 seconds in the 100-yard dash and long-jumped 24 feet 9 ½ inches.



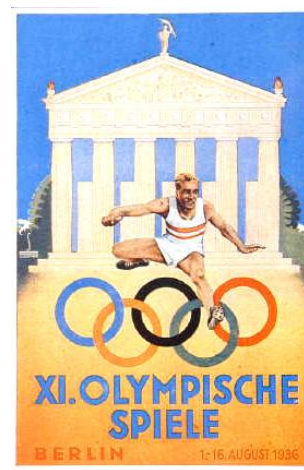
Big schools offered me a track and field scholarship, but *not* nearby Ohio State; I'd have to work as an elevator operator, waiter, and gas station attendant to support myself and my wife. But the university did guarantee *my father* a steady job. That sealed the deal.

Then came the 1935 track meet. I set three world records and tied a fourth in "the greatest 45 minutes ever in sport".



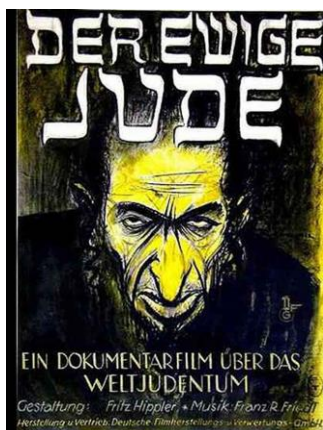
Returning home, I was chosen to be the captain of the Ohio State track team, the first Negro to ever become captain in the Big Ten. Cleveland officials gave me a victory parade.

Next stop...





The Nazis believed they were the 'Master Race', that all were inferior to 'Aryan Supremacy', including blacks and especially Jews.



"We have only one task, to stand firm and carry on the racial struggle without mercy."



"The nigger's a wild animal. Like letting a deer or gazelle compete."



I won four gold medals and became America's first Olympic hero. Before the whole world, I had struck a blow for all minorities and embarrassed the racist Third Reich!



"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it."

The Olympic Committee had given *Der Fuhrer* a choice: shake hands with every gold medal winner or with none. Hitler chose the latter. The Third Reich did give me, and every other gold medal winner, an oak sampling. I took the little trees home.

The world leader who 'snubbed' me was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt!



Not a White House invitation, not a telegram. Not even a telephone call.

Hitler believed that black people were 'primitive', that our physiques were 'stronger than those of civilized whites and hence should be excluded from future games.'



"The black is a better athlete to begin with because he's been bred to be that way... the slave owner would breed his big black to his big woman so that he could have a big black kid.

"If blacks take over coaching, they'll be no jobs left for white people."



"I'm not the first minority coach in the NFL. Tom Flores is."

As for the Jews...

I was chosen to compete in only three events, but at the last moment, the American Olympic Committee removed Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller from the 100 x 4 relay team and slotted Charles Metcalfe and me in their places. We won by 15 yards.

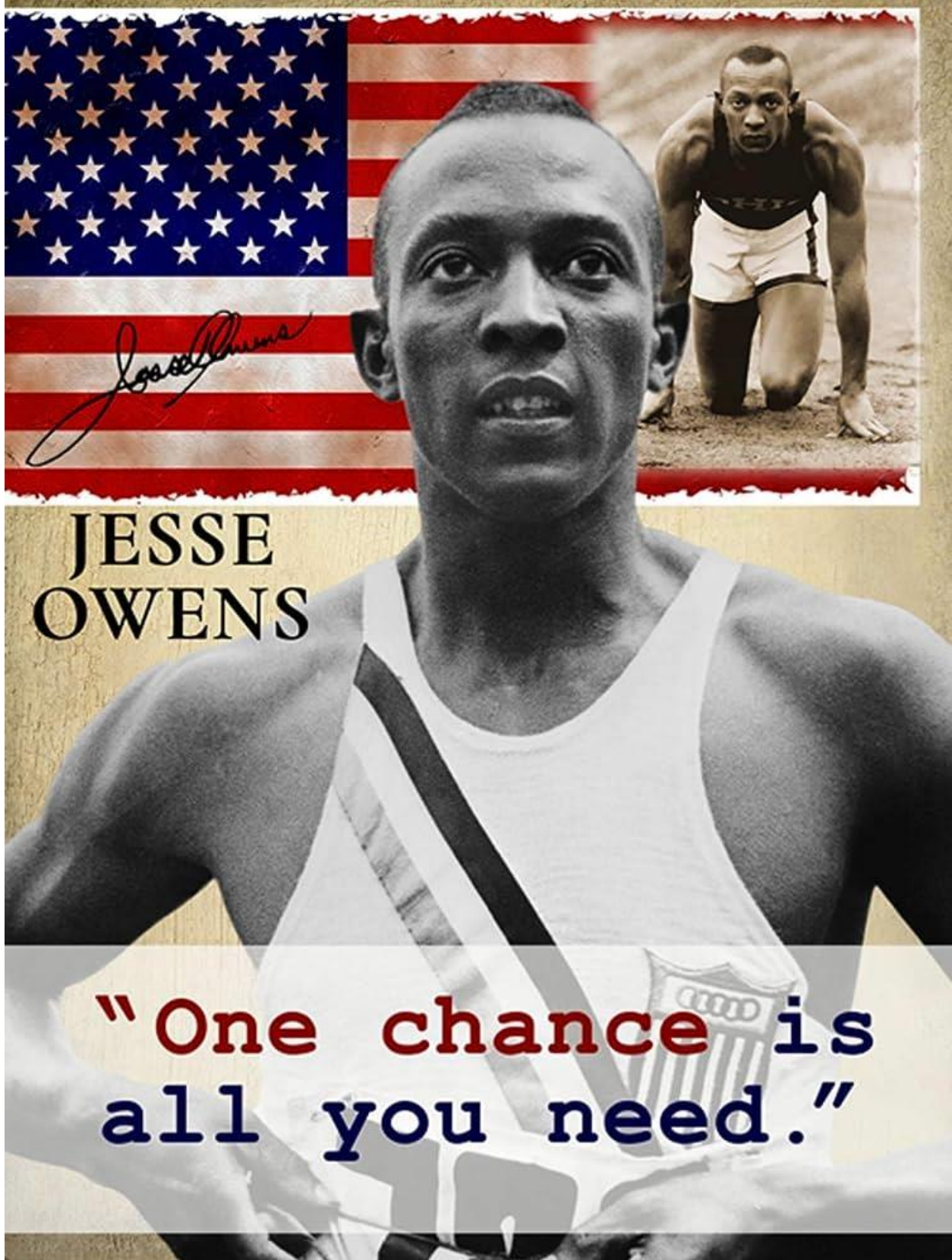


"Sometimes you lose sight of what's going on around you."

Or did we? Blacks won nearly a dozen medals at the games, but most important to the Nazis: the 'Master Race' won more than a hundred medals, and no Jew won anything, beginning and ending with Marty and Sam.



Not one of us non-Jews stuck up for our teammates. I never forgot that.



JESSE
OWENS

**"One chance is
all you need."**

2



AFTERMATH



"Of course Jesse Owens was our hero."



"Perhaps no athlete better symbolized the human struggle against tyranny, poverty, and racial bigotry."



*"Woe to the people that fails to honor its heroes!
It will cease producing them, cease knowing them.
Heroes spring from the essence of their people.
A people without heroes is a people without leaders,
for only a heroic leader is a true leader able to
withstand the challenge of difficult times."*



A parade down Fifth Avenue. I was at the top of the world! But when we arrived at the Waldorf Astoria for a reception in my honor, they told me to take the freight elevator rather than the normal guest one, reserved for whites.

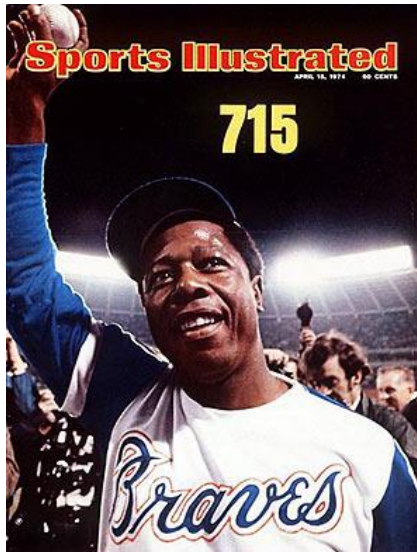


"Life is about timing."

Everyone was going to slap me on the back, want to shake my hand or have me up to their suite. But no one was going to offer me a job.

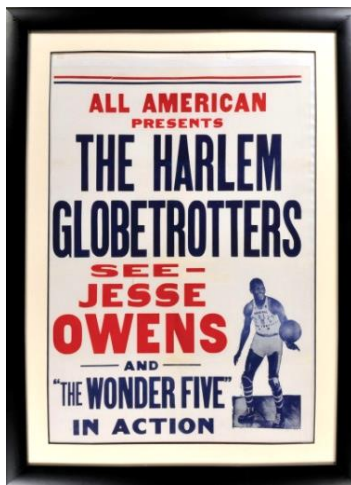


"[Blacks] may not have some of the necessities to be, let's say, a field manager, or, perhaps, a general manager"



"I never doubted my ability, but when you hear all your life you're inferior, it makes you wonder if the other guys have something you've never seen before. If they do, I'm still looking for it."

For a Negro, I made a lot of money doing personal appearances, pushing tobacco, and competing in 'The Sport of Kings'.



**"It's the tobacco inside that counts,"
says Jesse Owens**



The heart of every White Owl cigar is made for 3 1/2 years. It's not in a pack, it's in a pack. No other cigar makes it through 3 1/2 years.
That's why White Owl is the most popular cigar. That's why White Owl is the most popular cigar. That's why White Owl is the most popular cigar. That's why White Owl is the most popular cigar.
Only one exists.

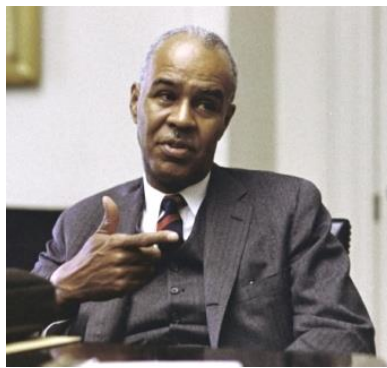


The secret is, first, get a thoroughbred horse because they are the most nervous animals on earth. Then get the biggest gun you can find and make sure the starter fires that big gun right by the nervous thoroughbred's ear. People said that it was 'degrading for an Olympic champion to run against a horse', but what was I supposed to do? I had four gold medals, but you can't eat four gold medals.

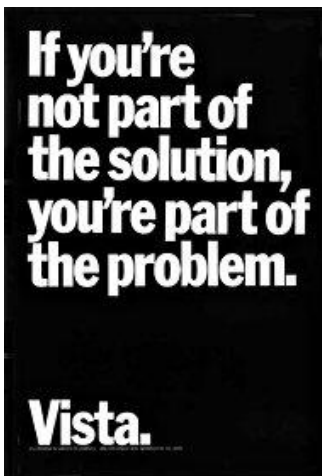
Finally, nearly a full generation after the Berlin Olympics, I got 'Presidential Recognition': In 1955 Dwight D. Eisenhower named me "Ambassador of Sports."



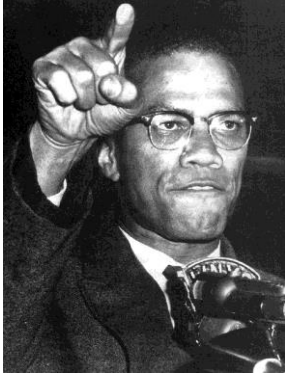
Through war and peace, boom and bust, I'd been a loyal Republican, and as time went on I came to believe the Conservative line: If the Negro doesn't succeed in today's America, it is because he has chosen to fail.



"President Eisenhower was a fine general and a good, decent man, but if he had fought World War II the way he fought for civil rights, we would all be speaking German now."



"Black Power is giving power to people who have not had power to determine their destiny."

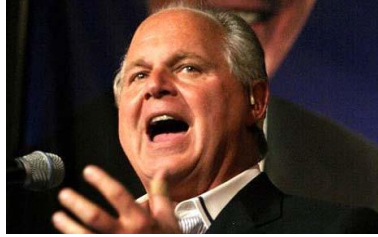


"We were not Antichrists. We were just human beings who saw a need to bring attention to the inequality in our country. I don't like the idea of people looking at it as negative. There was nothing but a raised fist in the air and a bowed head, acknowledging the American flag – not symbolizing a hatred for it."

The black fist is a meaningless symbol. When you open it, you have nothing but fingers – weak, empty fingers. The only time the black fist has significance is when there's money inside. There's where the power lies.



"We ask for nothing that is not right, and herein lies the great power of our demand."



"I think what we've had here is a little social concern in the NFL. The media has been very desirous that a black quarterback do well."



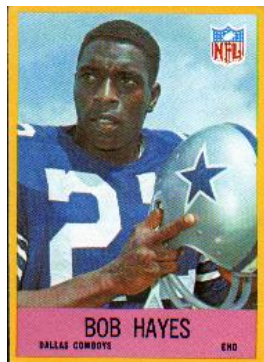
"The truth is that politicians are basically tied to trying to get reelected, so they can't really make landmark changes."



"Racism is when you have laws set up, systematically put in a way to keep people from advancing, to stop the advancement of a people."

It didn't take long for me to realize that *militancy* was the only answer where the black man was concerned, that any black man who wasn't a militant in 1970 was either blind or a coward.

For the rest of my life, I 'kept the faith', traveling thousands upon thousands of miles to give scores of speeches at home and in dozens of countries. The battles that count aren't the ones for gold medals. The struggles within yourself -- the invisible, inevitable battles inside all of us -- that's where it's at.



"I won gold medals representing this country, but I've gotten more recognition around the world than I have in my own back yard."

To me, we must learn to spell the word **RESPECT**. We must *respect* the rights and properties of our fellowman. And then learn to play the game of life, as well as the game of athletics, according to the rules of society. If you can take that and put it into practice in the community in which you live, then, to me you have won the greatest championship.



"Say it loud: 'I'm black and I'm proud!'"

Only by God's grace have I made it to see today and only by God's grace will I ever see tomorrow.



Life is no sprint. It's a marathon—a long, long, long-distance race over hills and through valleys, sometimes even with stops along the way, and it's how you run that marathon, not how soon you get to the finish line, that matters.



"We gotta get the black athlete. We must get the black athlete if we're going to compete."

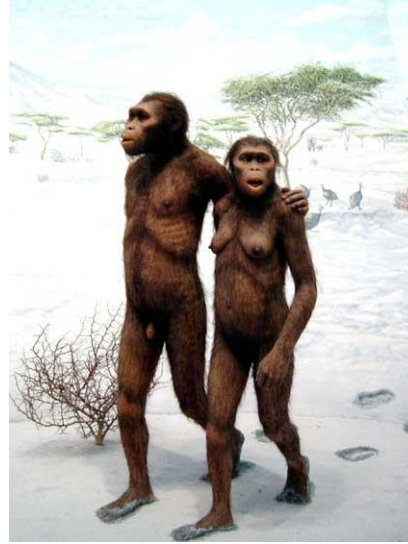


"Hitler was good at the beginning, but he went too far."



The city that treated me best was Berlin. "Jesse Oh-vens! Jesse Oh-vens!" they cheered in the 1936 Olympics. They'd name a street after me. I went back in 1951 and again in 64. Once ruled by the Nazis, the Communists now controlled the city. Berliners were no more free than the American black man.

Who are we?



According to the Bible, we're the descendants of Adam - *Eden-Americans!*
Believe in Evolution and where humanity actually began - Everyone in the country is an '*African-American!*'



"They're standing on the corner and they can't speak English. I can't even talk the way these people talk: Why you ain't, Where you is, What he drive, Where he stay, Where he work, Who you be... And I blamed the kid until I heard the mother talk. And then I heard the father talk.

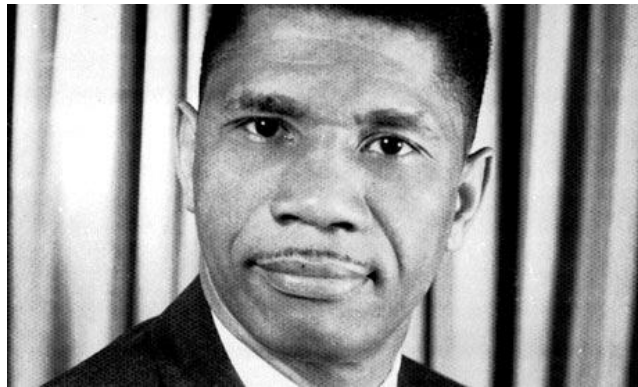
"Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads. You can't be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth. In fact you will never get any kind of job making a decent living.

"People marched and were hit in the face with rocks to get an education, and now we've got these knuckleheads walking around. The lower economic people are not holding up their end in this deal. These people are not parenting. They are buying things for kids. \$500 sneakers for what? And they won't spend \$200 for Hooked on Phonics.

"I am talking about these people who cry when their son is standing there in an orange suit. Where were you when he was 2? Where were you when he was 12? Where were you when he was 18 and how come you didn't know that he had a pistol? And where is the father? Or who is his father?"

"We have millionaire football players who cannot read. We have million-dollar basketball players who can't write two paragraphs. We as black folks have to do a better job. Someone working at Wal-Mart with seven kids, you are hurting us. We have to start holding each other to a higher standard.

"We cannot blame the white people any longer."



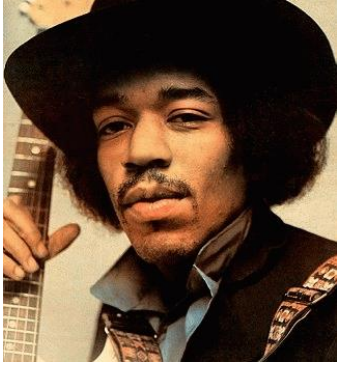
"The Negro has been here in America since 1619, a total of 344 years. He is not going anywhere else; this country is his home. He wants to do his part to help make his city, state, and nation a better place for everyone, regardless of color and race."



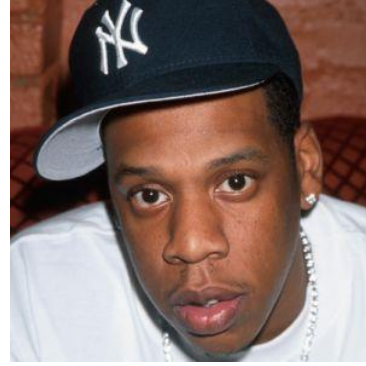
"I'm a patriot in the truest sense of the word."



"My mother named me after him."



"In order to change the world, you have to get your head together first."



"Hip-hop has done more than any leader, politician, or anyone to improve race relations."

We're not in this alone. Never have been.



*"Here you are free and you have pride."
"Free to be anything you choose."*



*"Long as you stay on your own side."
"Free to wait tables and shine shoes."*





"You know, I grew up in two American internment camps, and at that time I was very young."



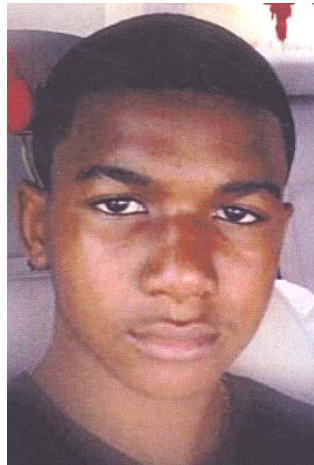
I want to be a representative and be a role model for the Asian American community."



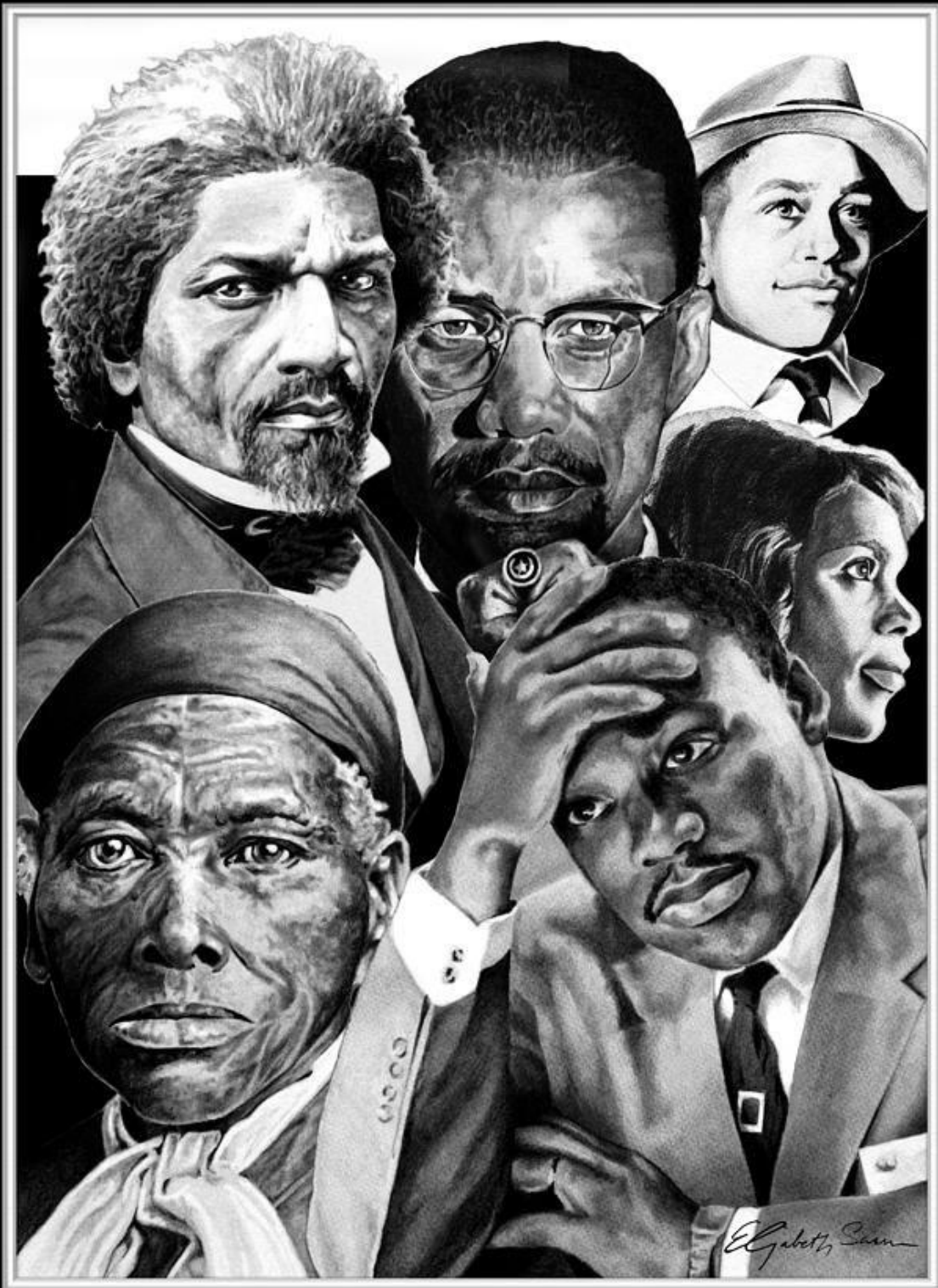
I wish I had lived long enough to see The Wall fall. Finally, Berliners were free.



But not the American black man...



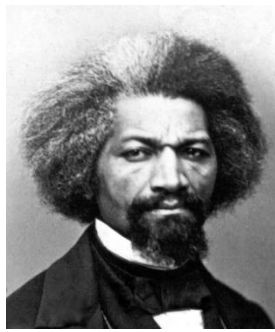
If you are their color, you know their names. If not, you remember only their color.



3



We Are The People!



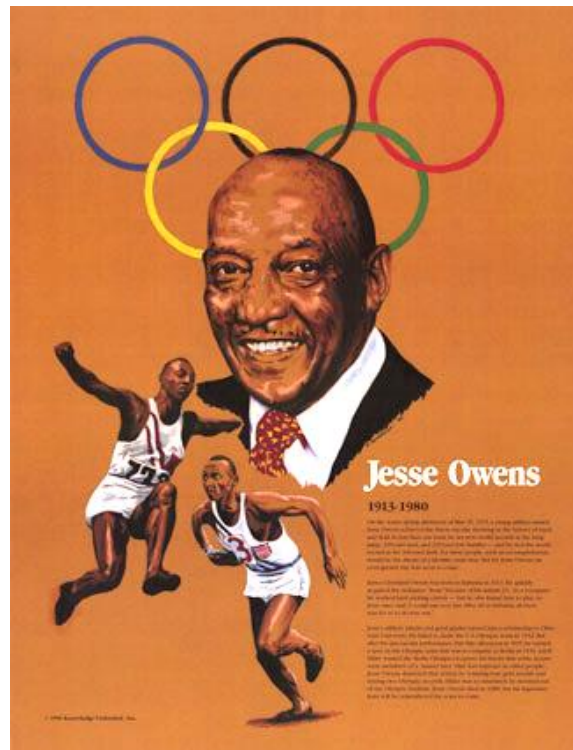
"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."



"Now that I look back, I realize that a life predicated on being obedient and taking orders is a very comfortable life indeed. Living in such a way reduces to a minimum one's need to think."



*"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change.
I am changing the things I cannot accept."*



I was the very first black American Hero, the first black American Olympic champion, the Noble Negro put on a pedestal for all the world to see.

Brother, where did we go wrong? Where do you go from here?



"I thought our community should have a deep dialogue to make black America better. I believe if we make black America better, we make all of America better."

Face the statistics - As husbands, fathers, employees and employers, the American black man has been losing the race, falling farther and farther behind. We endured...

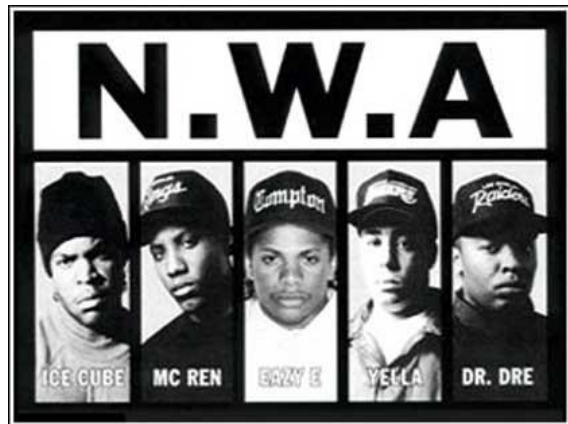


Only to become?



"Guess who's never coming to dinner."

Why? What made so many of us abandon the hope of the American Dream? When your 'intelligence' or your 'athleticism' fell a little short, how quickly did you decide to go another way?



From coast to coast, thousands of police officers and prison guards owe you their jobs.



"There's so much negative imagery of black fatherhood. I've got tons of friends that are doing the right thing by their kids, and doing the right thing as a father - and how come that's not as newsworthy?"

We're in a new age the 'Flat Earth Society' never saw coming; technology is leveling the playing field. Education and hard work, no other way to get anywhere. But not you because you run a 4.4 forty or got an outside jay?



"Stay in school and use your brain. Be a doctor, be a lawyer, carry a leather briefcase. Forget about sports as a profession. Sports make ya grunt and smell. See, be a thinker, not a stinker".

After all this time, after all we've been through, you keep pushing *color* and *ethnicity* as if that's our complete identity. If you don't understand the long-term impact of racism, don't take a look around at Selma or Ferguson, but to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.



"If the Great Spirit had desired me to be a white man he would have made me so in the first place."

Unemployment, school drop-outs, single-parent families, drugs, alcohol, gangs, domestic violence, child abuse, suicides, they've got their 'tribal pride' and 'ethnic hood' and you keep promoting blackness and Africa and their numbers will soon be yours.





Our ancestors survived an odyssey to get to this country. For more than five hundred years, we were enslaved and segregated. And when we stood strong...

"Uppity niggers!" said many.

"Poor Negroes," said many more.

Hardly anybody called us *Americans*.



*"In this country American means white.
Everybody else has to hyphenate."*

Not any more. I am *not* a color. *Not* a continent. My parents and grandparents were born and grew up here. I am first and foremost, an American!



"Why shut me up on a reservation? We will make peace; we will keep it faithfully. But let us go around free as Americans do. Let us go wherever we please."

Is that what we want our neighborhoods to become: *reservations*? The red man's got it figured out: Sell all you've inherited - grazing rights, hunting and fishing rights and those gaming rights. Adopted by Uncle Sam and 'Lady Luck', the Indians have become wards of the government and the casino industry,

That can never be us. We're Americans and we've got to start acting like Americans! To *unite* the power...*American* power!



*"Not only are a voteless people a hopeless people.
A non-producing people are hopeless also."*

We've got to work harder, each and every one of us. Not to promote our color or our race, to make our *country* better. America's in a race with the rest of the world and we've got to run straight and true every day, to show the world we possess the will and the skill to make stuff we're proud of.



*"I think, team first. It allows me to succeed,
it allows my team to succeed."*

We've got to team up and get on a new road. No more of this blacktop taking us downhill to nowhere. We can't stay where we are and damn us if we go back. The road to the Olympics leads to no city, no country. It goes far beyond New York or Moscow, ancient Greece or Nazi Germany. The road to the Olympics leads — in the end — to the best within us.

We've got to join in the American Freeway and drive right up to the limit. It's going to be a long, hard journey, but nowhere near as the one that got us this far. Only united together can we ignite the new American golden age.

'Can' is not enough. *We must!*



*"Only a man who knows what it is like to be defeated can reach
down to the bottom of his soul and come up with the extra ounce of
power it takes to win when the match is even."*

A long overdue 'serious discussion' of race relations in this country?



*"Cast down your bucket where you are.' Cast it down
in making friends in every manly way of the people of all
races by whom we are surrounded."*

Not just blacks and whites. Invite the red people and the yellows and the browns.
Let *Americans* 'discuss' the America we want our children to grow up in together.



*'Those who say it cannot be done are usually
interrupted by those already doing it.'*



Thank you for reading what I had to say. Please respect that it had to be said. Ever since my time in the sun, I've been loved and admired, hated and scorned to my death and beyond. And I'll take whatever you have to dish out. Please say what you will, but begin with...

Jesse Owens is an *American!*

And America's got work to do!

Appendix



Shall we Overcome?



“My dream is of a place and a time where America will once again be seen as the last best hope of earth.”



“Truth, Justice and the American way.”



“The American dream belongs to all of us”

“All my stories are free to read and they always will be.”
Kevin Ahearn

americananthologies.wordpress.com

Coming soon...



The Rondout Reader

